Philippines lifts worker deployment ban to Kuwait

Love, lust, heartache: Secret dating lives of young Saudis

Red-hot Lakers beat Nuggets, Pacers snap losing streak

On thin ice: Ice Skating Rink to close for good
Is CCTV safe?

CCTV refers to closed circuit television, a surveillance system that includes cameras and recorders for monitoring activities in a company, house or even a small grocery shop. The aim of this system is to prevent and detect crimes when they occur to keep the public and properties safe. But the question remains – is it safe enough? Are surveillance cameras useful or a violation of freedoms?

This question was a matter of debate on social media due to a recent incident that occurred in Kuwait. A woman discovered that someone violated the privacy of her house, especially after cameras filmed her while she was arguing and screaming at one of her kids.

Some people considered the leaked video an act of child abuse, while some said that no one has the right to publish such videos in public without the woman's permission, because what happened is a violation of privacy and whoever did this act deserves punishment.

I think the issue has different viewpoints. No person has the right to violate the privacy of a person in their home without permission; therefore the woman has the right to take legal actions.

I think surveillance cameras should not be a cause for concern, but some people do not like to see them as they consider them against privacy and freedoms, while some people prefer the idea of installing surveillance cameras as a source of security and safety.

Of course, misuse of surveillance systems can happen by recording some embarrassing situations of public figures and using these videos to end their careers and humiliate them in public, and this is something that can happen. I think surveillance cameras are absolutely necessary to stop abuse, and at the same time, deterrent laws should be enacted in case of misuse, with severe legal penalties for those who misuse them or hack others' privacy.

In fact, I believe that surveillance cameras are the best solution not only to stop any possible criminal activity, but some working mothers are using cameras to monitor their domestic workers at home, especially those with infants. But, this also has caveats, and possibly threats.

For example, a friend who has a baby girl and a new worker was worried about leaving the little one alone for a long time, so she placed a camera in the child's room. But after a while she discovered that the system was exposed to penetration and hacking; and therefore the girl could be at risk. So she canceled the setup, but her anxiety did not end.

I know that cameras are the ideal solution to maintain safety and also help provide visual records to the police as evidence for conviction. Choosing a monitoring system may be difficult, and there is a need to be careful and only select a monitoring system from a well-known company to avoid possible breaches of privacy. At least, it will be easy to demand the company for clarifications and investigations, because security companies do not allow such tampering.

A woman discovered that someone violated the privacy of her house

Losing a pet

A pet is not just an animal - it's a member of the family. When a pet dies, it hurts and those who don't understand this, who don't have pets can seem heartless or cruel for lacking empathy.

I fell in love with sugar gliders even before adopting them. I always wanted one, though they are not really meant to be pets. But my mom refused, she did not want pets in the house. Then one day a friend told me her brother was leaving the country and wouldn't take his two sugar gliders with him. So I ended up adopting them, telling my mom I had saved their lives. I explained that otherwise they will be thrown on the streets and die, as they can't tolerate the weather of Kuwait.

As soon as my mom saw them and looked at their cute faces, she forgot her anger and objections and welcomed them home. She fell in love with them, and she even fed them when I wasn't at home or early in the morning before I woke up. She especially liked to share her croissants. Even when one of them escaped from the cage and I was hunting for him in the house and he bit me, I was never mad at him.

I was always worried who would take care of my lovely sugar gliders Mango and Mishmish when I planned to travel. I had to make sure I gave them to trusted friends who would take good care of them and who didn't have small kids or animals who might possibly harm them, which wasn't always an easy job.

After having them for four years and two months, I lost the female, Mishmish. It was so hard watching her die without being able to help. I took her to different veterinarians, but they just gave her vitamins and said they didn't know what else to do. When I finally found a good vet who had some knowledge of these exotic animals, it was too late, and Mishmish passed away. The vet said she most probably had kidney disease as she was drinking too much in the last three days. When sugar gliders get old, the kidney is the organ that gets damaged.

I guess she was old. The lifespan of sugar gliders is short, as they only live between five to eight years. The vet told me that I was doing well as they lived with me for over four years, as she had met people whose sugar gliders died in less than a year. I buried her with a broken heart and much pain.

I know Mishmish was old, but it is so hard to lose her after more than four years and so many memories. I feel bad for Mango, who is very lonely now. I'm not sure what to do. I thought of placing him at the zoo with other sugar gliders to keep him in a collective, but the staff told me that they don't have space for him and no one to take care of him.

I was shocked by some negative and emotionless comments of people on her death, as if it was a broken glass or some unimportant thing. Only those who had a pet and lost it understood my great pain and loss. It's not just an animal - it's a living soul and breathing creature like humans, but more precious than most humans on this planet.

May you rest in peace, my lovely Mishmish - I will never forget you.
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A Kuwaiti farmer grows leafy greens of various kinds like lettuce, coriander, spinach, rocca, parsley, dill and mint. According to Abul Kalam, a salesperson at a small shop on the farm, the owner has several other farms, which he visits once in a while. “My sponsor has several farms in Kuwait, particularly in Wafra and Abdaly - we are supplying the entire market of Kuwait,” he said, gesturing towards stacked cartons of freshly harvested vegetables. “These boxes contain vegetables from this farm only - they will be delivered tomorrow to supermarkets around Kuwait.”

People tending the farm are mostly from Bangladesh, directly hired by the owner. “We have several workers in the farm for ploughing, planting and harvesting,” Abul Kalam said. The farm is cultivated regularly and can produce multiple harvests. “Most of our leafy greens are cultivated twice or thrice a year. For example, rocca is harvested three times,” he told Kuwait Times.
The best time to plant vegetables is always during winter, when the weather is cooler. But the farm is utilized the whole year round since free irrigated water is supplied. “Winter here is not that harsh compared to other countries, so we can plant at any time; however, most of the greens need cooler climes, which is why we have more of these veggies during winter. We plant even in summer, but they are not as healthy compared to winter planting,” Abul Kalam said.

Vegetables are also imported from other countries. “We have competitors in various countries. So the market price is dictated by the supply,” he said. In the small shop, a bunch of leafy greens usually sold for 50 fils is sold at 25 fils or cheaper. “We have displays of produce here from our farms in Jahra, Wafra and Abdaly. We hope to supply the entire market, but we need to cultivate more to meet local demand,” Abul Kalam concluded.
We still have a long way to go and I have almost similar in most countries worldwide. To congratulate them,” she said. This is positive impression and we would like so much energy into issues affecting them. I think it’s amazing that women here are putting energy and enthusiasm concerning very relevant and important issues of the society. “I’m inspired talking to the women of Kuwait. I am inspired to non-Kuwaitis, more women in the parliament and honor killings were among the subjects discussed during a brief meeting with Secretary General of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs Yoka Brandt as she visited the Kuwait Women’s Cultural and Social Society (KWCSS) on Wednesday. She met members of the board of trustees and discussed issues related to rights of children and women.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the event, Brandt lauded Kuwaiti women for their energy and enthusiasm concerning very relevant and important issues of the society. “I am inspired talking to the women of Kuwait. I think it’s amazing that women here are putting so much energy into issues affecting them. This is positive impression and we would like to congratulate them,” she said.

Brandt noted that issues about women are almost similar in most countries worldwide. “We still have a long way to go and I have always noticed the fact that wherever you go, in the Netherlands or elsewhere including Kuwait, the issues are almost the same but the context is different,” she noted. “It’s always great to share how we can help each other and how we can encourage each other. But the truth of the matter is that we also need the man, and I hope men will join us in the struggle, because both will benefit,” she said.

KWCSS Chairperson Lulwa Al-Mulla said most of the activities of the society are related to women empowerment, education, care for women and their families, which includes children and the stability of the family. “The society has raised several women’s issues in the parliament and the Cabinet,” she said. “We are committed to changing the perception about us, and we will continue the struggle until all rights are equally granted to us. We want more women in decision making too.”

Mulla argued there are far more educated women in Kuwait compared to men. “We are committed to helping the society and raising our head high: we still have many issues in Kuwait and we want to bring all of them in the open so people will be aware,” she said. The society has conducted several projects abroad, mostly in occupied Palestinian territories. “We are helping women in Palestine and Kosovo to be more resilient and proactive. We help through monetary assistance from Zakat House or charity events,” she added.
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Kuwait banks can withstand domestic, external challenges

BEIRUT: Kuwait banking sector is solid and capable of withstanding domestic or external financial challenges that might have impacts on national economy, the country’s top banker said on Friday, as many countries around the world suffered huge losses because they wanted to rescue their banks, which was a burden on their budgets and thus impacted citizens’ living conditions," said Mohammad Al-Hashel, Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK).

He was speaking in an interview with Al-Bayan, a monthly Lebanese magazine specialized in banks, insurance and freight in the Middle East. CBK, he added, implemented a policy enabling national banks to withstand ramifications of oil prices’ nosedive in the second half of 2014. “The banking sector, based on CBK’s policies, continues its service of the national economy with high efficiency,” to ultimately contribute to addressing the state budget deficit, said Hashel.

He cited a 2017 report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that affirmed Kuwait’s banking sector was implementing wise regulations put in place by CBK, which strengthened supervision and management. Kuwaiti banks, according to IMF report, were following Basel III that was based on a set of reforms designed to improve regulation, supervision and risk management. Hashel said another IMF report, issued in March 2019, welcomed solid foundation of Kuwait banking sector and commented CBK’s management and supervision regulations. Credit rating agencies, like Fitch and Moody’s, also commended CBK’s regulations, which contributed to strengthening financial conditions of local banks.

Hashel was asked about growth and job creation, and said the government of Kuwait had adopted a set of financial and economic reforms aimed at boosting growth and creating jobs. “This aims at diversifying economy and promoting private sector to play a further role in economic activities,” said Hashel. “Having a greater involvement of the private sector will ease burden on state budget. This can happen through privatization and establishing genuine partnership between the private and public sectors,” he said. He called for improving quality of education and training to meet private sector’s demands.

Development of private sector’s role, diversifying economy and supporting SMEs will certainly promote growth, said the CBK Governor.

Hashel, meanwhile, said CBK’s next five-year strategy aimed at cementing monetary and financial stability, in addition to ensuring safety and strength of the banking sector. CBK also seeks to maintain stability of the exchange rate of the local currency, the Kuwaiti dinar, and manage interest rate in line with national economy and internal interest rates, with the objective of having sustainable growth. The Central Bank, said Hashel, was enforcing strict supervision measures in line with international standards, developing infrastructure of information technology to facilitate clearing operations, developing human resources and using technology to further improve supervision.

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Kuwait remains in grip of cold wave, Saudi shivers too

KUWAIT/RIYADH: Kuwait continued to remain in the grip of a rare cold wave yesterday with subzero overnight temperatures in desert areas of the country. Meteorologists however expect weather conditions to improve in the coming days. Kuwait International Airport recorded a minimum temperature of 1 degree Celsius yesterday and in some areas of the country like Abdaly, Salmi and Jahra, the temperature fell below 0 degrees Celsius. However, Salimiya and Ahmadi recorded a maximum temperature of 19 degree Celsius in the afternoon. Meteorologists predicted cold with light to moderate northwesterly wind to variable wind with speeds of 6-26 km/h by day yesterday and cold with light to moderate variable wind to southeasterly wind with speeds of 6-26 km/h by night.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia is experiencing its coldest weather since 2016, meteorologists said yesterday, with overnight temperatures dropping below zero in the country’s north over the past two days.

In Tarif, on the border with Jordan, the temperature hit minus 5 degrees Celsius, according to the weather services. It dropped to minus three in Hai further south-east, and minus 2 in Arar on the border with Iraq. In the capital Riyadh, the temperature dipped close to zero and the streets were deserted Tuesday and Wednesday nights.

The desert kingdom is known for its extreme heat, particularly during summer. “The country is experiencing its most intense cold snap since 2016,” Hassan Abdallah from the Wasm meteorological centre said yesterday. In neighboring Iraq, where summers are also scorching, Baghdad residents woke up Tuesday to find the city carpeted in white from only its second snowfall in a century. The last recorded snowfall in the city was in 2008. — Agencies

Palestinians name roads in Gaza after Amir, Speaker

GAZA: Palestinian officials in Gaza have named a road in the south of the strip after HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in recognition of his efforts in support of Palestinian rights. The road, located east of the city of Khan Younis, is part of a series of Kuwaiti-funded projects worth $8 million intended for Gaza’s reconstruction. The move also saw another road named after Kuwait National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem. The initiative was taken as a “message of gratitude and appreciation from the Palestinian people for the ongoing financial and diplomatic support of His Highness,” Municipal minister Majdi Al-Saleh told KUNA. In relation to Kuwait’s chief lawmaker Al-Ghanem, the Palestinian official praised his “honorable and supportive positions towards the Palestinian people”, particularly with regards to the US plan on the Middle East. The Kuwaiti government, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, handed out a $200 million grant to the Palestinian people for the rebuilding of homes and infrastructure damaged after the Israeli bombardment of Gaza in 2014. — KUNA

Jabri visits KUNA, lauds its efforts

KUWAIT: Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammad Nasser Al-Jabri visited yesterday the headquarters of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) in order to be acquainted with the agency’s modus operandi. KUNA Board Chairman and Director-General Sheikh Mubarak Al-Duaj Al-Jabri, Minister of State for Administrative and Financial Affairs Abdelhameed Malik received Jabri.

The Minister took a tour of the agency’s departments and was briefed on the latest KUNA operations. Jabri praised KUNA’s big role in journalism and news broadcasting, adding that it was one of the key media entities in Kuwait. Sheikh Mubarak expressed his and the agency’s employees’ gratitude to the minister’s keenness to develop the capabilities of KUNA. — KUNA

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GAZA: Palestinians unveil a plaque naming a road after HH the Amir of Kuwait. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammad Nasser Al-Jabri meets KUNA Board Chairman and Director-General Sheikh Mubarak Al-Duaj Al-Sabah yesterday. — KUNA
Kuwait suspends Caracal deliveries; calls to probe Airbus aircraft deal

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: MP Adel Al-Damkhi said yesterday that he has withdrawn a threat to grill the defense minister after a quick and positive response from the ministry in which it suspended taking delivery of Caracal military helicopters until adequate technical examinations are carried out. The ministry of defense confirmed in a statement that it will not take delivery of any Caracal helicopter before making sure they are technically sound.

The ministry's move came after Damkhi on Wednesday said he will grill the defense minister if the ministry takes delivery of any Caracal after the first two Caracals encountered technical problems in their engines. Damkhi raised the issue after he came across a letter from a senior defense ministry official ordering that six ready Caracals be received without making the necessary checkpoints. The lawmaker said yesterday that he was informed by the defense ministry that an assistant undersecretary will be probed in the case.

In its statement, the ministry insisted that it will pay great attention to the safety of Kuwaiti pilots and personnel. In 2016, Kuwait signed a €1.2 billion deal to purchase 30 Caracal military helicopters from Airbus Helicopters. The deal is already under investigation in Kuwait after a Lebanese middleman demanded commissions worth €70 million from Airbus for mediating the deal with Kuwait.

In another aircraft sale with Airbus, MP Riyadh Al-Adasani yesterday called for investigating a deal to purchase 25 passenger jets from Airbus after a British court fined Airbus some A3.5 billion over corruption allegations, adding that the verdict mentioned names of Kuwaiti officials. Adasani told reporters that a fact-finding panel must be formed to investigate the deal over irregularities, corruption and bribes. Several MPs had already demanded investigation into the Airbus deal, claiming illegal commissions and bribes were paid in the deal.

Mutlaa death toll rises to 6, Amir sends condolences

By Hanan Al-Seadoun

KUWAIT: The fire department yesterday announced six workers had died and three were injured in the earth collapse in Mutlaa residential city, noting that the three injured men were saved minutes after the collapse and retrieved by search and rescue personnel. The authorized authority for housing welfare announced halting all constructions at the site until official investigations are over. The authority stressed that all measures will be taken to investigate the accident upon direct instructions from Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Rana Al-Fares.

HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday sent a cable of condolences to President of Nepal Bidhya Devi Bhandari over the death of the Nepalese workers in the Mutlaa accident. HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to Bhandari.

Meanwhile, director general of Al-Huraiti law firm, the legal representative of the Chinese company responsible for the project - Gezhouba, expressed deepest sympathies and condolences to the families of the deceased workers and wished the speedy recovery of those injured. Hussein Al-Huraiti hailed the quick response of rescue and medical emergency forces as well as Fares for her immediate presence at the site.

Kuwaiti Embassy distributes melons for free in Vietnam

By A Saleh and Meesaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: In a bid to help farmers affected by the spread of the coronavirus and save their crops, the Kuwaiti embassy in Vietnam purchased two tons of watermelons and distributed them free to passersby, said the Vietnamese thoisai.com.vn website. In this regard, Nguyen Thu Ha, secretary of the Embassy of Kuwait in Hanoi, said the embassy had received reports about difficulties the farmers have been facing in exporting their crops after the spread of the coronavirus, and accordingly, the embassy decided to purchase the watermelons and distribute them for free.

Autopsies not MoH responsibility

Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah stressed performing autopsies is the responsibility of the public prosecution. “Our job is to hand over the bodies and they do their work,” he underlined, adding that the case currently discussed by the parliamentary health affairs committee is still in court. Notably, the National Assembly had urged the health affairs committee to investigate the causes of the deaths of Abdul Aziz Al-Rasheedi, a child who died in Fahheel polyclinic dental clinic, and Kuwaiti citizen Hanan Al-Awadi.
Japan records first COVID-19 death, Vietnam places 10,000 under quarantine

BEIJING: China’s official death toll from the new coronavirus spiked dramatically yesterday after authorities changed their counting methods, fuelling concern the epidemic is far worse than being reported.

As the figures soared in China, a troubling new front opened abroad as neighboring Vietnam placed 10,000 people under quarantine after six COVID-19 cases were discovered in a cluster of villages—the first such lockdown overseas. Under criticism at home over the handling of the crisis, China’s Communist Party sacked two top-ranking officials in Hubei province, the epicentre of the outbreak.

Outside Hubei, there were 12 more deaths but the number of new cases fell for a ninth day in a row, with 312 extra patients. Hubei authorities said the increases were because they had broadened their definition for infection to include people “clinically diagnosed” via lung imaging.

Up until now, they had been documenting cases using a more sophisticated laboratory test. Health officials said they looked into past suspected cases and revised their diagnoses, suggesting older cases were also included in yesterday’s numbers.

China had been praised by the WHO for its transparent handling of the outbreak, in contrast to the way it concealed the extent of the deadly SARS virus epidemic in 2002-2003.

But it has faced continued skepticism among the global public, with fears that there may be similarities to the way it dealt with SARS. Authorities in Hubei have been accused of concealing the gravity of the outbreak.

Analysts said Hubei’s new counting methodology might be a legitimate attempt to be more transparent, but the immediate impact was to sow more distrust. “Oddly, this now is a moment of greater transparency,” Sam Crane, political science professor at Williams College in Massachusetts, told AFP. “It is not clear if the problem up to now, on this issue, was lack of transparency or simply bad medical practice,” Crane said.

In Vietnam, authorities announced they were locking down the commune of Son Loi, a farming region about 40 kilometers (25 miles) from Hanoi, for 20 days. Checkpoints were set up around the commune, according to AFP reporters in a district on the outskirts of Son Loi.

Health officials wearing protective suits sprayed disinfectant on vehicles. The biggest cluster of cases outside China is on a cruise ship quarantined off Japan’s coast, where 44 more people tested positive for COVID-19, raising the total number of infections on the Diamond Princess to 218.

Several countries have banned arrivals from China, while major airlines have halted flights to and from the country. Hundreds of people in some two dozen countries are infected.

Japan is one of the countries worst affected by the epidemic outside China, with 251 confirmed cases, including those on the Diamond Princess. Health Minister Katsunobu Kato told a news conference yesterday that a woman in her 80s living in Kanagawa prefecture, which borders Tokyo, had died. She was the first fatality in Japan, and the third outside mainland China. The woman fell ill in January but only later showed symptoms of pneumonia and was hospitalised, then transferred to another hospital when her condition worsened.

