

Mogherini:
Kuwait playing
positive role
in region



May arrives in
Saudi Arabia
on mission
to boost ties



Coast Investment
& Development
Co records profit
of KD 2.06m



Qatar in
talks to
host Club
World Cup



150 FILS
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NEW BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF KUWAIT AIRWAYS APPOINTED

OUTGOING CHAIRPERSON DETAILS RESIGNATION REASONS



Min 19°
Max 29°
High Tide
07:40 & 17:35
Low Tide
00:27 & 12:18

STATE TO INCREASE BORROWING FROM GLOBAL MARKETS

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Kuwait will increase its borrowing on international markets to plug a budget deficit resulting from low oil prices, the finance minister said yesterday. The move comes after the state raised \$8 billion last month in its first international bond issue. "We will continue to be present in the international (debt) market but in a prudent, rational way," Anas Al-Saleh told reporters at the Kuwait Financial Forum. "We will use all instruments, including bonds and (Islamic) sukuk. This will go side by side with enforcing reforms," he said.

On top of its international bond sales, Saleh said the government had raised domestic debt worth KD 2.2 billion (\$7.2 billion) in 2016-2017. The government also withdrew unspecified amounts from its reserves, estimated at \$600 billion, to meet the budget deficit. Saleh said the government put forward a bill allowing the state to borrow up to KD 20 billion (\$65.5 billion) over the next five years.

Continued on Page 13

SCORES KILLED IN SYRIA GAS ATTACK



KHAN SHEIKHOUN, Syria: Children are seen following a chemical attack at a makeshift hospital in this town in northern Idlib province yesterday. — AP (See Page 13)

KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs and Labor and Minister of State for Economic Affairs Hind Al-Sabeeh issued a decree forming a new board of directors at Kuwait Airways, with Sami Fahd Al-Rasheed as chairman. The decision also includes the appointment of Faleh Abdullah Al-Reqba as deputy chairman and Iman Al-Humaidan, Ibrahim Al-Khuzam, Mohammad Al-Hilal, Tareq Al-Wazzan and Wafaa Al-Othman as board members. Under the new decree, the new board will remain in office for only three years. Established in 1953, Kuwait Airways is one of the oldest airlines in the Gulf region.

The move came after Rasha Al-Roumi resigned as the carrier's chairperson yesterday after submitting a resignation letter addressed to Deputy PM, Interior Minister and Chairman of the Supreme Aviation Council Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah. In her resignation letter, Roumi said she had been facing many challenges since assuming office three years ago, despite the positive changes she managed to achieve.

Roumi explained that the Kuwait Airways building on Hilali Street in downtown Kuwait City was razed despite all attempts to retain it. She also noted that negotiations had gone on for 18 months to pay the company's KD 600 million debt in full, which forced the carrier to borrow, which reduced the value of its assets and capital compared to debts. Roumi also noted that a low-cost airline was granted more privileges than those given to Kuwait Airways, which led to considerable losses of public funds. —Agencies



Tassyoura Breakfast (For 2 Person)

Kuwaiti Breakfast 5.950 KD

Omelette, Foul , Lebneh, Chicken Liver, Fresh Vegetable, Qimar , Darabeel, Baqsam, Jam & Honey, Served With Tanoor Bread

Jordanian Breakfast 4.900 KD

Whole Egg, Foul, Falafel, Musabaha, White Cheese, Olive Oil , Zaatar , Served With Tanoor Bread

Lebanese Breakfast 5.950 KD

Fried Egg, Grilled Halloum , Sausage , Lebneh " Traditional Lebanese " , Makdoos , Cold Cut , Qimar & Honey , Served With Lebanese Bread

Indian Breakfast 4.750 KD

Lentil Mix , Qeema, Tawa Chicken, Egg Tomato, Yoghurt Mint , Served With Chapatti



KUWAITI FM HEADS TO BRUSSELS FOR SYRIA'S FUTURE CONFERENCE

KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah left to Brussels yesterday to take part in the 'Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region,' which takes place today. The conference will discuss means of easing the suffering of Syrians in their country and in neighboring states. It is co-chaired by Kuwait, Germany, Qatar, Norway, the UK, the UN and the EU.