Her infection with the coronavirus confirmed after her death, Kato said. The route of contagion was being investigated. — Reuters
Sudan says deal signed with families of victims of USS Cole bombing

KHARTOUM: Sudan said yesterday it has signed a deal with the families of the victims of the 2000 bombing of the USS Cole in Yemen, meeting a key condition for removing the country from Washington's terrorism blacklist. The United States has set certain benchmarks that Sudan has to meet to be removed from its state sponsor of terrorism list, which also includes North Korea, Iran and Syria.

For months now, Sudanese and US officials have been in talks to remove the northeast African country from the blacklist. Compensating the victims of the USS Cole attack had been a key condition imposed by the US administration.

Sudan's justice minister said a deal had been signed with the families of the victims of the attack, but it did not specify the amount of compensation agreed. “As part of the transitional government’s effort to remove Sudan from the terrorism list, a deal has been signed on February 7 with the families of the victims of the USS Cole incident,” the ministry said in a statement.

“The deal clearly specifies that the government of Sudan was not responsible for the incident or any such terrorist incident and it is doing this deal only to... fulfill the condition put by the American administration to remove Sudan from its terrorism list,” said Ahmed Mohammed Saeed, who heads the Sudanese ministry’s terrorism committee.

Sudanese businessmen and officials complain that the blacklisting has restrained international banking and transfer of funds, in turn severely impacting the country’s economy.

Other judges went on to order certain banks to make Sudanese assets available to start paying the damages agreed. “As part of the transitional government’s effort to remove Sudan from the terrorism list, a deal has been signed with the families of the victims of the USS Cole incident,” the ministry said in a statement.

Sudanese businessmen and officials complain that the blacklisting has restrained international banking and transfer of funds, in turn severely impacting the country’s economy.

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ISTANBUL: Turkey yesterday threatened to use force against “radicals” in Syria’s Idlib province after Russia accused Ankara of failing to “neutralize” jihadist groups under a 2018 deal. “Force will be used in Idlib against those who do not abide by the ceasefire, including the radicals,” Defense Minister Hulusi Akar was quoted as saying by the official Anadolu news agency. “Any form of measure will be taken,” he said. Idlib—the last opposition bastion in Syria—is held by an array of rebels dominated by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) jihadist group, which is led by members of the country’s former Al-Qaeda franchise. President Bashar al-Assad’s forces have pressed ahead with an offensive in the region since December, killing more than 380 civilians, according to the monitoring group the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The killing of 14 Turks in Idlib in government shelling has fuelled tensions between Ankara and Damascus, while raising stakes with Russia—a key ally of Assad.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday accused Russia of committing “massacres” in Idlib and threatened to strike government forces anywhere in Syria if the slightest harm is done to Turkish troops. In return, Moscow accused Ankara of failing to honour the 2018 deal, with Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov saying the Turkish side “had taken upon itself an obligation to neutralise terrorist groups” in Idlib. Under the bilateral agreement, radical groups were required to withdraw from a demilitarised zone in the Idlib region.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Thursday on the official Twitter account of the US Embassy in Turkey, voiced US support for Ankara’s “legitimate” interests in Syria. “Our job is to convince (Russia, Iran and the Assad government) that they are not going to have a military victory,” he said. “The United States totally agrees with Turkey on the legal presence and justification for Turkey defending its existential interests against refugee-flow and dealing with terror and finding a solution to the terrible Syrian conflict with the war criminal regime of President Assad,” he said.

Turkey, which already hosts more than 3.7 million Syrians, fears a further influx of refugees fleeing violence in Idlib. The two countries have been on a collision course over US support for Kurdish militants fighting against the Islamic State in Syria, deemed as terrorists by Ankara.

Under the bilateral deal with Russia, Turkey has also set up 12 observation posts in Idlib, three of which were encircled by Assad’s forces, according to Turkish officials.

Erdogan has now given Damascus until the end of the month to push back its forces outside the military locations. Turkey has sent reinforcements including troops and artillery to beef up its observation posts in recent days following the series of exchanges with the Syrian army.

Akar said: “We are sending additional units to establish a ceasefire and make it long-lasting. We will control the field.” — AFP
Two years on, ‘Ramaphoria’ for S Africa’s president is fading

President’s reform plans fail to deliver jobs, spur growth

JOHANNESBURG: When Cyril Ramaphosa took office as South African president two years ago, the media coined the term “Ramaphoria” to describe the giddy expectations he had stoked. Those heady days now seem firmly in the past. Ramaphosa, 67, has been praised for turning the page on the scandal-tainted era of his predecessor, Jacob Zuma.

But many South Africans are frustrated, disenchanted or angry that his rhetoric of “a new dawn” in a country bedevilled by joblessness, inequality and crime has fallen so far short. “We have all been disappointed...at the performance of the president over the past two years,” said Dawie Roodt, chief economist at the consultancy firm Efficient Group.

“We are worse off because we are poorer than two years ago in terms of per capita GDP,” he said. “But we do not have the same levels of incompetence and corruption that we experienced under Zuma.” Ramaphosa was a trade union leader who played a key role in the apartheid struggle.

After he became a hugely wealthy business- man but kept his political contacts bright, and at one point was seen as being groomed to succeed Nelson Mandela.

Fifteen months later, Ramaphosa won a popular mandate in elections where the ANC suffered its worst result since apartheid was overturned a quarter of a century earlier. The party’s electoral support dropped below the psychologically significant mark of 60 percent, falling to 57.5 percent.

Economic headache

The slump reflects the failure of Ramaphosa’s reform plans to deliver the jobs and sunnier life that he promised. In short order, his presidency has had to battle escalating electricity outages, rising unemployment—now at 29.1 percent and the highest in 11 years—and a national airline struggling to stay afloat. “It is quite clear that he is facing a much bigger challenge... than had been expected,” said Nedbank economist Isaac Matshego.

Ramaphosa’s leadership style is now under cold scrutiny. Sifiso Skenjana, chief economist at a management consulting firm, IQ Business, said Ramaphosa was having to navigate the “political complexity” of a divided ANC.

“He has tended to try to be inclusive and as a result he has come under a lot of criticism for having some level of indecision.” The head of the opposition Democratic Alliance, John Steenhuizen, acridly described Ramaphosa as “stuck in his own quicksand of warring factions and crippling indecisiveness. The incapable head of an incapable state”.

Julius Malema, leader of the firebrand opposition Economic Freedom Fighters, asked: “What is that Cyril has done since we removed Zuma... except him becoming president?”

“Ramaphosa is certainly not a disaster but he is really a disappointment,” said Roodt. “He is a weak president,” he said. “His personality is not a very strong leader because he doesn’t take decisions, he is always waiting for somebody to tell him what to do.” Ramaphosa was to make a state-of-the-nation address yesterday in which he is likely to admit to the country’s problems but also emphasize the positive.

“Where we have failed, we will correct. Where we have made mistakes, we will make amends.”

Sinn Fein seeks talks with Fianna Fail on forming new Irish govt

DUBLIN: Left-wing nationalist party Sinn Fein said yesterday it had formally requested talks with center-right rival Fianna Fail to discuss options for forming a new Irish government following an inconclusive election last weekend. The request puts pressure on Fianna Fail leader Micheal Martin, whose party has 38 seats in the 160-seat parliament, to clarify his position on a possible tie-up with Sinn Fein, which has 37 seats. Sinn Fein, Fianna Fail and the center-right Fine Gael Party of Prime Minister Leo Varadkar secured just under a quarter of seats in parliament each, meaning it will be hard to form a government unless at least two of the three cooperate.

Sinn Fein said that voters rejected the traditional parties over the key campaign issues of healthcare and the high cost and low availability of housing, won over by Sinn Fein’s high-spending promises and a pledge to freeze residential rents. During the election campaign, Martin ruled out doing a deal with Sinn Fein, the former political wing of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), but in the immediate aftermath of the vote, he refused to completely exclude the possibility.

Instead he became vice president, a largely low-profile role that he held until he landed the top job in February 2018. That came after an internal wrangle in the ruling African National Congress (ANC) saw Zuma, stained by years of incompetence and corruption that we experienced under Zuma.”

The party’s electoral support dropped below the psychologically significant mark of 60 percent, falling to 57.5 percent.

Economic headache

The slump reflects the failure of Ramaphosa’s reform plans to deliver the jobs and sunnier life that he promised. In short order, his presidency has had to battle escalating electricity outages, rising unemployment—now at 29.1 percent and the highest in 11 years—and a national airline struggling to stay afloat. “It is quite clear that he is facing a much bigger challenge... than had been expected,” said Nedbank economist Isaac Matshego.

Ramaphosa’s leadership style is now under cold scrutiny. Sifiso Skenjana, chief economist at a management consulting firm, IQ Business, said Ramaphosa was having to navigate the “political complexity” of a divided ANC.

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Sinn Fein leader Mary Lou McDonald said in a statement to announce that the formal request had been made. “There is an obligation on all of us to act urgently,” she added.

Fine Gael and Fianna Fail have long shunned Sinn Fein, citing policy differences and the party’s historic links to the IRA, which fought British rule in Northern Ireland for decades in a conflict in which some 3,600 people were killed before a 1998 peace deal. Both parties are also opposed to Sinn Fein’s high-spending promises, its pledge to scrap property tax and plans to hike income taxes on high earners they say would discourage foreign multinationals that employ one-in-10 Irish workers. There are open divisions among Fianna Fail lawmakers over talking to Sinn Fein. Two members of parliament, one a senior member of Martin’s front bench, strongly ruled it out yesterday ahead of the party’s first meeting since the election. The Irish Times newspaper said Martin was expected to rule out such a coalition. The two lawmakers, Niall Collins and newly elected Cathal Crowe, suggested that Fianna Fail could instead lead a minority government similar to the previous administration Varadkar led via a co-operation deal with then main opposition Fianna Fail. — Reuters

Greek islanders take anti-camp protest to Athens

ATHENS: Greek officials and residents from islands harboring thousands of asylum-seekers staged a protest in Athens yesterday against plans to build new camps. Dozens of demonstrators from the islands of Lesbos, Chios and Samos gathered outside the interior ministry, branding banners against the camps project.

The new conservative government which came to power in July has announced that the present camps, which are stretched several times beyond capacity, are to shut down this year.

They are to be replaced with new, smaller facilities that are to be operational by mid-2020.

But authorities and residents on the five Aegean islands with camp facilities, which include Leros and Kos, have opposed the initiative. The islanders demand the immediate removal of most of the asylum-seekers and accuse the EU of abandoning them.

“If we accept a (new) camp for 7,000 people, unofficially it could be 20-25,000 people,” said Georgios Stantzos, the mayor of Samos. The ongoing deadlock, five years after the height of the migration crisis, has caused exasperation among both island residents and asylum-seekers.

Outbreaks of violence are frequent in the overcrowded camps, and last week seven people on Lesbos were arrested on suspicion of forming a vigilante group to attack migrants. — AFP
British finance minister quits in reshuffle upset

Shock move deals blow to Johnson's government

LONDON: British Finance Minister Sajid Javid resigned yesterday, in a shock move that deals a blow to Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government just weeks after Brexit and a month before the annual budget. The chancellor of the exchequer stood down after Johnson tried to re-organise his cabinet and reportedly told Javid’s aides, a source close to the departing minister, he was immediately replaced by senior Treasury official Rishi Sunak. Javid's departure is a major upset at a turbulent time for Britain, just days before Northern Ireland under the deal, also challenged his dedication to the role. Smith said it had been “the biggest privilege”, adding that he was “extremely grateful” to Johnson for giving him the chance to serve, Business Secretary Andrea Leadsom, Environment Secretary Theresa Villiers and Attorney General Geoffrey Cox were also shown the door.

German far right reopens wounds of Dresden bombing

FRANKFURT: Germany marks 75 years since the destruction of Dresden in World War II today, an anniversary seized upon by the far right to inflame victim numbers and play down Nazi crimes. President Frank-Walter Steinmeier will give a speech at Dresden's Palace of Culture, walking a fine line between remembering the bombings killed in the Allied air raids on the eastern city and stressing Germany's responsibility for the war. Afterwards, he will join thousands of residents in forming a human chain of “peace and tolerance” as church bells ring out.

But Foreign Minister Dominic Raab and Michael Gove, Johnson's de facto deputy, are staring. Johnson held off from carrying out a cabinet reshuffle immediately after his December victory, choosing to wait until Britain left the EU. After years of political turmoil over Brexit, he wants to focus this year on domestic issues, including investments in police, healthcare and infrastructure. Johnson also named former aid minister Duk Sharma as the new minister in charge of the COP 26 UN climate summit, which is being held in Glasgow in November. The former minister, Claire O'Neil, was sacked last month. She responded with a blistering attack on his leadership, and warned that planning for the summit was “on way off track.”

Growing bill to fix Britain's Big Ben

LONDON: The bill to repair London's iconic Big Ben clock tower has increased by millions of pounds after the discovery of World War II bomb damage, pollution and asbestos, Britain's parliament said yesterday. The cost of renovating the Elizabeth Tower housing the famous clock, which began in 2017, is now set to rise to nearly £590 million (€654 million, 95 million euros). The extensive damage requiring an extra £20 million was only revealed once the project team was able to begin intrusive surveys for the first time ever on the 177-year-old structure. However, the efforts to restore the tower “to its previous splendor” remain on track for completion in late 2021, according to officials. A spokesperson for the House of Commons Commission, which is overseeing the project, called the spiralling costs “very frustrating.”

The work is to repair the clock faces and mechanisms, cracks in the tower's masonry and corrosion in the roof, as well as to restore the edging around the clock faces to its original 19th-century color.

A lift will also be installed as an alternative to the steps up the tower, and the lights illuminating the clock will be replaced by low-energy LEDs. Completed in neo-Gothic style in 1856 by parliament architect Augustus Pugin, the tower has suffered from considerable degradation over time, and now even leaves 46 centimeters (18 inches) off the vertical. The renovations have meant Big Ben's chimes feature on British television for the first time, after the clock was stopped for years, the commemoration events are set to attract neo-Nazis who have held “truth” about the bombings. Police are also bracing for a large demo by right-wing extremists on Saturday, as well as counterprotests.

Dresden mayor Ulf Biltz began the commemorations in the morning by placing white roses at a memorial for the victims. As in past years, the commemoration events are set to attract neo-Nazis, while an AfD-backed candidate was elected state premier for the first time. Although he swiftly resigned, the drama marked a coup for the AfD by breaking the firewall against a party that has called for Germany to stop atoning for its Nazi past. "Resurgent nationalism and right-wing populism are increasingly endangering the democratic remembrance culture," mayor Biltz told local radio.

Some observers have questioned whether the indiscriminate bombing of Dresden was justified so late in the war, an argument hijacked by neo-Nazis eager to shift the focus onto atrocities committed by the victors of WWII. The Allied forces however saw Dresden as a legitimate target on the eastern front because of its transport links and factories supporting the German military machine.
In Minnesota, the Kafkaesque existence of Haylee Ann Rucker

No passport, no driver’s license, no insurance

EVELETH, United States: Haylee Ann Rucker lives in a rural Minnesota town. The 19-year-old was born in the United States to American parents. But legally, she did not exist for 19 years. No passport, no driver’s license, no insurance. Rucker had none of the vital paperwork needed to lead a regular adult life. Why? Because she didn’t have a birth certificate. And without that, she could not get a Social Security number, and everything got more complicated from there. The story is an absurdist tale of administrative ping-pong involving two US states, the federal government and a hospital that did not register her paperwork from the outset.

But as bizarre as it sounds, it’s not unheard of in the United States, a country that offers nationality to anyone born on American soil. “It really hit me when I turned 16 and I couldn’t get a license like everyone else,” Rucker says in a soft and trembling voice.

When AFP met Rucker in Eveleth-population roughly 3,700 — in mid-January, she was working as a home health aide for the bedridden mother of the town’s mayor. Of course, she has to work under the table. Mayor Robert Vlaisavljevich repeatedly calls Rucker’s situation “the nuttiest thing.” Rucker was a good student in high school and wanted to become a nurse, but she could not register for college classes without identification documents. The frustration in her voice builds: “I mean, I can’t do anything. I’m kind of just stuck.”

“She’s mine’
It all started one Thursday night in December 2000 at a hospital outside Los Angeles. A very pregnant April Booth, Rucker’s mother, went to the hospital convinced she was about to give birth. But nurses sent her away and told her to return when her contractions were closer together. Booth, however, didn’t make it. She gave birth at home with the help of her baby’s father. An ambulance then came and took her back to the hospital. But the father did not want to sign any paperwork, perhaps so he could avoid paying child support.

Without his signature, there were no official witnesses to the birth, and the hospital did not follow through with the usual procedures to have a birth certificate issued. At the time, Booth did not worry about the birth certificate formalities, and her baby’s father disappeared from her life. But years later, when she was ready to file a tax return after heading back to work, Booth realized she could not claim Rucker as a dependant, because her daughter had no Social Security number. By that time, the family was living in Minnesota. In 2009, Booth applied for a Social Security number for Rucker. But her request was rejected because of the lack of a birth certificate. Social workers helped Booth get a paternity test proving the identity of Rucker’s father. The hospital certified that Booth had been admitted in December 2000.

There was a bill for the ambulance, and medical records. Booth spreads all the papers out on a coffee table in her home. She even has a copy of one of her ultrasound exams. “In the beginning, I thought maybe they thought that I had stolen her, and I could respect that,” says the 56-year-old Booth. “But I think I have enough documentation to prove that she’s mine.” In 2018, thanks to a friend, Booth finally got a lawyer to take the case pro bono. For months, there was no progress. Booth saw a certain irony in the situation. She works in a call center that has the Democratic Party as a client, and often conducts polls about the regularization of those in the US without papers. “I didn’t cross a border in the back of a truck. I didn’t hide her as a stowaway,” Booth said. “I had her in the United States, and I’ve never left the country. I’m an American citizen. And I can’t get her legal.”

As Rucker was not born in Minnesota where she currently lives, and doesn’t live in California where she was born, the two states have repeatedly punted to the other side on the case, says her attorney Bryan Lyons. — AFP

US commander warns Philippines rift could hurt terrorism fight

SYDNEY: A top US commander warned ending a security pact with the Philippines would hurt counter-terrorism efforts in the country’s restive south yesterday, putting him at odds with commander-in-chief Donald Trump.

Washington’s top military officer in Asia-Pacific Admiral Philip Davidson said he hoped Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte’s decision to scrap a deal allowing US forces to be based in the country would be rethought.

Manila has given “180 day notice so we have some time for diplomatic efforts,” Davidson said at an event in Sydney: “I hope we can get to a successful outcome.”

Trump has said he would be “fine” with the end of the visiting forces agreement as it would save the United States “a lot of money.”

But Davidson insisted the move would hamper military operations in Duterte’s home island of Mindanao where separatist and Islamist violence has killed some 100,000 people.

“Our ability to help the Philippines in their counter-violent extremist fight in the south, our ability to train and operate within the Philippines and with Philippines armed forces would be challenged without that visiting forces agreement,” he warned. — AFP

Just ‘Mayor Pete’? Trump struggles for killer nickname

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump likes to coin disparaging nicknames for his political opponents—but so far, he hasn’t quite hit the mark with rising young Democrat Pete Buttigieg.


But Buttigieg—a 38-year-old gay military veteran—has received surprisingly little presidential abuse despite his rapid emergence as a leading contender for the right to take on Trump in November.

“Bootedgeedge (Buttigieg) is doing pretty well tonight. Giving Crazy Bernie a run for his money. Very interesting!” Trump tweeted after the New Hampshire primary on Tuesday, in which Buttigieg finished a close second to Sanders. Is it perhaps that Trump doesn’t see “Mayor Pete” as a credible opponent? Or is he just struggling to craft a neat epithet for the centrist former mayor of South Bend, Indiana who is reaching out to independents and “future former Republicans”? ...

For Julian Zelizer, a political history professor at Princeton University, there is no doubt that Buttigieg will soon become a more serious target for Trump if his stellar ascent gathers pace. “Whenever Trump sees a threat, he attacks the threat. He will be watching and will unleach, should this intensify,” Zelizer told AFP.

What’s the angle?
But what will be his line of attack? Buttigieg’s difficult-to-pronounce name? The president has so far only made passing reference to the tricky surname, pretending to stumble on it when whipping up local supporters at rallies. But the moderate Democrat has already blunted that gambit by joking about it himself, offering voters funny ways to remember how to say it.