The event will also discuss progress made since the fourth donors' conference for Syria held in February 2016 in London. Moreover, it will shed light on solutions to end the current war and set a roadmap to follow, once the conflict ends.—KUNA



KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah leaves for Brussels yesterday. —KUNA

KUWAIT CONDEMNS SAINT PETERSBURG BOMB ATTACK

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday sent a cable of condolences to Russian President Vladimir Putin over the victims of the terrorist explosion in a metro station in the Russian city of St Petersburg.

His Highness the Amir expressed strongest condemnation of the State of Kuwait as well as full solidarity with the Russian people against this terrorist act, which killed 10 people and injured scores others. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables.

An official source at the Foreign

Ministry has expressed Kuwait's condemnation of the terrorist bombing attacks that targeted St Petersburg underground stations in the Russian Federation, leaving dozens of people dead and injured. The source voiced Kuwait's solidarity with Russia and its support to all measures it may take to retain its security and stability.

The official reiterated Kuwait's firm opposition to terrorism in all its forms and manifestations regardless of its source and called on the international community to redouble efforts to eradicate the scourge of terrorism and rid the world of its evils. The source also extended condolences to the Russian government and people, especially families of the victims, and wished the wounded people speedy recovery. —KUNA

KUWAIT PLAYS POSITIVE ROLE IN REGION: MOGHERINI

BRUSSELS: EU High Representative Federica Mogherini lauded yesterday the role of Kuwait in finding political solutions to the regional conflicts. "We have worked with Kuwait a lot in the preparation for this conference and we have seen an active and positive role that Kuwait is playing especially in trying to bridge some of the positions in the region," she said during a meeting with a small group of journalists yesterday afternoon ahead of the Brussels international conference on Syria today.



EU High Representative Federica Mogherini

"I hope and wish that a country like Kuwait can play a more prominent role in the political mediation," said the EU foreign policy chief.

Mogherini said she will meet Kuwaiti First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah either today or tomorrow to discuss not only the humanitarian issue but also the political solution to the Syrian conflict.

She stressed that all the countries in the region have a role to play in the political side as they have a direct interest to see that the conflict is not further protracted. "In the moment when we will hopefully soon come to the end of the conflict, we have to see that the situation is managed in a reasonable manner," she said. "I have a clear sense of the fact that Europeans and the Gulf countries share a sense of urgency and seriousness of the situation (in Syria) and that it could only be solved politically," she added.

The European Union, Germany, Kuwait, Norway, Qatar, the United Kingdom and the United Nations will co-chair the Brussels Conference titled "Supporting the future of Syria and the region," today. Mogherini said that representatives from 70 delegations, including from the EU and the region but also the wider international community, the United Nations, major donors and civil society, humanitarian and development organizations, will attend the meeting.

The conference will also assess where the international community stands collectively in fulfilling commitments made at the London Conference in February 2016 and agree on additional efforts needed to meet the needs of those affected by the crisis. She said pledges for Syria will be announced tomorrow and hoped that the pledges made last year and this year for Syria will be maintained. Mogherini said discussions in tomorrow's conference will also focus on how the international community can support a lasting political resolution to the Syrian conflict through an inclusive and Syrian-led political transition process based on the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Meanwhile, an EU statement noted that one year ago, the international community convened in London under the leadership of the United Kingdom, Germany, Kuwait, Norway and the United Nations, reaffirming its solidarity with millions of vulnerable people living in Syria and Syrian refugees and affected host countries in the region, and building on the commitments made at the three previous pledging conferences in Kuwait from 2013-15. The Brussels conference will reconfirm existing pledges and identify additional support to Syrians in need inside Syria and in neighboring countries, as well as to the respective host communities, in response to the UN coordinated appeals. —KUNA

AMIR PROPOSES IDEAS TO RESOLVE REGIONAL CRISES: MAGAZINE

BEIRUT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has proposed 'creative ideas' aimed at defusing tensions and resolving conflicts in the region during the latest Arab summit, disclosed a Lebanese magazine. The weekly Al-Sayyad said in its latest edition that His Highness the Amir put on the table 'creative ideas' designed to alleviate tensions in the region. "In the event, His Highness has gotten support (so that) regional strives can be turned into mere disagreements in opinion and a new era may be ushered in which our peoples will be relieved from perils of discords, wars and terrorism," Sayyad said. His Highness the Amir, a veteran Arab foreign minister before being proclaimed Amir, masterminded mediation and conciliation efforts among some of the regional and Arab nations during several crises. The magazine also shed light on great popularity enjoyed by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, listing the posts he had held and his firm role in fighting terrorists and saboteurs. "He however enjoys a spirit of forgiveness and great heart for resolving citizens' problems," it added. —KUNA



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KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Minister of Social Affairs and Labor and Minister of State for Economic Affairs Hind Al-Sabeeh who was accompanied by the president and board members of Kuwait Public Relations. — KUNA photos

AMIR MEETS STATE OFFICIALS

CROWN PRINCE RECEIVES ACADEMICS

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday Minister of Social Affairs and Labor and Minister of State for Economic Affairs Hind Al-Sabeeh, who was accompanied by the president and board members of Kuwait Public Relations Association. His Highness also received National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem and His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Dr Anoud Al-Sharekh, who was honored with the National Order of Merit by France. His Highness Sheikh Nawaf also received Dr Mariam Al-Shammari, who presented to His Highness with an atlas on dermatologic diseases in Kuwait. Moreover, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf received Dr Saud Al-Ajmi, who presented his Master Degree thesis on the balance between the legislative and executive authorities in Kuwait. Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received Dr Ahmad Al-Huraiji, who attained a fellowship in blood cancer from MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Texas.

Separately, His Highness the Amir sent a congratulatory cable to the newly elected Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables. In other news, His Highness the Amir is set to patronize and attend a national operetta to be held at 10:00 am today in Bayan Palace.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Dr Ahmad Al-Huraiji.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Dr Anoud Al-Sharekh.



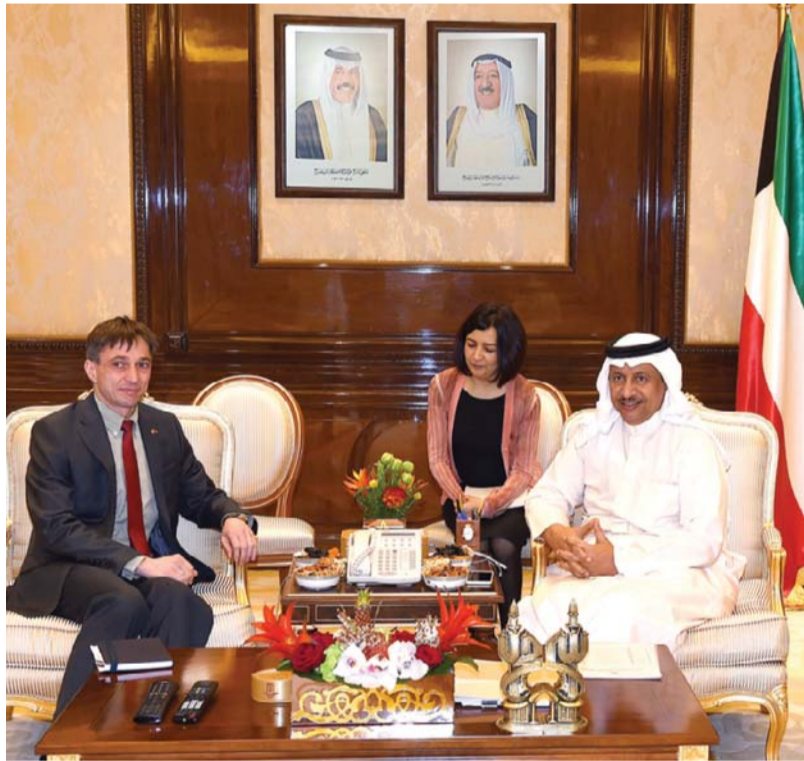
His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Dr Mariam Al-Shammari.