Will Trump mock Buttigieg’s relative lack of experience? After all, South Bend is a city of 100,000 people, not the world’s largest economy. Buttigieg dismisses criticism of his short political resume by raising his military service in Afghanistan. “I’ve seen a lot worse ‘incoming’ (fire) than a tweet full of typos,” he said, ridiculing Trump’s sometimes less-than-stellar spelling on social media.

In a Democratic debate in January, Buttigieg slammed Trump’s Vietnam draft deferments for medical reasons. — AFP
**Joe Biden seeks reboot after new upset in New Hampshire**

Back-to-back stumbles create a difficult situation for Democratic aspirant

Another wall goes up for Trump, this time in India

**NASHUA, New Hampshire:** Joe Biden's campaign held a victory party in a New Hampshire hotel ballroom on Tuesday evening. But there was no victory. And there was no Joe Biden. Before the polls had even closed, the Democratic presidential hopeful had left New Hampshire, where he ultimately posted a fifth-place finish. The dismal performance came just eight days after the Iowa caucuses, where Biden finished fourth. The back-to-back stumbles have created a difficult situation for Biden, who must perform well in upcoming contests in Nevada and South Carolina this month to show voters and donors that his candidacy remains viable.

The government official conceded that the said, speaking on condition of anonymity. “Does Biden have the resources to sustain a comeback?”, said Hopkins. “It’s hard to tell in this trajectory whether you are going to bounce back or just keep going downhill.”


Joe Biden, the affable former vice president, has tried to downplay his early struggles, Iowa and New Hampshire are small states with few delegates whose populations are overwhelmingly white and unrepresentative of the country overall, his campaign has argued. The candidate is looking to Nevada and South Carolina, the next two states on the nominating calendar, to revive his fortunes. Nevada boasts large numbers of unionized workers and Latino voters. South Carolina has a heavy concentration of African-American voters, who have shown a strong affinity for Biden, the former running mate of Barack Obama, America’s first black president. While Sanders, Buttigieg and a suddenly surging Klobuchar celebrated their strong showings in New Hampshire on Tuesday night, Biden headed to a rally in South Carolina.

“Up ‘til now we haven’t heard from the most committed constituency in the Democratic Party, the African-American constituency,” Biden said in Columbia, the capital. While Buttigieg and Klobuchar have emerged as formidable rivals to Biden in attracting moderate Democratic voters, they so far have attracted little support among Latinos or African Americans, whose votes will be critical to defeat incumbent Republican President Donald Trump in November. Sanders has attracted Latino support, but has yet to gain traction with black voters.

Biden has touted himself as the only candidate in the race capable of harnessing the Democrats’ diverse coalition. But that claim is being challenged by Mike Bloomberg, the billionaire former mayor of New York, who is skipping the four early contests to compete starting on Super Tuesday on March 3.

A national poll this week from Quinnipiac University showed Biden’s support among black Democrats, which stood at 51 percent in late January, has slid to 27 percent, while Bloomberg’s black support has climbed to 22 percent from 7 percent over the same period.

On a campaign strategy call on Wednesday, US Representative Cedric Richmond, a co-chair of the US campaign and the former mayor of New Orleans, was speaking to the funds I get today are the most important, most symbolic ones of the campaign.” He told supporters to “look out for new and everyone that supports the dictator will there will be more sanctions for the criminals. He said the sanctions imposed on the top officials at Maduro’s government were an “effective” form of pressuring. Guaido’s uncle Juan Guaido, who vanished after flying back with him, had been arrested, top Maduro ally Diosdado Cabello said, accusing him of smuggling explosives. On his state television programme, Cabello said Marte was detained for allegedly carrying C-4 explosives hidden inside flashlights and perfume refills, and was wearing a bulletproof vest.

Guaido had denounced the “disappearance” of his uncle at the airport and said he would hold Maduro responsible for whatever happened to him. Maduro retains the support of Venezuela’s powerful military and has resisted Guaido’s challenge, even as the United States ramps up the pressure. “Yes, there will be more sanctions for the criminals and everyone that supports the dictator,” warned Guaido, who on Tuesday had told supporters to “look out for new announcements.”

**Venezuela’s Guaido defends sanctions against Maduro regime**

**CARACAS:** Venezuela’s opposition leader Juan Guaido on Wednesday defended foreign sanctions against his country 24 hours after he was attacked at Caracas international airport by state airline employees shouting “fascist.” Guaido returned on Tuesday from a three-week international tour that took him to the US, Canada, Colombia and Europe. He was met by some angry Conviasa workers enraged that last Friday the US placed sanctions on the state airline company.

The US action criminalizing transactions with the flag carrier is the latest of many sanctions by Washington aimed at toppling leftist President Nicolas Maduro’s regime, particularly by cutting his government’s oil revenue. One protester appeared to douse Guaido with a fizzy drink. But speaking to journalists after a legislative session held in a Caracas plaza, the National Assembly speaker defended the use of sanctions. He said they are “the free world’s tools to confront regimes (that) violate human rights, torturers and murderers.”

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**Another wall goes up for Trump, this time in India**

**AHMEDABAD:** US President Donald Trump will be shielded from the sight of slums by a newly built wall when he visits the city of Ahmedabad during a visit to India this month. A senior government official said the wall was being built for security reasons, not to conceal the slum district.

But the contractor building it told Reuters the government “did not want the slum to be seen” when Trump passes by on the ride in from Ahmedabad’s airport. “I’ve been ordered to build a wall as soon as possible, over 150 masons are working round-the-clock to finish the project,” the contractor said, speaking on condition of anonymity. The government official conceded that the wall was part of a “beautification and cleanliness” drive.

Whatever the reason, the 400-meter-long and seven-feet-high wall will prevent the US leader from getting a glimpse of a slum district that houses an estimated 800 families. Trump, who has made his pledge to build a wall along the United States’ border with Mexico a feature of his presidency, will visit India on Feb. 24-25 to reaffirm strategic ties that have been buffeted by trade disputes.

He is expected to attend an event dubbed “Kem Chho Trump” (“How are you, Trump?”) at a stadium in Ahmedabad along the lines of the “Howdy Modi” extravaganza he hosted at a stadium in Ahmedabad along the lines of the “Howdy Modi” extravaganza he hosted for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Houston last September. Speaking at the White House on Tuesday, Trump quoted Modi as saying “millions and millions of people” would attend the rally.

The event provides Trump, who was impeached in December, with the opportunity to woo the support of hundreds of thousands of Indian American voters ahead of the US presidential election in November. But some slum dwellers whose homes will be cordoned off by the wall in Ahmedabad – the largest city in Modi’s home state of Gujarat – said the government was wasting tax-payer money to hide the poor. Poverty and slums are the reality of our life, but Modi’s government wants to hide the poor,” said Parvathbhai Mafabhai, a day worker who has lived there with his family for more than three decades. — Reuters
Japan cruise ship virus cases jump to 218 as elderly offered escape

US ship blocked over virus fears to dock in Cambodia

YOKOHAMA: Japan said yesterday it would allow some elderly passengers off a quarantined cruise ship if they test negative for the COVID-19 virus. "The situation on board is getting worse day by day," 24-year-old ship security officer Sonali Thakkar told AFP. "This morning they told us that 44 people have been infected and everyone is really scared and wanting to get off as soon as possible," she added. "All we want is tests to be done and to finalise the quarantine." Thakkar said that while passengers were in serious condition in hospital-four who have tested positive for the virus. Tests results for the fifth one are still being processed. With dozens of new cases diagnosed almost daily, questions have been raised about the pace of testing and whether the quarantine is working.

Quarantine questions
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Meanwhile, a US cruise ship blocked from several Asian ports over concerns that a passenger could have been infected with the new coronavirus arrived off Cambodia yesterday, as frustrated holidaymakers expressed hope that their ordeal may soon be over.

Cruise operator Holland America has insisted with assurances that all passengers are screened on landing in Pakistan. —AFP

Quarantine passengers
By mid-day, buses were lined up by the pier ready to transfer passengers to Sihanoukville's airport, where they would fly to Phnom Penh before traveling home-a return trip that Holland America will pay for. —AFP

Indonesian volcano spews ash and lava

JAKARTA: Indonesia’s Mount Merapi, one of the world’s most active volcanoes, erupted yesterday as fiery red molten lava streamed down from the crater and it belched clouds of grey ash 2,000 meters (6,500 feet) into the sky.

Authorities did not raise the rumbling volcano’s alert status after the early-morning eruption, but they advised commercial planes to take caution in the area. But any activity at Merapi raises concern and local residents were ordered to stay outside a three-kilometer no-go zone around the rumbling crater near Indonesia’s cultural capital Yogyakarta.

Volcanic ash rained down on a 10-square kilometer area, according to the Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation Centre. Mount Merapi’s last major eruption in 2010 killed more than 300 people and forced the evacuation of some 280,000 residents.

It was Merapi’s most powerful eruption since 1930, which killed around 1,300 people, while another explosion in 1994 took about 60 lives.
Duterte says travel ban stays even as Taiwan plans countermeasures

Primary concern is citizens’ health and safety: Philippines

"My primary concern is the health and safety of our countrymen", Duterte was quoted by his spokesman, Salvador Puno, as saying. Taiwan is governed entirely separately from China, but Beijing claims the island as its own and the World Health Organization (WHO) clubs its virus cases in the category for China, which has led some countries to impose the same restrictions on Taiwanese as on Chinese citizens.

More than 115,000 Philippine citizens live and work in Taiwan, mainly in factories and employed as household help. The Philippines’ decision to include Taiwan as part of a ban on people from China visiting the country had “nothing to do with” the One China policy, Puno said, quoting Duterte.

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Joanne Ou told reporters in Taipei that Taiwan had a separate decision in Beijing, and not in Taipei. "We will continue to communicate with the Philippines and explain that this is a one-sided and wrong decision by the Philippines’ health ministry, which has already affected the relationship between the two countries of Taiwan and the Philippines," Ou said.

In a statement following the Philippines announcement that the ban would stay, Taiwan's Foreign Ministry said it was still considering its response, and that it was hoping Manila made the "correct decision". Taiwan and the Philippines have close economic and cultural ties, but no formal diplomatic relations, as the Philippines, like most countries, only recognizes the government in Beijing, and not in Taipei.

Taiwan has repeatedly complained that, with its 18 virus cases compared with some 60,000 in China, it is unfair for the WHO to lump them together with China and mislead other countries into believing Taiwan faces an equally dire epidemic.

The Philippines, more than 115,000 of whose nationals work in Taiwan in factories and as domestic helpers, said this week it had included Taiwan as part of a ban on people from China visiting the country. Taiwan is governed entirely separately from China, but Beijing claims the island as its own and the World Health Organization (WHO) clubs its virus cases in the category for China, which has led some countries to impose the same restrictions on Taiwanese as on Chinese citizens.

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Joanne Ou told reporters in Taipei that Taiwan had a planned response if the Philippines maintained its ban, but she declined to elaborate, saying a decision was awaited from the Philippines government.

Fires contained in Australia state, but now floods threaten

SYDNEY: All the blazes in Australia’s hard-hit state of New South Wales have been brought under control, firefighters said yesterday, signaling the end of a “black summer” that claimed 33 lives nationwide. But heavy rains that helped extinguish the blazes that have raged along the east coast since September are causing flash floods in parts of the state, posing new problems for some residents.

"Not all fires are out, there’s still some fire activity in the far south of the state but all fires are contained so we can really focus on helping people rebuild," the state’s fire service deputy commissioner Rob Rogers said on Twitter.

"It is very good news," a Rural Fire Service spokesman told AFP. Bushfires scorched more than 10 million hectares in the country’s east and south, killing at least 33 people and an estimated one billion animals, while destroying more than 2,500 homes.

The fires, worst in decades, torched major cities including Sydney in smoke for weeks on end, saw towns cut off and prompted the deployment of the military to rescue stranded citizens. Beleaguered volunteer firefighters have fought the blazes day-in-day-out in what has been described as Australia’s “black summer”. The fires were exacerbated by prolonged drought and worsened by climate change in the country’s hottest and driest year on record. Days of recent rainfall have extinguished the largest fires and brought those that remain under control. — AFP

Vietnam quarantines area with 10,000 residents over coronavirus

BÌNH XUYÊN, Vietnam: More than 10,000 people in villages near Vietnam’s capital were placed under quarantine yesterday after six cases of the deadly new coronavirus were discovered there, authorities said. In the first mass quarantine outside of China since the virus emerged there in late December, the Son Loi farming region about 40 kilometers (25 miles) from Hanoi will be locked down for 20 days, the health ministry said. Checkpoints have been set up around the six villages that make up Son Loi, said an AFP team on the outskirts of the area in Binh Xuyen district.

Health officials wearing protective suits sprayed disinfectant on vehicles. Police warned people wanting to enter the quarantined area that while they would be allowed in, they would not be able to leave. The order comes after the health ministry reported that five people have been infected with the virus. It later announced a sixth case.

They all originated from a female worker who was sent to Wuhan in central China—where the virus originated—for training. The disease then spread to her family and her neighbors, including a three-month-old baby. So far, only the female worker has fully recovered and been discharged from the hospital, according to updates from the ministry, while the others remain in a “stable” condition. The Son Loi area of roughly 1,000 hectares (2,500 acres) is made up of farmland. Many of the 10,600 residents also commute to nearby factories for short-term labor jobs. Villager Tran Van Minh told AFP that authorities had already advised them to avoid large gatherings, though the cluster of infections in his village likely began due to Tet lunar new year celebrations last week. — AFP

"The woman infected her family and neighbors after Tet visits," he said, adding that he and his family remain in good health. But “life has been badly affected,” he told AFP by phone, adding that much of the labor force is reliant on jobs in construction and house painting. "Now we cannot get out and even if we do, clients don’t welcome us that much as before." Authorities in Son Loi began handing out face masks after the Tet holiday ended on January 30. Since then children and elderly have largely been confined to their homes. Minh said he was not worried about running out of food, but he hoped "the epidemic will end soon". More than 1,350 people have died in China from the virus, and nearly 60,000 others have been infected, since it was first detected in Hubei province in December. While thousands have recovered, scientists and pharmaceutical companies are racing to test a vaccine and treatment to better target the virus—though health experts say it could be months before it is readily available. — AFP
Love, lust, heartache: Secret dating lives of young Saudis

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The matchmaker of Beijing: Grandfather plays cupid for generations

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In Saudi Arabia's rigid past, religious police once swooped down on rose sellers and anyone peddling red paraphernalia around Valentine's Day, but now a more open-albeit risky—dating culture is taking root. Pursuing relationships outside of marriage in the conservative Islamic kingdom once amounted to a death wish, and would-be Romеorеs resorted to pressing phone numbers up against their car window in hope of making contact with women.

Now a sweeping liberalization drive—which has rendered the religious police toothless and allowed gender mixing like never before—has made it easier for young couples to meet in cafes and restaurants. Well-heeled millennials also hunt for romantic liaisons via Twitter and Snapchat, and apps such as Swarm—designed to log places the user visits but often repurposed to look for dates.

"Selling red roses was like selling drugs," one young Saudi film-maker told AFP, sitting in a music-filled Riyadh cafe with his girlfriend while a courting couple gazed into each other's eyes on the next table.

"Even this was once unthinkable—a woman sitting next to an unrelated man," said the girlfriend, a media professional. "Now women are asking men out." Pre-marital relationships remain a cultural minefield though in a country steeped in Islamic tradition and where matchmaking is typically overseen by family elders, forcing couples to keep unsanctioned romance under wraps. Covert dating operations illustrate how Saudi Arabia's mainly young population is often compelled to lead dual lives in the pursuit of social liberties that may outstrip the kingdom's capacity for change.

Secrets and lies

Samirah, a 27-year-old finance executive in the Saudi capital, felt a flutter of nerves when her boyfriend's mother stumbled upon a handwritten birthday card and gift she gave him—and that risked her own family finding out. In a society where family honor is often tied to female chastity, the revelation would have provoked fury from her family and jeopardized their months-long courtship that began through common friends.

Her boyfriend managed to deflect his mother, but the scare prompted the young couple yearning for more freedom to plan a forbidden rendezvous—a long weekend in Dubai disguised as a business trip. "Saudi society is more open, but everyone lies about relationships because people are judgmental," said Samirah, who like other interviewees requested that her real name be withheld.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the millennial heir to the Saudi throne, has loosened social norms in a seismic cultural shift away from hardline Islam, allowing cinemas and parties while rein-ucing in clerics opposed to events like Valentine's Day. In scenes unimaginable until just two years ago, women have been seen swaying on the shoulders of men at music concerts as the kingdom tears down the walls of sex segregation. But while the religious police have stepped back, the internal policing within Saudi families and society at large has not stopped, highlighting the limits of a Western-style liberalization drive in a deeply conservative country.

A Saudi woman in her late 20s told AFP she suspected her "control freak" brother, who works in the military, had deployed official spyware to track whether she was meeting men. "Young Saudis are caught between the old and new," said Nour, another woman who works in social development. "Many suffer from the Madonna-whore complex. Just because you are willing to go on a date does not mean you have a loose character."

Saudi women also bridle at pervasive sexism in a society that—despite undergoing change particularly in urban areas—some say reduces them to their future role as wives and mothers. Sex outside of marriage remains a criminal offence in most of the Arab world, and the restrictions also fuel the risk of blackmail. "It is a big concern if you break up on bad terms," said Samirah. "Women live in terror: What if he recorded photos and videos of me? What if he tells my father? What if he lands up at home?"— AFP

Love, Lust, Heartache: Secret DATING LIVES OF YOUNG SAUDIS

A Saudi couple attending a football match at King Abdullah Sport City Stadium in Jeddah.

‘Full of risks’

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Modern romance is also perilous for men—getting a hotel room can cause huge anxiety as couples are often expected to prove they are married at check-in. Nasser, a 25-year-old advertising professional, said last year one of his friends was caught kissing his girlfriend inside a private booth in a Riyadh restaurant. The restaurant manager threw open the screens and started filming them while shouting: "This is haram!" or un-Islamic. "Sometimes the only safe place to date is in your car," Nasser told AFP. "Dating is full of risks." — AFP
The matchmaker of Beijing: Grandfather plays cupid for generations

Zhu Fang's living room walls are plastered with hundreds of headshots of hopeful singles, some of them faded and featuring bouffant hairstyles and outdated outfits. For almost 50 years he has been one of Beijing's most popular matchmakers, and even now-aged 75—he remains in as much demand as ever. In his time uniting lonely hearts, China has undergone dramatic social change. Marriage, which has traditionally been key in the patriarchal society, is in decline and the country’s birth rate fell to its lowest level in 70 years in 2018.

But Zhu insists people are still looking for love, and his phone rings often with matchmaking requests. "It's meaningful, and that's why I've continued," he says, but concedes it is not a lucrative business, and he relies on the financial support of his children. Zhu says he's inspired by late Chairman Mao Zedong's political slogan, "Serve the People". "When I help others to find happiness, I also get some happiness myself," Zhu says. He charges a one-off 200 yuan ($29) membership fee and his clients are mainly elderly people hoping to find spouses for their adult children. On a cold December morning, his from-home "office" is full of middle-aged people hoping to find dates for their adult children.

"I thought it was fun, so I kept going, and now 50 years have passed." 

As China has changed, Zhu has also noticed a big change in his clientele. He says that in recent years his clients have become more status-conscious and are often embarrassed about using a matchmaker. "Some (clients) work in the industrial and commerce bureau or tax bureau, and fear that others will say, with matter how good the internet becomes, I still don't trust it," he says. And his matchmaking club continues to attract clients hungrily for face to face connection-of all ages. One woman, a septuagenarian, calls frequently to complain he has not found a boyfriend or girlfriend in his time as matchmaker; Zhu has brought more than 1,700 couples together. But he admits that he can't find a partner for everyone, and "some photos have been up for a long time".

Women's world

There are far more women on Zhu's books now, but he says they have high standards. "They have three 'highs': they're highly educated, have high salaries, and they are tall," Zhu explains, adding they won't settle for anyone they deem unworthy. "'Single-off women say, I'd rather have no boyfriend than have someone who's not good enough," he adds. "But no one is perfect," Zhu says. "If you don't have the right attitude, you'll never find someone." There's also a growing trend for intimacy on-demand, with some people opting for virtual boyfriends and girlfriends, so they can still have companionship without the pressures and commitments of real life dating.