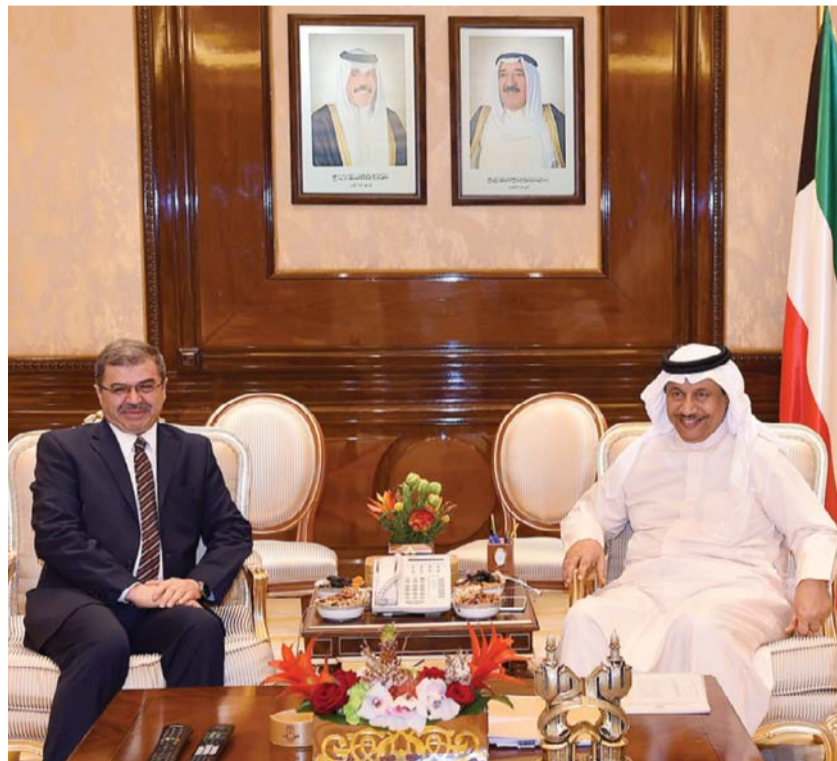
His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Dr Saud Al-Ajmi.

PRIME MINISTER RECEIVES NEWLY APPOINTED DIPLOMATS

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday the newly appointed Ambassadors of Austria, Iraq, and Bulgaria. The meeting was attended by chairperson of the Diwan of His Highness the Prime Minister, Sheikh Etimad Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — KUNA



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with the newly appointed Ambassador of Austria. — KUNA photos



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with the newly appointed Ambassador of Iraq.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with the newly appointed Ambassador of Bulgaria.

KRCS DISTRIBUTED MORE THAN 1,500 FOOD PARCELS IN MOSUL

IRBIL: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) distributed yesterday 1,500 food parcels in several liberated parts of Mosul, said an official for the society. The KRCS operation was carried out in cooperation with local humanitarian organizations, Director of the society's Disasters and Emergency Department Youssef Fahad Al-Me'raj said.

Me'raj added that this was part of "Kuwait is by your side" campaign, adding that the food aid covered the needs of newly displaced Iraqis escaping from the military operations in their area. The humanitarian aid that Kuwait provides to the Iraqi people will continue to cover many aspects of their daily needs, he affirmed. — KUNA



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem received yesterday Sheikh Dr Abdullah bin Mohammad Al-Mutlaq, member of the Saudi Council of Senior Scholars Authority and Advisor to King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. MP Al-Humaidi Al-Subaie attended the meeting. — KUNA

Photo

of the day



KUWAIT: A picture taken from a camp in Kuwait on the last day of the camping season. A seven-month ban on camping starts on April 1st every year to prevent excessive damage on the country's environment. —KUNA photo

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Good luck to you, our young artists.