And while China does not allow single women to use sperm donors, a growing number of affluent older women are opting to find foreign sperm donors so they can start a family in their own time, and on their own terms. Sandy To, a sociologist at the University of Hong Kong, said China's one-child policy—which was in force from 1979 to 2016 and limited the size of most families—has created "a generation of self-confident and resourceful women."

Dating apps and online agencies like Momo and Baihe have also taken off in China but Zhu believes his way is better. "No matter how good the Internet becomes, I still don't trust it," he says. And his matchmaking club continues to attract clients hungrily for face to face connection-of all ages. One woman, a septuagenarian, calls frequently to complain he has not found a partner for her yet. Joyce Gao, a finance professional in her early thirties and one of Zhu's clients, said she hopes to find an "energetic" man with "strong work ethic". At a recent group dating event organized by Zhu, she was the only single who had come on her own, without her parents. Gao says she still prefers Zhu's old-fashioned meetups to online dating. She says: "Offline, things are more real, and you can feel what someone is like."
No marriage, no problem: Indian apps offer couples privacy for a price

A new raft of Indian apps which offer rooms to unmarried couples are helping overturn traditional norms in a country where premarital sex remains taboo. From StayUncle and BreviStay, which offer hourly packages, to Softbank-funded Oyo, which allows users to search for couple-friendly hotels via its ‘Relationship Mode’, young entrepreneurs are tapping into a previously neglected market to lucrative effect. The development is good news for Puja, a Mumbai-based tech executive, as well as Jyoti, who made an emergency check-in to a hotel with her then boyfriend in 2016 and found that the romantic experience quickly turned ugly as staff enquired about her marital status.

“I could feel them judging me,” Puja, whose name has been changed on her request, told AFP. Stung by their questions, she decided to lie. “We were both above 18 — they had no reason to deny us a room, but it was all just so awkward,” she said. Her experience is not unusual in a country where many people live with their parents until they marry — either by choice or because of high housing costs or conservative cultural norms — leaving court couples desperate for a shred of privacy.

On any given evening in Mumbai, dozens of cansounding lovebirds can be spotted along the city’s famous seafront, their backs to the slow-moving traffic as they seek out personal space in the world’s second-most populous nation. Sometimes the consequences can be dangerous: police raids and demand bribes from unmarried guests, while Hindu hardliners attack couples celebrating ‘Western’ holidays like Valentine’s Day.

‘Supply and demand’

“People have a hard time accepting the idea that being in a relationship is a natural thing,” said Rahul Taneja, co-founder of LuxStay, one of several apps seeking to shake up the hospitality industry with services aimed at unmarried couples. “It is a simple case of supply and demand. The rooms are there, the customers are there: the challenge is to bring them together,” Taneja, 29, who runs a boutique in the city, told AFP.

One of several apps seeking to shake up the hospitality industry with services aimed at unmarried couples, StayUncle recently completed its 200,000th booking for the year.

StayUncle’s founder, Sanchit Sethi, initially planned to target business travellers with his app focusing on hourly rentals but when he began fielding enquiries from couples he realized he was targeting the wrong customer.

Soon the former engineer found himself handing out business cards to young people hanging out in coffee shops — advertising his new venture with the tagline: “Couples need a room not judgment”. When the app went live in 2016, hardline groups threatened to beat up Sethi and his colleagues, but “no one ever went beyond a phone call”, the 30-year-old told AFP. Getting hoteliers on board proved a tougher sell, with many worried about police raids and offending the sensibilities of traditional clients.

In one case, a hotelier signed up only to get cold feet and refuse guests at check-in, prompting Sethi to decide that he would not spend any more time trying to “convince reluctant hotels”. He need not have worried, given the soaring demand. The app currently has 800 hotels in 45 towns and cities and plans to add another 1,500 by the end of the year. And it’s not shy about pursuing new customers, with a YouTube channel offering dating advice to anxious singles, a TV series planning to target business travellers with his app focusing on hourly rentals but when he began fielding enquiries from couples he realized he was targeting the wrong customer.

Statues in winter woolies as Romanian museum bids to aid homeless

Statues at Romania’s national art museum sported colorful hats and scarves Wednesday as part of an “appeal against indifference” towards homelessness in one of the EU’s poorest member states. The winter woolies adorned a dozen bronze sculptures in the garden of the National Art Museum of Romania (MNAR) in the campaign set to run through February. “A museum must protect works of art but also people, especially those in need,” museum director Liviu Constantinescu told AFP. The goal is “to send an artistic message but also an appeal against indifference,” Constantinescu added.

The “Sheltered by Art” exhibit in the former royal residence in central Bucharest includes information panels on how to help the homeless. “We will stop to admire a sculpture, but when we encounter a homeless person we pass by quickly, often visibly annoyed,” reads a write-up about the initiative on the museum’s website. No official estimates of the number of homeless among Romania’s nearly 20 million people are available, but activists say several thousand are affected in the capital alone. “Their number remains almost unchanged: some of them reintegrate, but new ones arrive,” said Sabina Nicolae, head of Samasocial Romania, which co-organized the exhibit. The group helps around 1,600 homeless people a year, including families with young children.

World’s oldest man crowned in Japan aged 112

A 112-year-old Japanese man has been crowned the world’s oldest male, claiming that smiling is the key to longevity. Chitetsu Watanabe, who was born on March 5, 1907 in Niigata, north of Tokyo, was officially given the title at a nursing home in the city, Guinness World Records said Wednesday. The previous record holder, Masazo Nonaka, also Japanese, died last month at 112 years and 266 days. Watanabe, who is married with four children, said the secret to longevity is “not get angry and keep a smile on your face.” He admitted a penchant for sweets such as custard pudding — but it appears to have done him no harm.

The oldest living person is also Japanese, Kane Tanaka, a 117-year-old woman. Japan has one of the world’s highest life expectancies and has been home to several people recognized as among the oldest humans to have ever lived. They include Jiroemon Kimura, the longest-living man on record, who died soon after his 116th birthday in June 2013. The oldest verified person ever-Jeanne Louise Calment of France—died in 1997 at the age of 122, according to Guinness. — AFP
**Dogg apologizes for attacking TV anchor over Bryant story**

Rapper Snoop Dogg apologized on Wednesday for an obscenity-laced tirade in which he appeared to threaten a CBS news anchor over an interview about late basketball star Kobe Bryant. Snoop Dogg's harangue on social media had followed an interview that "CBS This Morning" anchor Gayle King had with former women's basketball star Lisa Leslie which referenced a 2003 sexual abuse allegation against Bryant. "Two wrongs don't make no right. When you're wrong, you gotta fix it," Snoop Dogg said in an Instagram video apologizing for his outburst.

"So with that being said, Gayle King, I publicly tore you down by coming at you in a derogatory manner based off of emotions, me being angry at questions that you asked," Snoop Dogg said, adding that he "overreacted" to the interview. "I should have handled it way different than that-I was raised way better than that. So I would like to apologize to you publicly for the language that I used and calling you out of your name and just being disrespectful." Snoop Dogg said he felt he had to defend his friend Bryant. "A lot of people look up to me and they love me ... so I want to let them know that anytime you mess up, it's OK to fix it, it's OK to man up and say that you're wrong," he said. "I apologize. Hopefully we can sit down and talk privately. Have a good day." Bryant died, along with his daughter and seven other people, in a helicopter crash on January 26 in California. Since then, references to the 2003 sexual abuse allegation against him have drawn a tumultuous reaction from fans. After her interview, King received multiple death threats, according to her good friend, media megastar Oprah Winfrey. —AFP

**The elite S Korean businesswoman behind Oscar-winning Parasite**

The woman who stepped up to make the final acceptance speech when Bong Joon-ho's satire Parasite—and the gap between rich and poor—won the Oscar for Best Picture is herself a member of South Korea's wealthiest family. Miky Lee, an heiress-turned-media mogul, is the executive producer of the first non-English-language film to secure the Academy Awards’ top prize in their 92-year history. The film has been praised at home and abroad for its critique of inequality, but Lee is the granddaughter of Lee Byung-chul, the founder of the giant Samsung group—by far the largest of the family-controlled, often-controversial conglomerates known as chaebol that dominate business in the world's 12th-largest economy.

She is the vice-chairwoman of the CJ Group, a food and entertainment giant that was spun out of Samsung in the 1990s as the empire was divided between different arms of the family. Chaebol families are often intimately connected with South Korea’s political class, and her cousin is Lee Jae-yong, the Samsung Electronics vice-chairman currently on trial for bribing former president Park Geun-hye in a corruption scandal that saw her ousted from power. But Miky Lee herself was secretly blacklisted by Park’s conservative government after she invested in a film based on the life of leftist presiding president Roh Moo-hyun.

A diminutive Harvard graduate, she is known as a cinematic connoisseur, with previous collaborations with Bong including “Memories of Murder” (2003), “Mother” (2009), and the Tilda Swinton-starring “Snowpiercer” (2013). Among those she praised in her Oscars speech were Korean filmmakers, who she said “never hesitated to give us straightforward opinion”, driving directors and creators to “keep pushing the envelopes”. She also thanked her brother, the CJ chairman Lee Jay-yong—a controversial figure who was convicted in 2014 on charges ranging from embezzlement to tax evasion. Her address “ultimately made for a very meta ending to Parasite’s award season,” said Keung Yoon Ba, a PhD candidate researching film and media at Harvard University. “It speaks to the parasitic relationship Korea as a whole has with chaebol conglomerates,” she told AFP. “The films pointing out the broken system are made within that system themselves.”

**DreamWorks deal**

The unprecedented Oscars haul for “Parasite” is the culmination of a corporate push into Hollywood that Lee has spearheaded for years. In 1995 she invested $300 million in the DreamWorks studio as it was set up by Hollywood heavyweights including Steven Spielberg.

She is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the powerful organization that awards the Oscars, and has connections throughout showbusiness in the US, where she moved after her blacklisting. Lee supervises CJ ENM, one of the South’s biggest media groups, which has operations in television, K-pop, film studios and multiplexes, subsidiaries in at least six countries, and a market capitalization of 3.7 trillion won ($3 billion). —AFP

**McGowan blasts Portman Oscars cape**

US actress and #MeToo activist Rose McGowan has dismissed as a “fraud” Natalie Portman’s Oscar dress embroidered with the names of female filmmakers overlooked for best director nominations. In a post on Facebook, the actress said she found Portman’s red carpet Oscar protest “deeply offensive to those of us who actually do the work.” “I’m not writing this out of bitterness,” she added. “I am writing this out of disgust.”

McGowan said that while the black Dior cape stitched with the names of the snubbed directors got “rave reviews from the mainstream media” it was nothing more than “an actress acting the part of someone who cares.” “Natalie, you have worked with two female directors in your very long career—one of them was you,” McGowan wrote. “You have a production company that has hired exactly one female director-you.” In a statement to AFP, Portman agreed with McGowan that she didn’t deserve to be called brave. “I agree with Ms McGowan that it is inaccurate to call me brave for wearing a garment with women’s names on it,” Portman said. “Brave is a term I more strongly associate with actions like those of the women who have been testifying against Harvey Weinstein the last few weeks, under incredible pressure,” she added in a reference to the disgraced Hollywood mogul on trial in New York charged with predatory sexual assault.—AFP
Celebs, rugs and rock 'n' roll: New York Fashion Week highlights

Dressing responsibly

Gabriela Hearst cemented her reputation as the flag-bearer of high-end responsible fashion with a stunning fall-winter collection that focused on sustainability at New York Fashion week Tuesday. Hearst's designs were all made from natural fibers, including recycled cashmere and remnants of antique Turkish rugs that were pieced together to form long coats. Many of the sweaters, cardigans, shawls and dresses had been hand knitted by Manos del Uruguay, a non-profit cooperative of female artisans from Hearst's home country.

The collection had a distinctly 1970s vibe with hand-painted leather coats and designs chosen from mandalas or abstract shapes asso-
associated with dreams. Any carbon footprint from the show will be offset via a donation to a project that aims to save the Cardamom forest in Cambodia. “True luxury is knowing where everything comes from and how it is made,” said Hearst, who grew up on a sheep farm in Uruguay.

Vera Wang’s ace
Tennis star Maria Sharapova served up a celebrity appearance in all black at Vera Wang’s show held in a plush Upper East Side mansion just off Central Park Tuesday. The multiple grand slam winner sat front row alongside Vogue editor-in-chief Anna Wintour and English fashion journalist Hamish Bowles. Models glanced at themselves in the grand residence’s elaborate mirrors as they walked through the house’s various rooms wearing black silk chiffon paired with thick platform heels.

Vera Wang’s evening wear also included a neon yellow French tulle corset and a green floral featherweight stretch long sleeve bodysuit. “I wanted to bring a kind of importance but a lack of formality, a kind of ease, youth, charm and delicacy to the evening,” Wang told AFP.

Debbie Harry in NY tribute
Rocker Debbie Harry rolled back the years as Coach 1941 paid tribute to New York’s past, present and future Tuesday. The Blondie lead singer, 74, performed alongside Atlanta band The Coathangers as they added a 1970s touch to a collection that celebrated “New York’s unique creative energy.”

More than six years after taking over as creative director, British designer Stuart Vevers continues to evolve Coach, which will notch its 80th anniversary next year. After shifting to a more urban collection last season, Vevers accelerated that movement with a distinctly vintage streetwear look this time around.

The flat sneakers, large socks and hipster hats were straight from the streets of Brooklyn while several designs were inspired by the paintings of local artist Jean-Michel Basquiat. “New York was the ultimate muse for this collection,” Vevers told AFP.

Gigi Hadid
If jury selection had gone differently than US model Gigi Hadid would have been in court for Harvey Weinstein’s rape trial instead of walking the runway for Proenza Schouler Monday. Hadid, 24, was last month excused from serving as one of the jurors in the high-profile case owing to her fame after appearing for the first round of pre-screening. On Monday, she lined up for Proenza Schouler’s 2020 fall-winter collection, which, after a spring show that evoked the 1980s, approached the present and near future head-on.

The New York duo of Lazaro Hernandez and Jack McCollough showcased a series of large, thick coats complemented by big shawls, designed to provide protection in an “unpredictable decade.” “For us it’s always a mood, an attitude. We just take it from the world around us,” Hernandez told AFP, following the late Monday show. “Things are falling off, falling apart, unraveling but then held together. It’s just like how people feel right now,” he added. New York Fashion Week ended Wednesday. —AFP

Models walk the runway in Coach 1941 fashion show during New York Fashion Week at Spring Studios in New York City. —AFP

Model Gigi Hadid walks the runway for the Proenza Schouler fashion show.
Friday, February 14, 2020

From Michael Kors’ snug knitwear to Rodarte’s nod to Count Dracula, AFP wraps up the latest highlights from New York Fashion Week, which ended on Wednesday.

**Chic wool**

Michael Kors reminded everyone to stay warm during the winter months with a “cozy glamor” 2020 collection on Wednesday that mixed comfort with chic. Thick knitted sweaters, cashmere ribbed turtlenecks and herringbone tweed skirts evoked curling up beside a log cabin fire with a mug of hot cocoa. Languid silhouettes, ponchos, mufflers and flat riding boots all featured as the 60-year-old US designer mixed town and country feels. Canadian country music star Orville Peck played live, and actresses Julia Louis-Dreyfus and Blake Lively sat front row at the show, which took place in the American Stock Exchange.

**Rodarte**

Sisters Kate and Laura Mulleavy had brought their label Rodarte to New York Fashion Week just once since September 2016, opting instead to showcase in Paris and Los Angeles. On Monday, they were back, reminding everyone that—with Marc Jacobs—they are arguably the closest thing the United States has to haute couture.

At St Bartholomew’s Church, the Mulleavys put on a masterful show imbued with the solemnity of the venue that added a Gothic touch and a wink in the direction of Count Dracula. Embroidered crystals, pearls, flowers, hand-painted elements and sequins added a finesse that is sometimes hard to find in ready-to-wear collections. Black lipstick and embroidered cobwebs recalled Dracula and the Gothic style. The parade started “in a very innocent place,” with a 1940s polka dot dress worn by supermodel Bella Hadid, and then journeyed “into the unknown,” Kate Mulleavy told reporters afterwards. “I like the idea of something seeming very sweet and not necessarily being sweet,” she added.

**Misfits, dreamers**

Singapore-born and Nepal-raised designer Prabal Gurung paid tribute to his adopted home of New York with a show on the 65th floor of the famed Rockefeller Center late Tuesday. From eclectic dresses paired with boas and stoles to animal print trousers and thick jackets with white feathers, the collection reflected the mish-mash that is America’s largest city. “Tonight I pay tribute to all of you, New Yorkers by name or soul, a cocktail of eight million people,” 40-year-old Gurung wrote in the collection notes. “The daring. The misfits. The free. The beautiful, bold, impossible dreamers.”

Dreamers and Dracula as New York Fashion Week draws to a close

Models walk the runway at the Rodarte show during New York Fashion Week: The Shows on February in New York City. —AFP
Kiteboarding is a challenging extreme sport that depends mainly on the wind at any season of the year as it is the utmost vital factor to have when up in the air. The kiteboarder combines surfing with paragliding and other sports, doing tricks and spectacular movements in mid-air for enthusiasts to watch captivating shows on Kuwait’s beaches.

Since there are no training centers in Kuwait, thrill-seekers travel abroad to obtain certificates and expertise from specialized organizations. A team of professionals established a center to train those who wish to practice it, giving them the skills that will allow them to enter international tournaments. — KUNA
Strong and flavorful Vietnamese coffee makes converts as quickly as it raises pulses. French colonists might have introduced coffee to Vietnam, but the morning cup of cà phê soon became a local habit. With variations that make use of yoghurt, eggs and even fruit, Vietnamese coffee has developed a style of its own.

The secrets of Vietnamese coffee

The preparation process, as well as the blend of beans, helps give Vietnamese coffee its particular style. Most of the Vietnamese coffee bean plantations are located in the area of Đà Lạt, nicely nicknamed ‘Europe of Vietnam’ because of its fresher climate and hilly landscape. Most of the tea, coffee and even the flowers sold across the country are originally grown there in the south.

But what makes Vietnamese coffee so flavorful? Some will argue it’s the filter drip, but the traditional roasting way actually makes for its special intense taste: the Vietnamese can roast it with rice wine, a pinch of salt, and butter. This last ingredient is the reason why slow-drip coffee in Vietnam can sport a slight oily texture. Some roasteries add flavors such as chocolate or caramel, all very much to the taste of local coffee drinkers.

Coarsely ground beans go into a French drip filter (called a phin), which sits on top of the cup. The beans are weighted down with a thin lid, hot water is added to the phin, and then the water slowly trickles through into the cup. This operation should be repeated at least twice before the drip actually produces enough coffee to be enjoyed.

Different types of coffee in Vietnam

In Vietnam, coffee has long overtaken its nature of simple drink. Below are some of the most famous recipes you can try while traveling across the country. Far from being fancy, it is common to find many of them in most traditional coffee places.

Coffee with milk (ca phe nau or ca phe sua)

Most people drink the dark, strong brew with sweetened condensed milk, a practice that began because the French couldn’t easily acquire fresh milk. Up to this day, fresh milk is not a common ingredient found in traditional coffee shops. You could ask but shouldn’t count on it. In the north of Vietnam, the mixture of
black coffee and sweetened condensed milk is referred to as ca phe nau (brown coffee), while in the south it’s called ca phe sua (milk coffee). While it is mostly served cold with ice, you can also order it hot.

Yoghurt coffee (sua chua ca phe)
Like coffee, yoghurt was originally brought to Vietnam by the French and has been adopted into local culinary tradition. Rich and creamy, it’s served with various toppings, from fresh mango to fermented rice - and even coffee. This might sound like an odd combination, but the rich yoghurt pairs amazingly well with a drizzle of black coffee – just stir and sip.

Egg coffee (ca phe trung)
Egg yolk whipped with condensed milk into an airy froth meets dark coffee in this rich concoction: think of it as a Vietnamese take on tiramisu. A Hanoi invention, egg coffee first made the scene in the 1940s, when milk was scarce and egg yolks provided a convenient replacement. Café Giang in Hanoi’s Old Quarter, where it was invented, still serves the egg coffee but other places now offer their own recipe - sometimes even bettering the original!

Coconut coffee (ca phe cot dua)
It is unsure whether this is a traditional recipe or if it was invented by the Cong Café chain of boho coffee shops. What is certain however is that it’s become a favorite among the trendy Vietnamese youth in the past couple of years. Black coffee with a tear of condensed milk is mixed with coconut milk and blended with ice in a sort of shake. A more regular version served in some local shops presents a base of ca phe nau (brown coffee) mixed with coconut milk and fresh milk.

Coffee smoothie (sinh to ca phe)
In recent years, coffee has even found its way into smoothies. Popular juice shops perk up creamy blends of fresh fruit with a touch of Vietnamese coffee, sometimes tossing in yoghurt or cashews. In Hanoi, try sinh to ca phe chuoi bo (coffee blended with banana and avocado). In Ho Chi Minh, go for sinh to ca phe sapoche (coffee blended with sapodilla, a tropical fruit with a custard-like taste). Both are delicious ways to get your caffeine fix and your vitamins at the same time.
Where to drink the best Vietnamese coffee

Hanoi remains the undisputed center of cafe culture in Vietnam. While modern-style coffee shops have grown in popularity, traditional sidewalk cafes still fill up from morning to night with drinkers of all ages, who linger for hours over a single glass. However, you can find quality coffee all over Vietnam.

Singling out only a few places does not do justice to the extensive Vietnamese cafe culture, but below are some addresses that remain landmarks in the two main cities:

For the experience: Trieu Viet Vuong

Known as 'Coffee Street', this stretch of Hanoi’s historic Hai Ba Trung District might contain more cafes per block than anywhere else in Vietnam, ranging from family-run shops to more fashionable places popular with teenagers. Hanoian favorite Cafe Tho (117 Trieu Viet Vuong), which has been here for three decades, brews a powerful cup that still draws consistent crowds.

For dessert: Cafe Giang

No trip to Hanoi is complete without a taste of egg coffee at the place it was invented. Cafe Giang (39 Nguyen Huu Huan), on the edge of Hanoi’s Old Quarter, was the first to begin whipping up this drink/dessert in the 1940s. Since then the atmosphere has changed as little as the recipe. While the tiny stools here might not be the most comfortable, the drink itself is top notch. Those who don’t drink coffee can sample the egg foam with sweetened mung beans or cocoa.

For the view: Cafe Pho Co

Accessed via an entrance concealed in the back of a shop, a spiral staircase leads up to Hanoi’s Cafe Pho Co and a stunning view of Hoan Kiem Lake. From the quiet balcony overlooking the lake and surrounding streets, you can enjoy a coffee while watching the seemingly never-ending stream of traffic pass by.

For a blast from the past: Cafe La Tamia

A retro cafe in Ho Chi Minh City, La Tamia (38/05 Tran Khac Chan) offers visitors a glimpse into old Saigon. Relax on a vintage sofa or browse the cafe owner’s collection of antique TVs and gramophones while enjoying your iced coffee.

Drink coffee like a local in Vietnam

A few coffee-drinking tips for your Vietnam trip:

Milky way Don’t even try to ask for decaf. If you prefer your coffee mild, do as the Vietnamese do and order ca phe bac xiu, coffee with lots of extra condensed milk. This will also taste like coffee ice cream and will be a delight for your (very) sweet tooth.

Sweet spot As condensed milk is sweetened, there is no white coffee without sugar. True coffee connoisseurs should opt for ca phe den (black coffee). A touch of sugar will bring out the complex flavors, just as it does with dark chocolate. However, if you want to ensure that your drink isn’t too sweet, ask for it duong (less sugar).

Avoid hunger Cafes in Vietnam don’t typically serve food although some newer cafes do offer quick eats. It is therefore accepted to bring your own snacks and eat on the spot, but you're better off following the local custom of eating first and then heading to a cafe to relax. In a pinch, you can always nibble on hat huong duong (sunflower seeds).

This article was originally published on June 2015 and was updated in February 2020 by Fabienne Fong Yan
## TV Listings

### Friday, February 14, 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<th>Show Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Fish Of The Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:35</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>Friday Night Fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Peter Kuruvita's Mexican Fiesta</td>
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<tr>
<td>01:25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Warrior Road Trip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02:40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Ultimate Airport Dubai Compiations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03:30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Ugly House To Lovely House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03:40</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>06:00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Ultimate Airport Dubai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06:06</td>
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<td>Extreme China</td>
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<tr>
<td>06:50</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>A House Of Its Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07:40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>The Food Files</td>
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<tr>
<td>08:05</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Miguel's Feasts</td>
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<td>09:05</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>John Torode's Malaysian Adventure</td>
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<td>11:00</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>23:15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Cradle Of Mandopop</td>
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### Comedy Tonight

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<td>Awkward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15:25</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>Awkward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17:10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Awkward</td>
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<tr>
<td>17:35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Awkward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18:20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Awkward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19:30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Awkward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20:45</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Awkward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21:50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Awkward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22:05</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Awkward</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### TV Listings

- **Relatively Evil**: 01:00
- **Homicide City**: 02:00
- **Impractical Jokers**: 02:15
- **Ghost Hunters**: 03:00
- **Lip Sync Battle**: 03:25
- **50 Central**: 03:50
- **50 Central**: 04:15
- **Evermoor Chronicles**: 04:25
- **The Lion Guard**: 05:00
- **Toy Story**: 05:25
- **Fireman Sam**: 05:45
- **Paprika**: 05:55
- **Lip Sync Battle**: 06:15
- **Strange Case Of The Dress**: 06:35
- **Space Chickens In Space**: 07:00
- **Ancient Aliens**: 07:15
- **America's Book Of Secrets**: 07:30
- **Botched**: 08:00
- **Ultimate Airport Dubai**: 08:25
- **Ice Road Truckers**: 09:00
- **Big Hero 6 The Series**: 09:25
- **American Pickers**: 10:00
- **Forged In Fire**: 10:25
- **Homicide City**: 11:00
- **A.N.T. Farm**: 11:25
- **Homicide City**: 12:00
- **A.N.T. Farm**: 12:25
- **Lab Rats**: 13:00
- **Lab Rats**: 13:25
- **Lab Rats**: 13:50
- **American Pickers**: 14:15
- **Forged In Fire**: 14:25
- **Homicide City**: 15:00
- **Ice Road Truckers**: 15:25
- **American Pickers**: 16:15
- **Forced In Fire**: 16:45
- **Homicide City**: 17:30
- **American Pickers**: 18:15

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## More TV Listings

- **Friday Night Fish**: 00:35
- **Friday Night Fish**: 00:55
- **Fish Of The Day**: 01:05
- **Friday Night Fish**: 01:25
- **Friday Night Fish**: 01:45
- **Friday Night Fish**: 02:05
- **Friday Night Fish**: 02:25
- **Friday Night Fish**: 02:45
- **Friday Night Fish**: 03:05
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- **Friday Night Fish**: 03:45
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- **Friday Night Fish**: 20:25
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- **Friday Night Fish**: 21:25
- **Friday Night Fish**: 21:45
- **Friday Night Fish**: 22:05
- **Friday Night Fish**: 22:25
- **Friday Night Fish**: 22:45
- **Friday Night Fish**: 23:05
- **Friday Night Fish**: 23:25
- **Friday Night Fish**: 23:45
- **Friday Night Fish**: 24:05
- **Friday Night Fish**: 24:25
- **Friday Night Fish**: 24:45
Someone close to you could develop some strange symptoms that cause this person to panic. It never hurts to consult a doctor, but when this person does, he or she is likely to find that these problems are probably nothing more than stress, too much work, or overindulgence in food or drink. Therefore, don’t you panic, too! You might find yourself making phone calls or running errands to enable your friend to get some rest.

Group activities might prove a little unsettling for you today, Taurus. Animated discussions could turn into angry quarrels and this could offend your desire for harmony. A lot of misinformation could be exchanged today and cause confusion and short tempers. Stay home, if you can, but if you must go out, don’t be afraid to leave at the first sign of arguments. They aren’t likely to accomplish much after that anyway.

A member of your household is likely to be in a very strange mood today, Gemini. This person has heard some news that is confusing and probably untrue and therefore is wondering what effect this would have on their situation. If he or she discusses it with you, the best advice you might have to resort to dealing with money in the old fashioned way.

Some rather disturbing news about trends in the world economy could have you and everyone around you worrying about your financial future. Have faith, Aquarius. What you’re hearing may be total misinformation. The future is probably going to shape up to be far different than the picture you draw from the news. In fact, you might find that your own personal finances take a definite turn for the better.

This might be a good day to take some time for yourself, Virgo. Contact others, no matter how much you love them, and probably untrue and therefore is wondering what effect this would have on their situation. If he or she discusses it with you, the best advice you might have to resort to dealing with money in the old fashioned way.

Some of your friends and colleagues could be calling you at home to discuss the matter. However, these rumors are probably based on little more than gossip, so don’t take them seriously. Someone could have an axe to grind and tend to blow things all out of proportion. Try not to engage in this gossip. Stay calm and let your friends and colleagues know that, for you, the best strategy seems to be to wait for the situation to grow clearer. That should get you through.
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- Management of malignant tumors
- Management of pain conditions

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Kuwait Board of Otolaryngology.
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Fellowship in Microvascular Head & Neck Surgery.
Member of the European Laryngological Society.
Member of the American Academy of Otolaryngology – Head & Neck Surgery.
Member of the Canadian Society of Otolaryngology Head & Neck Surgery.

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- Diagnosis and treatment of Tinnitus
- Diagnosis and treatment of Vertigo
- Diagnosis and treatment of Allergic Rhinitis
- Diagnosis and treatment of Snoring

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Consultant Laryngologist
Kuwait Board of Otolaryngology.
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- Myringotomy and ventilation tube insertion.
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- Endoscopic sinus surgery.
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- Diagnosis and treatment of vertigo.
- Thyroid surgery.
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Friday, February 14, 2020

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DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION

METEOROLOGICAL DEPARTMENT

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**Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours**

**BY DAY:** Rather cold with light to moderate north westerly wind to variable wind, with speed of 06 - 26 km/h.

**BY NIGHT:** Cold with light to moderate variable wind to south easterly wind, with speed of 06 - 26 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

**WEATHER WATCH**

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<tr>
<th>STATION</th>
<th>MAX. EXP.</th>
<th>MIN. REC.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KUWAIT CITY</td>
<td>18 °C</td>
<td>08 °C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KUWAIT AIRPORT</td>
<td>18 °C</td>
<td>01 °C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABDALY</td>
<td>17 °C</td>
<td>-1 °C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUBYAN</td>
<td>- °C</td>
<td>- °C</td>
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<tr>
<td>JAHRA</td>
<td>18 °C</td>
<td>03 °C</td>
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<td>FAILAKA ISLAND</td>
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<td>08 °C</td>
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<td>SALMIYAH</td>
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<td>AHMADI</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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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>02/14</td>
<td>Fair and Partly cloudy</td>
<td>23 °C</td>
<td>07 °C</td>
<td>SE-VRB</td>
<td>06 - 28 km/h</td>
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<td>Saturday</td>
<td>02/15</td>
<td>Fair and some scattered clouds will appear</td>
<td>24 °C</td>
<td>11 °C</td>
<td>NW-VRB</td>
<td>06 - 26 km/h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>02/16</td>
<td>Warm and Partly cloudy</td>
<td>26 °C</td>
<td>13 °C</td>
<td>VRB-SE</td>
<td>08 - 40 km/h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>02/17</td>
<td>Warm and Partly cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times</td>
<td>27 °C</td>
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<td>SE</td>
<td>15 - 45 km/h</td>
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**PRAYER TIMES**

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<td>12:02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asr</td>
<td>15:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunset</td>
<td>17:36</td>
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<td>Isha</td>
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**RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT**

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<th>MAX. RH</th>
<th>MIN. RH</th>
<th>MAX. Wind</th>
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<td>01 °C</td>
<td>52 %</td>
<td>12 %</td>
<td>N 39 km/h</td>
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TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR: 0 mm
Exports to lucrative markets are largely banned by Israel

GAZA CITY: Off a bumpy dirt road in Gaza city, a group of children stood outside a half-open factory door, desperate to get their hands on what was being made inside. “We want chocolate!” they shouted at a worker as he left the Al-Arees factory, which despite daunting obstacles churns out treats ranging from chocolate-covered biscuits to a Gazan version of a world famous spread, dubbed here Natalia. Buckling in the face of candy-crazed kids, the man popped behind the door and returned with enough free chocolate to rot their growing teeth.

Al-Arees’ products are Gaza but their components are not, as few of the basic raw ingredients are produced in the impoverished Mediterranean coastal strip. The factory relies on chocolate from as far as Argentina, sugar from African countries and dried eggs from the Netherlands, with other essentials imported from Turkey and Israel. Israel controls all goods that enter Gaza, imposing a blockade that tightened after the tiny enclave was seized by the Islamist group Hamas in 2007. Due to Gaza’s electricity shortages, Ai has installed three fuel-guzzling generators. “Then you take them out of the truck and then onto another truck from Gaza and after about 500 metres you have another checkpoint for checks, then onto another truck from Gaza and after another 500 metres you have another checkpoint for Hamas,” he added.

Apart from Gaza’s electricity shortages, Ai has installed three fuel-guzzling generators. “Then you take them out of the truck and then onto another truck from Gaza and after about 500 metres you have another checkpoint for checks, then onto another truck from Gaza and after another 500 metres you have another checkpoint for Hamas,” he added.

Gaza imports all its electricity from Israel, and money. “From Ashdod we pay for workers and trucks that take these goods to the Kerem Shalom border crossing (between Gaza and Israel),” said Wael Al-Wadiya, chairman of Sarayo Alwadiya company that made the Crimpote. “Right now we have 150 employees at the company. If they open the door to exports we will have eight tonnes of Crimpote were cleared for export to Bahrain, crossing through Israel and the West Bank to Jordan, and onward to the Gulf Arab state. “What I exported was one day’s work only,” said Wael Al-Wadiya, chairman of Sarayo Alwadiya company that made the Krempots. “Right now we have 150 employees at the company. If they open the door to exports we will have 150 permits for Gazans to work in Israel. But Wadiya remains optimistic. “If you can succeed in Gaza, you can succeed anywhere.” —AFP

GAZA CITY: (Left) A shop employee holds up jars of a Gazan version of a world famous spread, dubbed ‘Natalia’, on Wednesday. (Right) Workers at Al-Arees sweets factory sort a batch of chocolate-covered biscuits on Feb 5, 2020. —AFP photos

‘Natalia’

Nutella may be a global phenomenon, but Gazans clamor for Natalia, their own version of a chocolate and hazelnut spread. Local factories also make Crimpote, a large marshmallow coated in a thick layer of chocolate. The treats are popular, but not necessarily profitable. West Bank;” he added. “In Gaza we have a limited market, so the banning of exports weakens the industry.” Despite ongoing tensions, Israel and Hamas have reached a series of agreements over the past year that have slightly eased tensions. That fragile accord led to an event in December which, for a Gazan producer, could fairly be described as momentous: For the first time in years Gaza exported sweet goods.

Eight tonnes of Crimpote were cleared for export to Bahrain, crossing through Israel and the West Bank to Jordan, and onward to the Gulf Arab state. “What I exported was one day’s work only,” said Wael Al-Wadiya, chairman of Sarayo Alwadiya company that made the Krempots. “Right now we have 150 employees at the company. If they open the door to exports we will have 150 permits for Gazans to work in Israel. But Wadiya remains optimistic. “If you can succeed in Gaza, you can succeed anywhere.” —AFP

First exports of Gaza sweets

“They are banned from being exported even to the West Bank,” he added. “In Gaza we have a limited market, so the banning of exports weakens the industry.” Despite ongoing tensions, Israel and Hamas have reached a series of agreements over the past year that have slightly eased tensions. That fragile accord led to an event in December which, for a Gazan producer, could fairly be described as momentous: For the first time in years Gaza exported sweet goods.

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The exchange of fire has escalated since last month after US President Donald Trump unveiled his Middle East peace plan, angrily rejected by the Palestinians as a capitulation to Israeli objectives. But even last week - amid rockets and mortars from Gaza and late night Israeli air strikes - the chocolate factories kept whirring.

Double customs fees

Gaza has no airport. Goods for the strip are usually brought into Ashdod, an Israeli port around 35 km north of the strip. Getting them into Gaza requires patience and money. “From Ashdod we pay for workers and trucks that take these goods to the Kerem Shalom border crossing (between Gaza and Israel),” said Wael Al-Wadiya, head of Al-Arees. “Then you take them out of the truck for checks, then onto another truck from Gaza and after about 500 metres you have another checkpoint for Hamas,” he added.

“I pay customs twice,” he told AFP, meaning once in Ashdod where Israel collects fees on behalf of the official Palestinian government based in the West Bank and then in Gaza to Hamas. Due to Gaza’s electricity shortages, Ai has installed three fuel-guzzling generators. “If you want anything done in Gaza you have to do it yourself,” he said.

First exports of Gaza sweets

“They are banned from being exported even to the
As China needs virus masks, phone, diaper makers fill void

Country’s mask production capacity hits 94 percent

BEIJING: A diaper manufacturer in eastern China was closed for the Lunar New Year holiday when it heard from officials - China needed vast amounts of masks to fight a deadly virus epidemic and factories needed to chip in. In just over two days, New Yifa Group converted a manufacturing line in Fujian province to make face masks, tapping some of its materials that would have gone into hygiene products. “All our staff are working on the masks now,” the group’s vice president Shen Shenxiayan told AFP in a phone interview. He added that the line can produce up to 600,000 mask pieces a day, and the company is looking to convert another nappy production line soon.

Companies across China - from iPhone maker Foxconn to car manufacturer BYD and garment factories - have made similar forays into protective gear as the country grapples with a shortage of medical equipment to prevent the virus from spreading. To date, the virus has killed more than 1,350 people and infected some 60,000, sparking fear across the globe and causing people to stock up on protective supplies. Authorities said this month that China urgently needed masks, especially at the epicentre of the crisis, Hubei, where doctors face a shortage.

At full capacity, Chinese factories can only produce around 20 million masks a day. As of Tuesday, China’s mask production capacity hit 94 percent, said Xia Nong, an inspector at the National Development and Reform Commission. But there remains a need for more resources. At a press conference on Thursday, Xia urged mask companies that are not yet producing at full capacity to do so “as soon as possible”. $6 million hit

Doctors on the front line in Wuhan - the epicentre of the outbreak - have had to see patients without proper masks or protective body suits, resorting to reusing the same equipment. Manufacturers are stepping up, but this comes at a cost, with New Yifa Group postponing a $6 million order to focus on mask production. But Shen is confident the local government in Putian city, where the firm is based, will help companies like his tide over.

In other cities such as Ningbo in eastern Zhejiang province, 14 garment manufacturers are looking to produce a million masks in 20 days, reported Xinhua on Wednesday. Chinese automaker BYD said in a statement that it was looking into the design and making of protective gear, to produce masks and disinfectant. BYD expects to make up to five million masks and 50,000 bottles of disinfectant a day by the end of the month.

It plans to start mass production by Monday and told AFP the masks will go to hospitals and seriously-affected areas, among others. Others that have stepped in include a General Motors venture in China, SAIC-GM-Wuling, and China Petroleum & Chemical Corporation (Sinopec). Sinopec said on China’s Twitter-like platform Weibo on Sunday that it was setting up 11 production lines with partners and targets making up to over a million masks a day by March 10.

Taiwan tech giant Foxconn, which assembles Apple products, also said in a social media post last week that it started producing masks at a plant in Shenzhen. It expects to make up to two million masks a day by end-February. The masks will be supplied to its own workers, and can be distributed externally where needed. — AFP

IMF sees ‘mild’ virus impact on global economy

WASHINGTON: It is too early to tell the economic toll from the virus outbreak in China, but the hit to global growth should be “mild”, International Monetary Fund chief Kristalina Georgieva said Wednesday. The death toll from the new coronavirus epidemic in China has climbed past 1,350, but hopes have risen that the outbreak could peak later this month. The IMF is expecting a “V-shaped impact”, with a sharp decline in activity in China followed by a sharp recovery, meaning there likely will only be a “mild impact on the rest of the world,” Georgieva said on CNBC.