- Competition is open to ages from (6 - 8) (9 - 11) (12 - 14) (15 - 17) and Special needs.
- The competition is open for all schools in Kuwait (Government and Private)
- The competition will start on March 19th and will continue till April 20th 2017.
- 10 winners from each category will receive valuable prizes.
- All participants will receive a certificate of appreciation.
- All schools participating in the competition will receive an appreciation plaque.
- Any school or individual interested to participate in this competition is welcome to visit the office of Kuwait Times and collect the drawing sheets.
- Drawing sheets will be given to schools FREE of charge.
- Only drawing sheets provided by the Kuwait Times will be allowed.
- You can use any kind of color pencils, paint brushes or crayons.

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Kuwait Times Participation Form

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Total number of interested students are
6 - 8 years 9 - 11 years 12 - 14 years 15 - 17 years Special need
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KUWAITI STUDENT PRESENTS 'MY PARKING' PROJECT AT DUBAI FAIR

ABU DHABI: Kuwaiti student Maha Al-Hajri presented her project 'my parking' that deals with reserving parking spots for vehicles in shopping malls during the Dubai International Government Achievements Exhibition.

The project was executed by students from the Hafsa intermediate school for girls, that won the first place in the 'young merchant' competition organized by Kuwait's Manpower and Government Restructuring Program (MGRP) in cooperation with the Ministry of Education. The competition was aimed at encouraging youth to engage in small enterprises and later enter the business world, head of the small enterprises department at the program Faris Al-Enezi said yesterday.

The 'young merchant' is held for the third year in a row, with the participation 450 male and female students from 75 intermediate and high schools, said Enezi.

Meanwhile, student Hajri said she was pleased to present her project at one of the biggest fairs in the Middle East. The project aims to allow people to save time and effort in finding a parking spot in shopping malls, especially in crowded days by booking their spot prior to their visit, she explained. —KUNA



ABU DHABI: Kuwaiti student Maha Al-Hajri who presented her project 'my parking' at the Dubai International Government Achievements Exhibition.



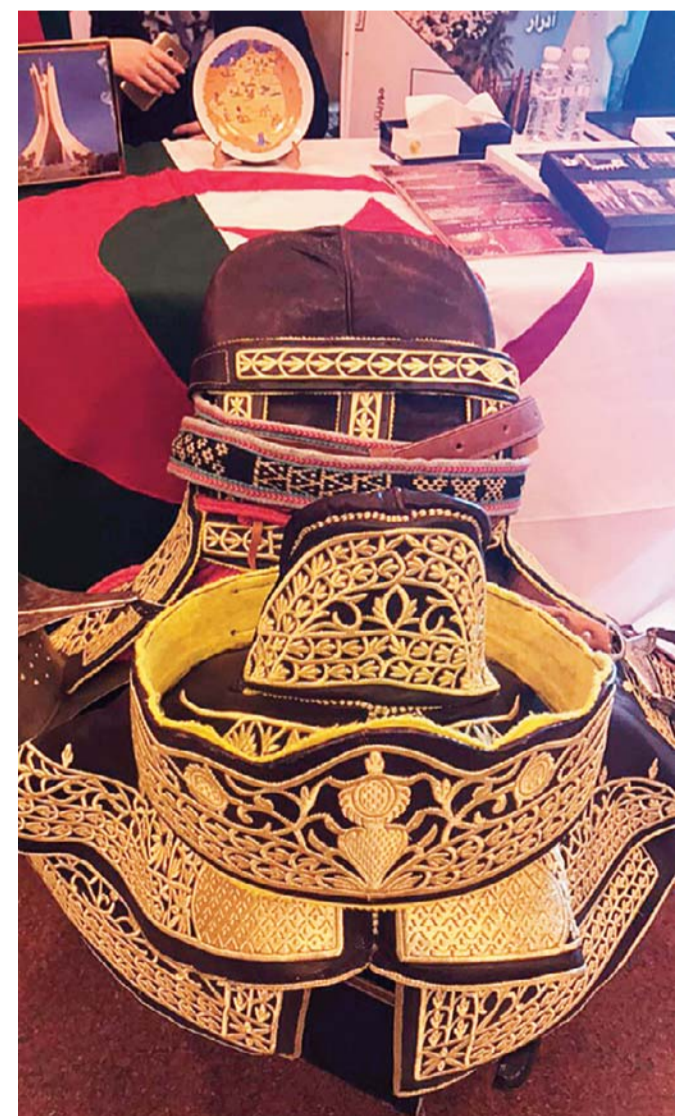
Kuwaiti student Maha Al-Hajri poses with officials from Kuwait's Manpower and Government Restructuring Program (MGRP). —KUNA Photos