But she cautioned: “It is still too early to make projections,” and the global economy is “somewhat less strong” than it was when China faced the SARS virus epidemic in 2003. “China was different, the world was different. This virus is clearly more impactful and the world economy then was very strong,” she said. The IMF projects China’s economy will grow 6.0 percent this year, compared to 10 percent in 2003.

US officials likewise are reluctant to provide forecasts but say the impact on the American economy probably will be short-lived. “There’s no question it’s having a significant impact in China,” Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin told legislators Wednesday. But for the US economy “I don’t expect that the coronavirus will have an impact beyond this year,” he echoed the comments from Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell, saying, “we’re obviously monitoring very carefully.” — AFP

COVID-19 causing first drop in oil use in decade: IEA

PARIS: Global oil demand will suffer its first quarterly drop in a decade as the COVID-19 virus lashes the economy in China and its impact ripples throughout the world, the IEA said yesterday. “Global oil demand has been hit hard by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and the widespread shutdown of China’s economy,” the International Energy Agency said in its latest monthly report. “Demand is now expected to fall by 435,000 barrels year-on-year in the first quarter of 2020, the first quarterly contraction in more than 10 years” when it dropped during the global economic crisis, it added.

While the IEA still expects demand for oil to grow for this year as the outbreak is contained, it slashed its forecast for the increase in global consumption by nearly a third to 825,000 barrels per day, the smallest increase since 2011. The outbreak of the new coronavirus spurred China to take drastic measures such as placing in quarantine over a dozen cities and extending the Lunar New Year holidays in order to try to stem its spread, nearly shutting down key parts of its economy. Although markets have rebounded in recent days as investors grew confident that China could quickly contain the virus and its economic impact would be short lived, the IEA warned against complacency by comparing today’s crisis to the 2003 SARS outbreak.

“Stronger global impact”

While steps taken in China to reduce its spread were adopted earlier than in the SARS crisis and have been far more extensive, the profound transformation of the world economy since 2003 means China’s slowdown today is bound to have a stronger global impact,” it said in the report. The IEA noted that since 2003 China has become more integrated in global supply chains, its tourism sector has dramatically expanded and Chinese are the largest contingent of world tourists, and the country’s share of global GDP has jumped from 4 to 16 percent.

With it estimating that China’s international air travel having fallen by 70 percent and domestic travel by half in the early part of the crisis, the IEA expects double digit drops in jet fuel demand in the country. A similar drop in diesel demand is expected due to other travel restrictions. The IEA chopped its forecast for China’s GDP growth in the first quarter of this year by 1.5 percentage points to 4.5 percent. It also made large cuts of over 0.5 percentage points to its forecasts for China’s trading partners in the region, as well as the United States and Russia.

The IEA doesn’t forecast changes in oil prices, but said consumers were unlikely to get much of a boost from cheaper petrol and diesel at the end of the day. “The effect of the Covid-19 crisis on the wider economy means that it will be difficult for consumers to feel the benefit of lower oil prices,” it said.

Over supply concerns

With China being a big consumer of oil and the source of most of the growth in oil demand in recent years, the crisis will have a major impact on oil producers. At the end of last year, OPEC and its allies including Russia, called OPEC+, agreed to further cuts in oil production in order to compensate for rising production in the United States and avoid excess supplies that would depress prices. They are now considering an additional cut of 600,000 barrels per day to compensate for the drop in demand due to COVID-19.

The IEA estimates that the demand for OPEC crude has dropped from 29.4 million barrels per day (mbd) in the final quarter of 2019 to 27.2 mbd in the first three months of this year. It noted that this is 1.7 mbd below what OPEC produced in January when the new production cuts came into force. OPEC on Wednesday cut its forecast for growth in global oil demand as well due to COVID-19. — AFP
World Mobile Congress cancelled over virus fears

Decision certain to be major blow for Barcelona

BARCELONA: Organizers of the World Mobile Congress said yesterday they have cancelled the world’s top mobile trade fair due to fears stemming from the coronavirus that sparked an exodus of industry heavyweights. The mobile fair is one of the biggest events worldwide to be cancelled so far owing to the virus that has killed more than 1,100 people to date. The announcement came after the GSMA, the mobile trade association that organizes the annual show, met to decide the fate of the event that had been planned to run in Barcelona from February 24-27.

“The GSMA has cancelled MWC Barcelona 2020 because the global concern regarding the coronavirus outbreak, travel concern and other circumstances, make it impossible for the GSMA to hold the event,” a statement said. It added that the decision was made with “due regard to the safe and healthy environment in Barcelona and the host country,” and that host city parties understand the cancellation.

Just hours before the meeting took place, Vodafone, Nokia, Deutsche Telekom, Britain’s BT and Rakuten of Japan had pulled out, following in the footsteps of Intel, Facebook,Cisco and China’s Vivo. A source close to the event had said that organizers were wary of being left with a cancellation bill of about euro 100 million ($110 million). They were wary of being left with a cancellation bill of about euro 100 million ($110 million). They were wary of being left with a cancellation bill of about euro 100 million ($110 million). They were wary of being left with a cancellation bill of about euro 100 million ($110 million). They were wary of being left with a cancellation bill of about euro 100 million ($110 million). They were wary of being left with a cancellation bill of about euro 100 million ($110 million).

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“I’m happy to announce that we’re cancelling the show,” said John Hoffman, the GSMA’s chief executive officer. “We’ve always been an industry leader and an industry innovator, and we’ve always been driven by our vision to bring people together. That’s why we’re cancelling the show.”

The decision is certain to be a major blow for Barcelona, as the huge trade show was forecast to bring in almost euro 500 million, organizers said. “It’s the high point of the year,” said Ignacio Arias, manager of the AC Som Marriott hotel which lies very close to the venue where the conference has been held since 2006. “During the four days of the congress, the hotel is fully occupied with the highest rates of the year. There’s no other week like it,” he said, with his words echoed by fellow hoteliers.

“We were supposed to host the team assembling Sony’s stand but they haven’t turned up. Ericsson has cancelled 30 rooms, and Intel and LG have cancelled their meeting rooms,” said the manager of another nearby hotel who did not want to give her name. “It feels like we’ve been working for months for nothing. This year has been pretty sluggish so far and this is just going to finish us off.”

Ride-sharing firms were also on edge. “This period accounts for 20 percent of our yearly income,” said Jose Maria Comin who runs Unauto, a fleet of vehicles for hire with drivers. Trade shows have been hit by the virus on several continents, and while Asia’s biggest annual show in Singapore went forward nonetheless, more than 70 exhibitors cancelled.

Epidemic of fear

The cancellations began on Feb 4 when South Korea’s LG Electronics, which occupies one of the largest spaces at the show, said it was pulling out to “remove the risk of exposing hundreds of LG employees to international travel... as the virus continues to spread across borders”. With the exception of Apple, most major smartphone manufacturers typically present their new products and innovations at the congress. Before the cancellation, China’s top smartphone maker Huawei as well as its smaller rival ZTE, had pledged their executives and staff would undergo a self-imposed two-week quarantine period, while ZTE said its stand and equipment would be disinfected daily. The organizers had also sought to reassure exhibitors, saying they would step up security measures, impose restrictions on visitors from China and have staff on hand to take visitors’ temperatures.

But it wasn’t enough, and the trickle of withdrawals quickly turned into a deluge with dozens of companies pulling out of the show. Regional health minister Alba Verges tried in vain to reassure participants on Wednesday, saying that the only epidemic in Barcelona “is an epidemic of fear”.

SAS ad about Nordic traditions sparks furor

COPENHAGEN: A new commercial from airline SAS challenges the authenticity of Scandinavian traditions has provoked furor in the form of cyber attacks, a wave of social media anger, and bomb threats against the ad agency behind it. Yesterday morning, Danish police cordoned off the area around the Copenhagen offices of the ad agency which created the newly released commercial, according to an AFP reporter on the scene.

Copenhagen police said a bomb threat had been emailed to the agency but that they had found nothing of interest to the police. Published to YouTube on Tuesday, the ad asks “What is truly Scandinavian?,” and then answers with “absolutely nothing... everything is copied”. It then goes on to list the origin of iconic Scandinavian staples like Swedish meatballs - which were originally imported from Turkey. SAS, founded jointly by Sweden, Denmark and Norway in 1946, said in a statement that the commercial was meant to convey the message “that travel enriches us”, but others saw it as an attack on Scandinavian culture. “What complete damn nonsense and self-loathing,” Richard Jomshof, a Swedish member of parliament representing the populist Sweden Democrats, wrote in a post to Facebook.

In Denmark, Soren Espersen, vice president of the anti-immigration Danish People’s Party, told Danish newspaper EkstraBladet that he was shocked. “The government has to say that enough is enough,” Espersen said. Both promised never to fly with the airline again. Rival airline Norwegian also seized on the opportunity to poke fun at SAS by posting an image of a cheese slicer Facebook with the caption: “Luckily, no one can take the cheese slicer from us.” SAS, which transports around 30 million passengers every year and employs 10,000 people, is 70 percent controlled by institutional and private investors with the remaining 30 percent shared almost equally by Sweden and Denmark. Contacted by AFP, the Swedish and Danish governments had no immediate comment. Facing a barrage of reactions, SAS on Wednesday temporarily took the commercial down from their social media accounts.

The company said, however, that the “pattern and volume” of reactions meant it suspected “an online attack and that the campaign has been hijacked”. When asked by AFP, SAS did not indicate whether it intended to lodge a complaint, and the intelligence services would not confirm if they had opened an investigation. The campaign has since been reinstated and yesterday the video had almost 320,000 views on YouTube. Comments had been disabled but the video had nearly 59,000 dislikes, and only 3,700 likes.

IMF says new Lebanon govt requested advice

WASHINGTON: A day after receiving a vote of confidence from parliament, the government in Beirut on Wednesday asked the International Monetary Fund to provide advice on its economic plan, a fund spokesman said. However, the IMF statement made no mention of financial assistance for crisis-battered Lebanon. The authorities asked for “advice and technical expertise on the macroeconomic challenges facing the economy,” IMF spokesman Gerry Rice said in a statement.

Part of the mission of the Washington-based crisis lender is to offer “advice to its member countries on policies and reforms to restore macro-stability and promote growth.” However, “any decisions on debt are the authorities’, to be made in consultation with their own legal and financial advisors,” Rice said. The country is on the brink of defaulting on its sovereign debt, with a $1.2 billion Eurobond payment due next month.
Nissan downgrades forecasts as 9-month net profit plunges

Autmaker has filed lawsuit to reclaim ¥10bn from Ghosn

YOKOHAMA: Crisis-hit Japanese automaker Nissan said yesterday its net profit plunged more than 87 percent for the nine months to December as it struggles with weak demand and fallout from the arrest of former boss Carlos Ghosn. Nissan revised downwards its full-year sales and profit forecasts, but warned that the impact from the spreading coronavirus crisis was not yet included in their figures. “Let me express my sincere regrets to shareholders. The company results are weaker than expected,” said CEO Makoto Uchida, who announced there would be no dividend paid.

Net profit for April-December dropped 87.6 percent to ¥39.3 billion ($358 million), on sales down 12.5 percent to ¥7.7 trillion for the period. On a quarterly basis, Nissan suffered a net loss of ¥20.1 billion for the three months to December, the first third-quarter loss in more than a decade.

The profit decline was mainly due to weak sales in the United States as well as Japan, where the impact of the nation’s sales tax hike hit auto demand, the company said in a statement. “Nissan is in a very severe situation at a time when competition in the global auto market is further intensifying,” said Satoru Takada, auto analyst at ITW, a Tokyo-based research and consulting firm. Nissan, which downgraded its annual forecasts three months ago, said its bottom-line profit was now forecast to be 68 billion yen for the fiscal year to March 2020, compared with an earlier estimate of ¥110 billion.

Full-year sales are estimated at ¥1.02 trillion, down from a previous forecast of ¥1.06 trillion but Uchida said the latest forecast did not include the potential impact of the novel coronavirus. “The market remains tough due in part to the novel coronavirus outbreak,” Uchida told reporters.

Analysts are weighing the possible impact of the virus on production in China. Nissan has already suspended operations at two plants in the country. It aims to resume operations at two plants next week, but has not decided whether to extend the closure at the remaining two. It was Nissan’s first earnings announcement since Ghosn dramatically jumped bail and fled Japan, where he was awaiting trial on financial misconduct charges. Ghosn, who was arrested in November 2018, remained in custody until early this month and has not been able to provide any concrete details concerning the so-called back doors.

The EU has struggled to find a middle way to balance Huawei’s huge dominance in the sector with security concerns pressed by Washington. With Huawei widely viewed as providing the most advanced 5G equipment, British telecoms group BT said it would take a £500-million hit from the UK restrictions and Vodafone about 200 million euros, as it would require changes to their own equipment.

French telecoms operator Orange said last month it had chosen Nokia and Ericsson, adding that the impact from the spreading coronavirus crisis was not yet included in their figures. Nissan shares plunged 1.54 percent to ¥568.5 ahead of the third-quarter earnings report.

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France won’t bar but may restrict Huawei in 5G network

PARIS: France yesterday said it would not how to American pressure to exclude Huawei from supplying equipment for its 5G networks, though the Chinese telecommunications firm could be subject to restrictions. Taking a stance echoing those of Britain and the European Union, Economy and Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said Paris could prioritize European operators as it begins preparations to roll out the 5G network.

“France must have this freedom of choice,” Le Maire told Reporters. “It is normal if we look first if they can provide the solution. And I think our Chinese partners can understand that.”

He insisted: “Huawei will be not be discriminated against. If Huawei has a better offer from a technical point of view or price it can have access to 5G in France.”

‘Secret capability’

Britain last month allowed the use of Huawei equipment in 5G networks, but excluded the Chinese firm from “sensitive” core infrastructure. The European Union followed suit, limiting but not banning Huawei equipment in 5G networks. Le Maire’s comments came as the Wall Street Journal reported that the Trump administration believes Huawei can covertly access mobile networks around the world through “back doors” designed for use by law enforcement. It cited US officials saying the company has had this “secret capability” for more than a decade.

The US kept the intelligence highly classified until late last year, when officials provided details to allies including Britain and Germany, the paper said. However Huawei vehemently de-nied the report, saying in a statement it “has never and will never covertly access telecom networks, nor do we have the capability to do so.” It said that even the WSJ conceded US officials “are unable to provide any concrete details concerning these so-called back doors.”

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Barclays board backs CEO despite Epstein links

LONDON: Barclays bank yesterday gave its full backing for Jes Staley to continue as chief executive amid a UK regulatory probe into his historical links with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Based on information already gathered, "the board believes that Mr Staley has been sufficiently transparent with the company as regards the nature and extent of his relationship with Mr Epstein. Accordingly, Mr Staley retains the full confidence of the board", a statement said.

The board has "unanimously recommended" US national Staley for re-election. "It is the bank’s annual general meeting on May 7. The bank’s disclosure of the probe being carried out by the Financial Conduct Authority and Prudential Regulation Authority came alongside news that Barclays’ net profit surged 54 percent last year. “In deciding whether to recommend Jes Staley for re-election, the board has carried out its usual formal and rigorous performance assessment, which it does in respect of the effectiveness of each of the directors,” Barclays added yesterday. It said that following reports that Staley had "developed a professional relationship" with Epstein, the Barclays CEO last summer volunteered information to the chairman and fellow executives at the bank. "Mr Staley also confirmed to the board that he has had no contact whatsoever with Mr Epstein at any time since taking up his role as Barclays Group CEO in December 2015," the statement added. A wealthy financier, Epstein was found dead in a US prison last August while awaiting charges of trafficking minors. Barclays added yesterday that its profit after tax jumped to £2.64 billion (£3.4 billion) in 2019 compared with net profit of £1.16 billion a year earlier. — AFP

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In Norway, bottles made of plastic are still fantastic

1.1 billion plastic bottles, aluminum cans returned in 2018

FETSUND, Norway: One at a time, the elderly lady places her empties into the gaping hole of a machine at the entrance to an Oslo supermarket. With a well-functioning deposit system, Norway recycles almost all of its plastic bottles. “You have to get rid of them, so you may as well do it intelligently,” says the woman in her 70s, as the machine spits out a bar-code ticket that entitles her to around 30 kroner ($3.25) either in cash or credit at the till.

With its 97 percent recycling rate, Norway is 10 years ahead of the EU’s 2029 target date, by which countries must recycle at least 90 percent of their plastic bottles. That compares to barely 60 percent in France and in the UK, which is considering a deposit system. The deposit system is widely viewed as the key to the Nordic country’s success.

Customers pay a few extra cents when they buy a drink in a plastic bottle, and they’re refunded that amount when they return their empties. “When you have a deposit on the empties, you actually tell the consumers that they buy the product but they borrow the packaging,” explains Kjell Olav Maldum, the head of Infinitum, a company created by manufacturers and distributors to run the deposit scheme.

The concept of returning empties has become so widespread there’s even a verb in the Norwegian language for it - a pante (pronounced Oh pant-uh). As an added bonus, the reverse vending machines give customers the choice of using their refund to buy a lottery ticket that benefits charity.

Outgoing CEO proud as Credit Suisse profits jump 69%

ZURICH: Credit Suisse boss Tidjane Thiam claimed success yesterday after the bank posted a 69-percent jump in profit for 2019, despite a snooping scandal that is forcing him out. “I am proud of what Credit Suisse has achieved during my tenure,” Thiam said in a statement announcing the results. “We have turned Credit Suisse around and our 2019 results show we can be sustainably profitable,” he said. Thiam, who will step down on Friday, also announced the results. “We have turned Credit Suisse around and our 2019 results show we can be sustainably profitable,” he said.

More than 1.1 billion plastic bottles and aluminum cans were returned in 2018 at collection points in supermarkets, petrol stations and small shops. In Fetsund, about 30 km northeast of Oslo, a steady stream of trucks dump thousands of empties at a time at Infinitum’s main processing centre. Bouncing along on conveyor belts, the plastic bottles that once contained water, juice or soda are sorted, compacted and placed on pallets resembling enormous colorful Rubik’s cubes, destined for a second life after recycling.

Each new plastic bottle contains around 10 percent recycled materials, a level the country hopes to increase with a regressive tax that would encourage manufacturers to use recycled plastic instead of new plastic, which is currently cheaper.

Valuable waste

“We call it clean loop recycling: if you put your bottles into a machine, they sort of enter a clean loop,” says Harald Henriksen, head of business area collection solutions at Tomra, the world leader in reverse vending machines. “You can use it again and again, and you can make new bottles many, many times,” he says. In this example of a circular economy, what some consider waste becomes a resource, whose value encourages collection and recycling.

The idea has begun to catch on elsewhere. “One example is Lithuania where they had a 34 percent return rate before the deposit system was introduced, and at the end of year number two that had already increased to 92 percent,” says Henriksen. Larissa Copello of environmental organization Zero Waste Europe told AFP deposit return systems are “the only way” to meet the EU target. But the organization would also like to see a mixed system that would collect glass bottles for reuse, and extend the deposit system to other types of plastic packaging.

According to WWF, the equivalent of 18 tons of plastic are dumped into the world’s oceans every minute. While the Norwegian recycling industry acknowledges the planet needs to put an end to the problem, they think plastic - a lightweight, practical and cheap material - still has a promising future. “Is the problem with plastic itself, and if so, is it the way that we the consumers behave ourselves,” asks Maldum. “Plastic is still fantastic but keep it out of nature.” — AFP

Restructuring and job cuts hit profits at Commerzbank

FRANKFURT: Germany’s second-largest lender Commerzbank yesterday reported sliding profits for 2019, as costs for job cuts linked to its restructuring weighed on the bottom line. Net profits dropped over 25 percent to 464 million (701 million), the Frankurt-based Commerzbank said, although it was able to make a slight improvement in operating profits. Severance charges for some 4,300 employees worldwide struck especially in the final three months of 2019, as the group slashed its payroll to just over 40,000 people.