KUWAIT: Kuwait University President Dr Hussein Al-Ansari is seen with Palestinian Ambassador Rami Tahboub during the forum. —KUNA Photos



Kuwaiti photographer Hamed Al-Amiri



Handicrafts displayed at the exhibition.

KUWAIT UNIVERSITY ADVOCATES MULTI-NATIONS' INTERACTION

KUWAIT: Kuwait University seeks to interact with academic establishments of other countries in implementation of one of its key objectives, says the KU president. The university administration makes sure that students are regularly involved in scientific and cultural occasions in and outside Kuwait, said Dr Hussein Al-Ansari, in a statement after inaugurating "peo-

ples' cultural forum," organized by the KU. Groups from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, Palestine, Tunisia and Algeria are taking part in the activity, displaying traditional dresses, books and handicrafts.

Rami Tahboub, the Palestinian ambassador, boasted of his country's participation noting that the pavilion displays Al-Quds encyclopedia,

30,000 editions of which have been printed by the Kuwaiti Ministry of Information. Photos by the renowned Kuwaiti photographer Hamed Al-Amiri are exhibited at the forum. Some of them depict ancient and traditional professions such as pearl diving. Kuwaiti artist Hussein Al-Bazzaz displays prototypes of old Kuwaiti dhows and visitors are served Kuwaiti cuisines. —KUNA

MINISTRY WORKERS PROTEST ALLOWANCE SUSPENSION

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: A large number of Ministry of Electricity and Water (MEW) employees staged a sit-in on Monday to protest over the suspension of remote areas' allowances some of them had been getting. The sit-in was held at MEW headquarters in South Surra. Ministry officials had explained earlier that they followed Civil Service Commission instructions to cut allowances given to some employees who work in power plants and other MEW facilities located in remote areas.

Commenting on the issue, MPs Nayef Al-Merdas and Marzouq Al-Khalifa stressed the need to do justice to employees who lost their allowances and urged Minister Essam Al-Marzouq to intervene before things develop into a strike. MEW employees' syndicate chairman Nawwaf Boyabes said Marzouq promised to look into the matter during a meeting held earlier this week and instructed his assistant undersecretary for financial and administrative affairs to follow up and resolve the problem.

In other news, Kuwait Fishermen Union's chairman Thaher Al-Sowayan stressed that the union is keen on providing Sharq fish market with all needed fresh local fish despite the hardships fishermen suffered after being evicted from their residences without providing them with alternative accommodation close to the harbor.

KUWAITI WARPLANE ENTERS IRAQI AIRSPACE: SAFWAN AUTHORITIES

DEBATE OVER REVOKED CITIZENSHIPS CONTINUES

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Iraqi authorities said a Kuwaiti military plane entered Iraqi airspace over Safwan in Basra governorate and broke the sound barrier, terrifying residents of the area. Safwan authorities asked the Kuwaiti government to 'make an apology' to residents of the area for causing them a scare. Kuwait is currently hosting a military exercise along with American and GCC forces, but it was not clear whether the incident took place as part of the drill or not. Kuwaiti authorities could not immediately be reached for a comment on the subject.

In other news, Iraqi Cabinet Secretary General Mahdi Al-Allaq discussed with Kuwait's Ambassador to Iraq Saleem Al-Zamanan the process of rebuilding areas liberated from the Islamic State (IS). A statement said that the Kuwaiti ambassador handed the secretary general a list of mobile schools in displaced camps, and list of schools

financed by the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development in several Iraqi areas.