After a failed bid early last year to merge with crossover rival Deutsche Bank, Commerzbank is pressing ahead with restructuring and with digitizing more of its internal processes. The lender added almost half a million new retail and business clients last year, hoping the bigger base will make for fatter profits when eurozone interest rates eventually rise. Meanwhile it was able to increase slightly the capital buffer regulators require of banks to withstand financial shocks.

“Our strong capital ratio... provides us with more flexibility in the implementation of our strategy and for focused growth,” chief financial officer Bettina Orlopp said in a statement. With profits weaker, Commerzbank trimmed its dividend this year, to 15 euro cents per share. Looking ahead to 2020, it expects revenues “at least at the level of 2019”, while costs will be inflated by modernization of its IT systems. Bosses hope selling off Polish subsidiary mBank will cover the expenses, although according to German media only one prospective buyer is so far in the running. — AFP
**Ngidi stars as South Africa beat England by one run in T20 thriller**

**EAST LONDON:** Fast bowler Lungi Ngidi took three wickets in his last two overs as South Africa snatched a thrilling one-run win in the first Twenty20 international against England at Buffalo Park on Wednesday. Jason Roy and captain Eoin Morgan hit half-centuries for England and they looked well on the way to chasing down South Africa’s total of 177 for eight.

But the match changed dramatically in the last three overs as England lost six wickets for 24 runs to finish on 176 for nine. “You run in as hard as you can and hit your length. All of a sudden their team was on the back foot,” said Ngidi, who was man of the match for his 3-30.

“It was a very fast-paced game, but it’s about how you bounce back. I didn’t panic under pressure, they seemed to be cruising but my job was to get wickets.”

England needed just seven to win off the last over but Ngidi dismissed Tom Curran and Moeen Ali with conceding only five runs. Adil Rashid was run out off the last ball, trying for an improbable second run which would have tied the scores. He couldn’t beat a calm running appeal for an improbable second run which would have tied the scores. Roy couldn’t beat a calm running appeal for an improbable second run which would have tied the scores.

Opening batsman Roy was brutal in reaching his fifty off 22 balls, Rassie van der Dussen (31) joined Bavuma and the pair added 63 for the second wicket before Ngidi dismissed Dussen for 44. Earlier, De Kock (36) and Temba Bavuma (43) got South Africa off to a fast start, putting on 48 for the first wicket off 26 balls. De Kock pointed out both teams struggled to score freely towards the end of their innings as the ball got softer and the bounce lower. “We knew if we made sure we kept to our basics that we could win,” he said.

“It was an outstanding game of cricket,” added Morgan. “Experiences like this, particularly with the T20 World Cup around the corner, are so valuable. Both teams were under pressure. Both teams gave it everything.”

Both innings followed a similar pattern. Both teams scored 68 runs in the first six-over power play and both had scored 133 runs after 12 overs before slowing down in the closing overs.

Opening batsman Roy was brutal in reaching his fifty off 22 balls on the way to scoring 70 off 38 deliveries with seven fours and three sixes. Earlier, De Kock (31) and Bavuma (43) got South Africa off to a fast start, putting on 48 for the first wicket off 26 balls. Rassie van der Dussen (31) joined Bavuma and the pair added 63 for the second wicket off 41 deliveries before Van der Dussen fell to Ben Stokes and the innings lost momentum. —AFP

**MLB announces rule changes, including three batter minimum**

**NEW YORK:** Major League Baseball made official its rule changes for the 2020 season on Wednesday, implementing a three-batter minimum for any pitcher and an expanded regular-season roster. The new pitching rule is the major change, designed to speed up the game by eliminating some pitching changes. Any starter or reliever must face three batters, or pitch until the inning is over, before coming out of the game. This will, for example, affect the usage of a left-handed specialist out of the bullpen, often brought in to face a left-handed batter before another pitching change. An exception to the three-batter rule is if the pitcher is injured or ill he could be taken out with the approval of the umpires’ crew chief.

The three-batter rule goes into effect during spring training on March 12.

**OTHER CHANGES:**

- **ROSTER LIMITS:** The active roster through Aug. 31 is increased from 25 to 26, with teams able to carry a maximum of 13 pitchers. All teams must carry 28 players — maximum of 14 pitchers — from Sept. 1 through the end of the regular season. Previous teams could bring up anybody on the 40-man roster in September, often carrying 30-plus players. Postseason rosters are set at 26.

- **TWO-WAY PLAYERS:** These players may pitch without counting toward the pitching roster limits. Such players must accrue at least 20 innings pitched in the majors and start at least 20 games as a position player/designated hitter with at least three plate appearances in those games. Stats from 2019 and 2018 can be used to designate such players. This helps address the status of the Anaheim Angels’ starter/designated hitter Shohei Ohtani and Cincinnati Reds’ reliever/outfielder Michael Lorenzen.

**POSITION PLAYERS PITCHING:** A position player may pitch only in extra innings or if his team is losing or winning by more than six runs.

**EXTRA PLAYER RULE:** Teams previously could call up a 26th player for special circumstances — mostly because of a doubleheader. They can still do so, temporarily expanding their roster to 27.

**INJURED LIST:** Pitchers and two-way players must now spend 15 days on the injured list. The reinstatement period for position players remains at 10 days.

**OPTION PERIOD:** Pitchers optioned to the minor leagues must stay there for 15 days, rather than 10, which is still the minimum for position players.

**CHALLENGE TIME:** Managers have only 20 seconds to challenge a play instead of 30. —Reuters

**Smith, Warner must ‘ride the storm’ in South Africa**

**MELBOURNE:** Steve Smith and David Warner will be ready for whatever South Africans throw at them when the Australia batsmen return to the nation two years after the ball-tampering scandal, paceman Josh Hazlewood has said.

The trio will fly out with the Australia squad on Friday for a limited overs tour in the duo’s first visit to the country since serving 12-month bans for their parts in the tampering plot during the Cape Town test. The trio were jeered relentlessly by English crowds during last year’s one-day World Cup and the following Ashes series, and Hazlewood said they would be unfazed by more hostility.

“Steve and Dave have ticked off pretty much every box since coming back,” Hazlewood told reporters in Sydney yesterday. “It’s just another one of those and I don’t think it’ll faze them one bit. They probably play better when it’s like this. It’s nothing we haven’t experienced before — we’ll be fine.” Both Smith and Warner have thrived since returning to the national fold after their bans expired last March. Smith played a leading role in Australia’s retention of the Ashes while Warner was awarded the Allan Border Medal for the third time on Monday as the country’s top cricketer in 2019.

Local media have reported that the head of the national players’ union will tour with the side in South Africa to offer extra support for the players. Hazlewood told Smith and Warner would not need to be shielded.— Reuters

**Forgotten Australia opener Renshaw to take break from game**

**MELBOURNE:** Matt Renshaw, once tipped as a long-term fix for Australia’s opening batting problems, is taking a break from cricket after being dropped by Queensland ahead of the resumption of the Sheffield Shield season.

The 23-year-old left-hander has failed to score a century in Australia’s domestic first-class competition since playing the last of his 31 tests in 2018. “As part of our usual review process of player performance, our coaching and support staff spent time with Matthew this week and they all came to the conclusion that he would benefit from some time away from cricket,” Queensland performance boss Bennett King told News Ltd media. “We’re confident Matthew will benefit from a break from the game to freshen up, and look forward to working with him once he is ready to resume playing.”

Renshaw had been expected to be named in a Cricket Australia (CA) XI to play the England Lions development squad in a four-day game in Hobart this week but he told selectors he had decided to step away from the game. CA’s website (cricket.com.au) said.— Reuters
Chinese Grand Prix, Hong Kong Sevens add to Asia’s sports calendar chaos

HONG KONG: The deadly COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak is causing chaos across Asia’s sporting calendar. Some of the continent’s most prestigious sporting events, including One’s Chinese Grand Prix and the Hong Kong Rugby Sevens have been postponed although Tokyo has pledged that this year’s 2020 Olympics, due to begin on July 24, will go ahead as planned. Here is the latest rundown of Asian sporting spectacles already affected by the outbreak and those that could follow suit.

MOTORSPORT
The Chinese Formula One Grand Prix in Shanghai on April 19 was postponed on Wednesday after the governing body FIA took advice from its partners in China “to ensure the health and safety of the travelling staff, champion-ship participants and fans”. Nothing has been announced regarding the inaugural Vietnam Grand Prix, scheduled for April 5 on a Hanoi street circuit — around 135 kilometres (80 miles) from the Chinese border. The Chinese Formula E Grand Prix on the southern island of Hainan on March 21 has been scrapped.

RUGBY UNION
Sevens World Series tournaments in Hong Kong on April 3-5 and Singapore the following weekend have been postponed, World Rugby announced yesterday. The Singapore tournament will now take place on October 30-41 and Hong Kong a week later on October 13-14, including the 10-stop world series. The world-famous Hong Kong Sevens has not missed a year since it was founded in 1976 — it played on during the deadly SARS outbreak in the city — and it is the 40,000-capacity sell-out, three-day extravaganza can continue that proud run by being played in October instead. The event is a huge revenue-generator for the city, with bars, restaurants and hotels booked out months in advance as thousands of players, officials and fans fly in from all over the world.

OLYMPIC GAMES
Tokyo Organisers yesterday hit back at speculation the Games could be scrapped, with less than six months to go until the opening ceremony on July 24. Tokyo 2020 CEO Yoshiro Mori, at a meeting with International Olympic Committee officials, said: “There are many irresponsible rumours but I would like to make it clear again that we are not considering postponing or cancelling the Games.”

ATHLETICS
The World Indoor Championships, scheduled for Nanjing from March 13-15, were postponed for a year. The Hong Kong Marathon, due to take place on Sunday, was cancelled. World Athletics is scheduled to host the elite Diamond League meeting in Shanghai on May 16.

BADMINTON
The China Masters tournament from February 25 to March 1 has been shelved, the Badminton World Federation said, while indicating the Asia Championships in Wuhan from April 21-26 are likely to follow suit.

BASKETBALL
The Chinese Basketball Association has postponed all of its top-flight CBA League, which had been due to start on February 1. Last week’s women’s Olympic qualifying tournament between China, Great Britain, Spain and South Korea was moved from Foshan, in southern China, to Belgrade.

BOXING
A qualification event for the Tokyo Olympics initially scheduled from February 3-14 in Wuhan was moved to Amman in Jordan and will be held from March 3-11.

CYCLING
The Tour of Hainan from February 23 to March 1 — a second-tier ProSeries race — was cancelled.

HORSE RACING
Hong Kong’s famous horse racing industry is staggering on, although all off-course betting shops are shut and twice-weekly meetings are taking place behind closed doors.

A total of 122 people attended Wednesday’s Happy Valley card, a record low attendance. The meeting on the corresponding week-day 12 months ago attracted more than 17,000 punters.

MMA
The Singapore-based One Fighting Championship, Asia’s largest mixed martial arts promotion, announced Thursday that their card in Chongqing on April 11 would be moved to Jakarta.

FOOTBALL
China has suspended all domestic football and postponed the second half of its top-flight China Super League season which was due to kick off on February 22. The virus has hit Asia’s continental competitions, with four Chinese clubs’ home group matches in the AFC Champions League, which began this week, being postponed until at least April and May. Home AFC Cup matches for Vietnamese teams have been postponed or moved to away venues after the government banned all sports and entertainment events in February.

The European Tour is expected to postpone its season of 10 tournaments, down from 14, beginning in late May or June.

HONG KONG: File photo taken on April 10, 2016, Japan rugby players cheer the crowd after beating Hong Kong to qualify for the Sevens World Series XII on the third day of the Hong Kong rugby tournament in Hong Kong. Rugby's Hong Kong and Singapore Sevens were expected to be postponed yesterday as Asian sport reels from the coronavirus, with the Chinese Grand Prix, golf and football fixtures among the long list of casualties. — AFP

GOLF
The elite women’s US LPGA Tour cancelled all three of its lucrative early-season events in Asia in Thailand, Singapore and Thailand with a combined prize purse of more than $5 million. The European Tour is expected to postpone its China Open at Shenzhen in April, with an announcement soon. The Asian Tour told AFP Thursday that next month’s Malaysia Open and Royal’s Cup in Thailand were still going ahead with precautions such as temperature checks and travel declarations. The US PGA Tour’s third-tier China Series has postponed two qualifying events, which had already been moved to Thailand and Indonesia, until early May. The China-based circuit has also shelved its first four regular season events in Sanya, Hailou, Chongqing and Guangzhou and plan a truncated season of 10 tournaments, down from 14, beginning in late May or June.

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Tennis
The Fed Cup Asia/Oceania Group I event between China, Taiwan, Indonesia, South Korea and Uzbekistan in Dongguan was postponed and will now be played in Dubai from March 3-7.

Sking
Men’s World Cup races in the Chinese resort of Yanqing, the first test events for the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, were cancelled and will run in Saalbach-Hinterglemm, Austria at the weekend.

Snooeker
The China Open in Beijing, set for March 30-April 5, has been cancelled.

All Blacks fan Lindberg tickled by tee-time with Barrett

MELBOURNE: Major-winning Swedish golfer Frida Lindberg is looking forward to the “incredible challenge” of competing as the lone woman at the New Zealand Open where she will tee off with two-time World Rugby Player of the Year Beauden Barrett.

The 33-year-old Lindberg will be the first woman to play in the event, with the 10lst edition to be staged at the Millbrook Resort and The Hills in Queenstown from Feb. 27 to March 1.

“It’s going to be an incredible challenge,” she told reporters at the Australian Open in Adelaide yesterday. “I’m not going to set any kind of goals for myself, but I’m really going to soak in the week.”

Lindberg said her surprise entry in the Pro-Am event was fixed up by a New Zealand acquaintance and tournament director Michael Glading. Having won in New Zealand a year ago, Lindberg had planned to visit the country for a holiday with her husband before heading to China for the Blue Bay event on Hainan island, which ended up being cancelled due to the coronavirus outbreak.

“(Glading) said, ‘It’s the New Zealand Open, it’s not the men’s Open’ ... So he said if we wanted to play, sure you can do it,” she said. Lindberg’s pairing with All Blacks fullback Barrett is certain to be of major interest in rugby-mad New Zealand.

“I might have mentioned to (organisers) that I really like the All Blacks, the rugby team,” said Florida-based Lindberg, who won the 2018 ANA Inspiration, her sole major triumph.

“(Barrett) sent me a message last night and said he’s excited to play with me and I might have been very, very excited when I got that message.” Only a handful of women have played in men’s golf events since American Babe Zaharias crossed the gender divide to play in the 1938 Los Angeles Open.

Swede Annika Sorenstam and Americans Suzy Whaley, Michelle Wie and Brittany Lincicome have all featured in men’s events this century but only Zaharias managed to make the halfway cut.— Reuters
**Sports**

**King says allowing coaching from stands is ‘no brainer’**

LONDON: American great Billie Jean King believes allowing coaches to signal to players from the stands during matches is a “no brainer” that will create more interest in tennis. Women players are already allowed to summon their coaches during changeover once per set, apart from at Grand Slams, and the Women’s Tennis Association (WTA) will trial a new system allowing coaches to interact from the stands. The trial will start at next week’s Dubai Duty Free Championships.

“They should be able to signal from the stands,” King told Reuters by telephone this week. “Look at baseball. They have a first base coach and a third base coach, the coaches are giving all those signals, squeezing their nose or whatever and making all those signals. It’s fascinating for people.

“They make documentaries on these coaches. It’s just a story to promote our sport and anything we can do to promote it is a good thing, it’s a no-brainer.” The topic of coaching divides opinion and the ATP do not allow it in men’s tournaments.

Players can receive code violations for ‘coaching’ from the stands. The issue became a hot topic following the 2018 US Open final when Serena Williams’s coach Patrick Mouratoglou gestured to the player during her defeat by Japan’s Naomi Osaka at Flushing Meadows, leading to a code violation and sparking a heated row between the American great and the chair umpire.

International Tennis Federation chief David Haggerty says he prefers the status-quo as far as on-court coaching, which is allowed in the Davis Cup and Fed Cup team events where the captain sits on court.

He said the ITF will use data from the WTA Tour trial to revisit the issue. Twelve-times Grand Slam singles champion King, a trailblazer for the sport throughout her career and afterwards, said tennis needed to get with the times and make coaches part of the narrative, as in other sports.

“I have always been for it (coaching on the court),” the 76-year-old said. “We want more people to go into coaching, and you have to see it to be it. If they are sitting up in the stands no one knows who they are. — Reuters

**Aquabike World Championship**

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Aquabike World Championship (the first round) for 2020 was opened under the patronage of HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, in the presence of Information Minister, State Minister for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Jahri, Director General of Public Authority for Sports Dr Humaid Fulaiteh, PAS Deputy Director General for Competitive Sports Affairs Dr Saeqer Al-Mulla, Chairman of Kuwait Sea Sports Club Mohammad Al-Zunki, board members and other sports leaders. The opening started with a display of participating countries’ flags led by champion Yousuf Al-Abdalaqazq with Kuwait flag. There were also exciting fireworks followed by a display on water by several professionals, and it was concluded by laser displays. Preliminaries of qualifications began yesterday afternoon, as the morning period was for checking engines and having a training run in the race field. Advanced competition will be completed today with the participation of all world ranked riders who did not go through the preliminaries. Meanwhile, the finals of all four categories GPI sitting, GPI men standing, GPI women standing, GPI free style will take place on Saturday afternoon and will end at 6 pm.

**MAJOR PREPARATIONS**

Director of Public Relations and Information at the Sea Sports Club Salman Al-Khalafan lauded the large participation from various countries and wished them success. He said preparation for the championship four months earlier in order to have the best preparations possible and reach maximum success, for the sake of future events, in addition to proving Kuwait Youth ability to organize and manage the best world championships.

**FANTASTIC ORGANIZATION**

Meanwhile, Marketing Director of Aquabike Raimondo di San Germaino lauded the organization of Aquabike World Championship 2020 (the first round), being held in Kuwait for the first time under the patronage of HH the Amir. He said preparations by the Sea Sports Club are up to the best preparations for world championships, adding that success will be with the first round. Kuwait’s Champion Yousuf Al-Abdalaqazq said he is ready to compete for top place in the world championships (first round), despite the dislocated shoulder injury which he suffered in the UAE championships. He said Kuwait’s current weather is normal and ideal for Aquabike sports, adding that information has it the weather will be ideal during the weekend, and all what we have to do is concentrate in the presence of champions from France, UAE and Denmark who are the highest ranked in the world.

**Pastnak’s hat trick boosts Bruins**

BOSTON: David Pastrnak completed his fourth hat trick of the season and surpassed 40 goals as the Boston Bruins beat the visiting Montreal Canadiens 4-1 Wednesday night. Pastrnak regained the league lead with his 41st goal when he scored his third of the night late in the second period. Patrice Bergeron added an empty-netter and Brad Marchand had two assists as the Bruins won for the seventh time in their past eight games. Tuukka Rask stopped 28 shots to improve to 13-0-6 at home this season. Nick Suzuki scored for the Canadiens, who lost their second straight. Carey Price made 34 saves for Montreal. Pastrnak became the first Bruin to reach 40 goals in a season since Glen Murray scored 44 in 2002-03. He is the first Bruin to register four hat tricks in a season since Phil Esposito and Bobby Orr each did it in 1974-75.

**KINGS 5, FLAMES 3**

Calvin Petersen made 35 saves in his second start of the season and the 12th of his NHL career, helping Los Angeles end a five-game losing streak with a win against visiting Calgary. Petersen made 14 saves in the third period, including three during a five-on-three that lasted 1:42. Tyler Toffoli, Austin Wagner, Kurtis MacDermid, Jeff Carter and Sean Walker scored for the Kings, who came in 0-5-0 at Staples Center since Dec. 31. Elias Lindholm scored two goals, Mikael Backlund also scored, and David Rittich made 28 saves for Calgary, which was coming off back-to-back-to-back-6-2 wins. — Reuters

**CANUCKS 3, BLACKHAWKS 0**

Jacob Markstrom stopped 49 shots for his fifth career second shutout of the season as Vancouver blanked visiting Chicago. It was the fifth career shutout for Markstrom, who also picked up his 22nd win of the season. The Canucks improved to 19-6-3 at home, the most home wins by any Western Conference team, and won for the 11th time in their past 12 games at Rogers Arena. Brandon Sutter had a goal and two assists, and Bo Horvat and Adam Gaudette also scored goals for Vancouver. Corey Crawford finished with 17 saves for Chicago, which saw its winless streak extended to a season-long five games (0-3-2) despite firing a season-high 49 shots on goal.
NEW YORK: Caris LeVert scored 20 points Wednesday night in New York as the Brooklyn Nets recorded a 101-91 victory over the Toronto Raptors, who saw their team-record, 15-game winning streak come to an end. The Nets won their fifth straight home game and headed into the All-Star break with seven wins in their last 10 games. Brooklyn sustained their first loss in six games without beating the Raptors for only the second time in the past 20 meetings since Jan. 6, 2016. Joe Harris added 19 points for the Nets, who led for the final 43:50. Spencer Dinwiddie contributed 17 points, nine assists and six rebounds for Brooklyn. Jarrett Allen collected 10 points and 13 rebounds. Serge Ibaka scored 28 points to lead the Raptors, whose last loss was by one point on their home court to the San Antonio Spurs on Jan. 12.

LOS ANGELES LAKERS 120 - DENVER NUGGETS 116 (OT)
LeBron James had 33 points, 14 assists and 12 rebounds, Anthony Davis finished with 33 points and 10 rebounds, and Los Angeles won at Denver for the second time this season. It was the 12th triple-double of the season for James, tying him with the Dallas Mavericks’ Luka Doncic for the NBA lead, Dwight Howard had 14 points and 11 rebounds, and Alex Caruso and Avery Bradley scored 10 points each for the Lakers, who are 5-1 in their last six games overall. Jamal Murray had 32 points and 10 assists, Nikola Jokic scored 22 and added 11 rebounds, and Jerami Grant had 15 points for Denver. Gary Harris and Monte Morris added 13 and 12 points respectively. The Nuggets had their four-game win streak snapped.

INDIANA PACERS 118 - MILWAUKEE BUCKS 111
T.J. Warren scored 35 points as Indiana snapped a season-high, six-game losing streak by defeating Central Division rival Milwaukee in Indianapolis. Warren had 16 of 19 from the field for the Pacers, who exploited the absence of Giannis Antetokounmpo and shot a sizzling 61.9 percent from the floor (26 of 42) in the first half. Forward Malcolm Brogdon collected 17 points and 13 assists. Domi DiVincenzo scored a team-high 19 points and Khris Middleton added 17 for the Bucks, who sustained their first loss in six games without Antetokounmpo in the lineup. The reigning NBA MVP sat out his second consecutive contest following the birth of his first child, Liam Charles.

ORLANDO MAGIC 116 - DETROIT PISTONS 112 (OT)
Aaron Gordon had 25 points, nine rebounds and nine assists, and Nikola Vucevic hit the go-ahead shot in overtime as host Orlando held off Detroit. Markelle Fultz supplied 22 points and 10 assists, while Vucevic contributed 19 points, 11 rebounds and seven assists. Evan Fournier added 19 points for the Magic. Christian Wood led the Pistons with 26 points and 12 rebounds. Thon Maker had 18 points, Markieff Morris scored 14, Reggie Jackson added 12 and Langston Galloway chipped in 11 for the Pistons, who have lost four straight.

DALLAS MAVERICKS 130 - SACRAMENTO KINGS 111
Luka Doncic recorded 33 points, 12 rebounds and eight assists in his return from an ankle injury to lead Dallas to a victory over visiting Sacramento. Doncic missed seven games with the injury, and the Mavericks went 3-4 without the All-Star point guard. On Wednesday, Doncic shot 10 of 18—including 3 of 7 from behind the arc—to lead Dallas to a 117-107. Leads in minutes against the Kings, the Mavericks have won six of their previous eight contests.

MEMPHIS GRIZZLIES 111 - PORTLAND TRAIL BLAZERS 104
Brandon Clarke scored 27 points and Ja Morant added 20 with nine assists as host Memphis’ rookies led the charge past Portland in the last game for each team before the All-Star break. Jonas Valanciunas and De’Anthony Melton each scored 12 points, while Valanciunas added 18 rebounds, as the Grizzlies won for the fourth time in their past five games and the eighth time in their past 10 contests.

Nets recorded a 101-91 victory over the Toronto Raptors Wednesday night in New York as the Brooklyn Nets won their fifth straight home game and headed into the All-Star break with seven wins in their last 10 games. Joe Harris added 19 points for the Nets, who led for the final 43:50. Spencer Dinwiddie contributed 17 points, nine assists and six rebounds for Brooklyn. Jarrett Allen collected 10 points and 13 rebounds. Serge Ibaka scored 28 points to lead the Raptors, whose last loss was by one point on their home court to the San Antonio Spurs on Jan. 12.

WASHINGTON WIZARDS 114 - NEW YORK KNICKS 106
Bradley Beal scored 10 of his game-high 30 points in the fourth quarter as Washington pulled away for a win at New York. The Wizards outscored the Knicks 17-3 in the final 7:30 to secure the win, completing their first season sweep of New York. Bradley Beal scored 30 points in back-to-back games, and he has tallied at least 30 in nine of his past 11 games. Davis Bertans had 16 points off the bench for the Wizards, Julius Randle finished with 21 points and 13 rebounds for the Knicks, and Elfrid Payton collected 19 points and eight assists.

PHOENIX SUNS 112 - GOLDEN STATE WARRIORS 106
Devin Booker’s 27 points helped host Phoenix hold off Golden State in the final game before the NBA All-Star break for both teams. Kelly Oubre Jr. added 15 points and Mikal Bridges had 14 for the Suns, who had lost six of their previous seven games. Forward-Jonah Bolden, signed to a 10-day contract before the game, scored six points with seven rebounds in 26 minutes in his Phoenix debut. Andrew Wiggins’ 27 points led the Warriors, who have lost four straight and have the NBA’s worst road record at 2-5-4. Jordan Poole added 18 points and 10 rebounds.

CLEVELAND CAVALIERS 127 - ATLANTA HAWKS 105
Tristan Thompson, Andre Drummond and Larry Nance Jr. each produced a double-double to help host Cleveland end a six-game losing streak with a win over Atlanta. Thompson came off the bench to score 27 points, hitting a season-high three 3-pointers, and grab 11 rebounds. Drummond, playing his second game with the Cavaliers since being acquired at the trade deadline, had 14 points and 15 rebounds to extend his streak of double-doubles to seven straight games.

CHARLOTTE HORNETS 115 - MINNESOTA TIMBERWOLVES 108
Devonte’ Graham pumped in 26 points, and Malik Monk came off the bench for 25 points as Charlotte recovered from a big first-half hole to defeat Minnesota in Minneapolis, spoiling the home debut of Minnesota guard D’Angelo Russell. Charlotte’s Miles Bridges poured in 20 points, Bismack Biyombo supplied 14 points and 10 rebounds, and rookie Jalen McDaniels had 10 points. The Hornets were without guard Terry Rozier, who had a sore left knee. Despite winning their last two games, the Hornets have still lost 13 of their last 16. Malik Beasley led Minnesota with 28 points, and Russell notched 26 points and 11 assists. The Timberwolves also received 16 points and 12 rebounds from Juancho Hernangomez.

LOS ANGELES: Kobe Bryant and his daughter Gianna were buried last week near their family home in Newport Beach, California, in a private ceremony, according to death certificates.
A death certificate for the basketball legend, who was killed in a helicopter crash outside Los Angeles on January 26 along with his daughter and seven others, states that he was buried last Friday at Pacific View Memorial Park in Corona del Mar, US media reported.
A memorial service for Bryant and Gianna is planned February 24 at the Staples Center in downtown Los Angeles which can hold 20,000 people. The Center, also the home of the NHL’s Los Angeles Kings and venue for concerts and events such as the recent Grammy Awards, has hosted memorials for recording artists Michael Jackson and Nipsey Hussle.
Byrant’s wife Vanessa on Monday took to Instagram to express her grief saying “my brain refuses to accept that both Kobe and Gigi are gone.” “It’s like I’m trying to process Kobe being gone but my body refuses to accept my Gigi will never come back to me,” she added.
“I feel wrong. Why should I be able to wake up another day when my baby girl isn’t being able to have that opportunity?! I’m so mad. She had so much life to live.” Then I realize I need to be strong and be here for my 3 daughters.” Bryant had an iconic 20-year career playing with the Los Angeles Lakers. — AFP

Kobe, daughter buried in private ceremony

Friday Times
Friday, February 14, 2020
Sports
LeVert scores 20 points as Nets snap Raptors’ 15-game winning streak

BROOKLYN: Taurean Prince #2 of the Brooklyn Nets shoots the ball against the Toronto Raptors at Barclays Center in Brooklyn, New York. — AFP
**Hertha Berlin in turmoil after Klinsmann’s surprise departure**

**BERLIN**: Hertha Berlin have little time to pick up the pieces of their failed collaboration with coach Juergen Klinsmann, who has left the club after only eight weeks in charge, if they are to win their fight to avoid relegation.

The Berliners sit 14th in the Bundesliga table, six points above the relegation playoff spot, despite having pumped more than 70 million euros ($76 million) into transfers over the winter period as requested by Klinsmann.

The former United States and Germany coach arrived in late November ready to launch a “big club project” and saying Berlin deserved a big team like other major European cities.

He pledged to turn Hertha from a relegation-threatened club to a contender for European spots within two seasons, with the backing of Hertha’s major investor Lars Windhorst. But on Tuesday his project crashed before it had even taken flight. Klinsmann claimed there was a lack of trust from the bosses and wanted more control taken away from sports director Michael Preetz and given to him.

Windhorst, who has pledged a total of more than 200 million euros after coming in as an investor last year, said on Thursday he regretted Klinsmann’s decision. He called the manner of his departure “unacceptable”, saying Klinsmann could no longer keep his seat on the club board.

“Unfortunately the way he left is so unacceptable that a constructive collaboration with him in such a form cannot continue,” Windhorst told a news conference. “It is regrettable to have left so abruptly but we have to live with it.” “This is not acceptable. Maybe you can do it as a teenager in the business world among adults, such things should not happen.”

**REPUTATIONAL DAMAGE**

Klinsmann’s decision will no doubt hurt his own reputation in the Bundesliga, given that his only other league experience was a failed brief spell at Bayern Munich more than a decade ago.

It also leaves Hertha with a black eye and in complete turmoil.

Players said they were stunned and confused by the decision but they must now recover in time for their trip to bottom club Paderborn on Saturday as they battle to avoid the drop and earn back the trust of their fans.

Hertha will have some help with the arrival this week of Brazilian forward Matheus Cunha — one of Klinsmann’s winter transfers worth a reported 18 million euros — who had been busy with the Brazil Under-23 team for their Olympic qualifiers.

With only five goals in their last seven league games, Hertha need Cunha’s goals badly. At the other end of the table, Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich will look to protect their one-point advantage with a win at strugglers Cologne.

The Bavarians, on 43 points, are eager to bounce back from last week’s goalless draw against RB Leipzig, who are second and host relegation-threatened Werder Bremen. Borussia Dortmund, third on 39, entertain Eintracht Frankfurt, who are unbeaten this year having won three of their four games since the winter break.

**Liverpool will decide on Salah and Olympics**

**CAIRO**: Mohamed Salah’s potential involvement for his country in the Tokyo Olympic Games will be a decision for the player and his club Liverpool, Egypt’s Olympic coach told Reuters on Wednesday.

The Olympic tournament is for Under-23 teams but three over-age players are allowed in each squad. FIFA has long acknowledged that clubs are not obliged to release over-age players for the Games.

Salah was part of the Liverpool team which won the Champions League last season and they are now runaway leaders in the Premier League with the Egyptian their top scorer on 14 goals. In response to Salah’s inclusion in the squad, the player’s agent Ramy Abbas posted on Twitter that “no decision has been made yet” and Gharib said that view was correct.

“The agent’s comment does not offend anyone ... What he said is the same truth,” he said, noting that Klopp had not ruled out or backed his player featuring in Tokyo. But Gharib clearly hopes a way can be found for the striker, the most successful player Egypt has produced, to perform for his country in the tournament from July 22 to August 8. Salah is one of the top three players in the world and any team hopes to have a player of his capabilities and skills in the squad. “I have chosen Salah in an expanded list of 50 players to select 18 players heading to Tokyo,” he said. “The final list that will include 18 players will be sent next June, so it is too early to talk about the names of the 18 players.” — Reuters

**Napoli beat Inter Milan**

**MILAN**: Fabian Ruiz scored the only goal as Napoli shocked Inter Milan 1-0 in their Italian Cup semi-final, first leg tie in the San Siro on Wednesday. The Spanish midfielder broke through after 57 minutes to get Gennaro Gattuso’s side back to winning ways after their 3-2 league defeat at home to lowly Lecce last weekend.

Ruiz picked up a Giovanni Di Lorenzo cross, beating three Inter defenders to curl in past a helpless Daniele Padelli. “This is the real Napoli. Big compliments to my lads,” said Gattuso, whose side are 11th in the Serie A table.

But he warned: “There’s no reason to smile, we still haven’t achieved anything yet.” Antonio Conte’s side looked sluggish days after their thrilling 4-2 derby win over AC Milan which put them top of the Serie A table.

Both sides had their chances in the first half with Lautaro Martinez nodding wide with Padelli denying Vito Zaniolo just before the break in front of a crowd of nearly 60,000 in northern Italy. Conte sent on Cristian Eriksen after 65 minutes and the Dane threatened but David Ospina held firm in the Napoli goal. Napoli, who last won the trophy in 2014, now take a slim advantage into the second leg at their Stadio San Paolo on March 5. “The derby certainly took away a lot of energy,” said Conte. “But we’re talking about Napoli, who beat Lazio, Juventus, Liverpool. “It’s a team of substance despite its position in the standings.”

Record 18-time winners Juventus take on AC Milan in the other semi-final on Thursday, again in the San siro. The match will be the first clash in Italy between Juventus star Cristiano Ronaldo and Sweden’s Zlatan Ibrahimovic. The final will take place in the Stadio Olimpico in Rome on May 13. — AFP
Six-goal PSG into French Cup semi-finals as Lyon knock out Marseille

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain cruised into the semi-finals of the French Cup on Wednesday after thrashing Dijon 6-1 in a match that saw French champions benefit again from comical own goals. PSG were ahead just 47 seconds after kick off thanks to Wesley Lauzon shanking Mitchell Bakker’s low cross into his own net to the bemusement of his teammates.

It was the second own goal in a week to be scored for PSG, who also saw Lyon’s Fernando Marcal slam a stunning effort past his own goalkeeper at the weekend. However the hosts were level in the 13th minute thanks to an impressive low curling effort from MoumOU Chouiar, which squeezed past Kaylor Naas.

While the away side were far from full strength, withAngel Di Maria and Mauro Icardi on the bench and Neymar even not in the squad, Thomas Tuchel’s team did include Kylian Mbappe and Edinson Cavani, who was making his first start in over a month after nearly moving to Atletico Madrid in January.

The Uruguayan was left waiting his 200th goal and the club in the 21st minute when he turned home Thomas Meunier’s cross, only for the strike to be ruled out for handball by the Bel- gian after a VAR check. “It’s not that bad because he can score his 200th goal on Saturday against Amiens” or Tuesday (against Borussia Dortmund)” I can feel he’s there,” said Tuchel.

The winning goal came 10 minutes after Lyon’s Moussa Dembele had a penalty — awarded when Hiroki Sakai handled a shot from Karl Toko Ekambi — saved by four chances. Villa know they will need to take their place in the final but these sessions will allow girls to play out different roles of their favourite Disney heroes. “There will still be football cones and a ball but these sessions will allow girls to play out scenarios of their favourite Disney movies, they will be empowered to take on the character and roles of their favourite Disney heroes.”

Tottenham sense chance to put squeeze on Chelsea

LONDON: Tottenham Hotsur have the oppor- tunity to crank up the pressure on Chelsea in the battle for fourth place in the Premier League this weekend as they emerge from their mini mid-season break.

Jose Mourinho’s side travel to relegation bat- tlers Aston Villa on Sunday in the back of con-secutive league wins, knowing another one will put pressure on the London club hoping to snap a Programme also has Arsenal hosting Newcastle United, with the London club hoping to snap a run of four successive draws that have left them struggling in mid-table.

Liverpool’s procession towards a first title for 30 years looks likely to continue at bottom club Norwich City on Saturday, when the only other game is Southampton’s home clash against Bournemouth. A victory for either side at St Mary’s will go a long way to banishing any lingering relega- tion worries. With Manchester City enjoying a week off, Leicester City can move second if they win at Wolverhampton Wanderers on Friday.

When Mourinho arrived at Tottenham in No- vember in the wake of Mauricio Pochettino’s surprise sacking, the north London club were in 14th place after 12 games, 12 points behind Chelsea.

Seven wins and four defeats in their 13 league games since the celebrated Portuguese arrived is hardly a spectacular turnaround but with Chelsea stalling and other teams falling away it has been enough to push Tottenham back in the race to secure Champions League football with a top-four finish.

It has not been pretty, with Tottenham scram- bling points in unconvincing fashion, although a smash-and-grab 2-0 home victory over Man-chester City in their last league game showed more about the galvanising effect Mourinho has had. Tottenham, who remain without injured striker Harry Kane, have lost only once in all competitions in the last 12 years against Villa, a 1-0 home defeat in 2015.

While another win will move them into touching distance of Chelsea into fifth place, Mourinho knows the battle for fourth spot is not just with his old club, with several other sides vying for the spot, none more so than Sheffield United who moved fifth by beating Bournemouth last week.

“Wolves and Sheffield United are fighting for the top four, (the managers) they can say no, and I understand if they say no but the reality is that they are,” Mourinho said.

“Not just because of the position that they are in the table, but because of the power and quality.” If Saturday’s match represents a chance for Tottenham, who have 20 points fewer than at the same stage last season, to advance their top- four clamour a win would give them some precious breathing space in the relegation scrap. They are one place and one point above the bottom three. The Villa Park clash will see MourinhO come up against his former Chelsea skipper John Terry, who is cutting his teeth in coaching as Dean Smith’s assistant. — Reuters

UEFA teams up with Disney in a bid to boost girls’ participation

MANCHESTER: UEFA has teamed up with Disney to launch a pan-European project aimed at increasing the number of girls playing football. The biggest-ever attempt to boost girls’ involvement in the game will start this spring in seven European countries before being introduced across the continent, European soccer’s governing body said yesterday.

The new ‘Playmakers’ project is aimed at girls aged five to eight years old, who are not currently playing football, and is focused around play and games involving popular Dis-ney characters and storylines.

The first stage of the project will be based around the Incredibles 2 film and characters. UEFA had already committed to an ambitious project for girls playing the sport by 2024 and the youngest age group is seen as key to that change. Nadine Kessler, UEFA’s Head of Women’s Football, told Reuters that the aim of the programme was to “create an environment for all girls to flourish and develop, whether that is fundamental movement skills, football basics or life skills and values.

“We truly believe that this unique programme can be the spark for a more active generation of football-loving girls.” While more teenage girls and women are playing football, girls tend to start later than boys, choosing other sports or activities.

UEFA examined research which showed that globally 84% of girls under the age of 17 are not meeting the World Health Organization minimum activity guidelines.

When girls reach the age of 15-24, they are half as likely to participate in sport as boys the same age, according to studies by the Euro- pean Commission for Education, Sport, Youth and Culture. Kessler says that sessions at Play- makers events will be very different from tra-ditional training sessions.

“There will still be football cones and a ball but these sessions will allow girls to play out scenarios of their favourite Disney movies, they will be empowered to take on the character and roles of their favourite Disney heroes.”

“It is broken down into 10 sessions and the girl will learn basic football skills by completing different tasks,” she added. The Playmakers project will launch in Scotland, Norway, Belarus, Poland, Austria, Romania and Serbia this spring, before a full pan-European roll-out.

Disney is not one of UEFA’s commercial part- ners and has joined up with the organisation specifically for the Playmakers project. “It is a completely new agreement we have signed and a very important one,” said Kessler.

“If you decided to create a programme based on play-based learning then you want to have the best characters and stories in the world and I think Disney has inspired genera- tions and we are really happy to be able to use some of this magic.” — Reuters
Nets snap Raptors’ 15-game win streak

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