Revoked citizenships

A governmental committee discussing the issue of nationality revocations held its first meeting recently that was chaired by Amiri Diwan advisor Ali Al-Rashed. It agreed on the mechanism of its work and allowed those whose nationalities were revoked to contact the panel through a website. Informed sources said there are plans to allow all those with revoked nationalities since 1980 to plead their cases, adding that the only cases that can be discussed are those concerning nationalities that were revoked according to administrative procedures, and not those related to state security, which means the door will be closed to many cases expected to be discussed. Sources said priority will be given for nationalities revoked recently, such as

those of former MP Abdullah Al-Barghash, Saad Al-Ajmi and Nabil Al-Awadhi.

In related news, MP Khalid Al-Shatti accused fellow lawmakers he described as "those with shining slogans" of working to "legitimize forgers and protect dual citizens by amending the nationality law." Shatti said that the nationality law is among the sensitive issues being discussed by the National Assembly, saying that the law was issued in 1959, three years before the constitution. "It is rejected to have a systematic attack on the nationality law, to a point where an MP introduces a new law - and what is worse - he calls it the 'national identity protection law,'" he charged. "There are bedoons (stateless) in Kuwait and even if I sympathize with them over their rights and hope their issue is resolved, the matter is much bigger than this issue, because the amendment aims at protecting forgers, and this is dangerous because it is a clear violation of national identity and protects the corrupt," Shatti added.



TOP INTERIOR MINISTRY OFFICIALS ATTEND MILITARY EXERCISE

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Interior Ministry Undersecretary Maj Gen Mahmoud Al-Dousary along with assistant undersecretaries witnessed a training session as part of activities of the 'Eagle Resolve 2017' military exercise at the special security forces camp. The

maneuvers were also witnessed by Kuwait Army Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans Maj Gen Ahmad Al-Ameeri and Commander of the Eagle Resolve 2017 exercise Maj Gen Waleed Al-Saradi. It was also attended by Commander of Protection and Backup at the National Guard Maj Gen Faleh Shujaa and Kuwait Fire Service

Directorate's Deputy Director General for the Firefighting Sector Maj Gen Jamal Al-Bulaihees.

In other news, the Interior Ministry's Traffic Department said a detour will be opened at the intersection of Jamal Abdelnasser Road with Ghazali Road, and a red light will be placed before demolishing the old steel bridge on Friday, April 7, 2017.



KUWAIT: Firefighters tackled a blaze that gutted a six-floor apartments' building in Mahboula yesterday. No injuries were reported in the incident. Meanwhile, Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) said that legal action will be taken against the building's owner for violations that obstructed firefighter's work while extinguishing the flames. — By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KIPIC ANNOUNCES NEW STRUCTURE, UNVEILS LOGO

KUWAIT: Kuwait Integrated Petrochemical Industries Company (KIPIC) announced recently its administrative structure to include Hashim Hashim as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Ahmad Saleh Al-Jeemaz as Deputy CEO for Petrochemicals and Liquefied Gas and Khaled Al-Qo'oud as Deputy CEO for Financial and Administrative Affairs and official spokesperson, among others.

Speaking on the occasion, Hashim stressed that KIPIC was founded and launched as a result of the efforts and strategies of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC)

and its subsidiaries, saying that the new company's main duties include building, operating and managing the refining and petrochemicals complex and the imported liquefied gas facilities in Al-Zour Project.

"This integration aims at boosting Kuwait's petroleum industries while coping with international markets' demands," he underlined. KIPIC also announced that its official logo was approved by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and that it would use the following e-mail: media@kipic.com.kw for media correspondence.



Hashim Hashim



Ahmad Al-Jeemaz



Khaled Al-Qo'oud



VOLUNTARY TEAM HOSTS PROGRAM WITH PAAET NURSING INSTITUTE

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Al-Wiqaya Ghaya voluntary team launched the first stage of its agility and youthfulness project in cooperation with the nursing institute of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET), in the presence of the team's director Dr Musaef Ghanim Al-Enezi and assistant director of the nursing institute Firyal Al-Tamimi, who represented Director Dr Wael Hamada, in addition to several institute officials.

Dr Enezi said the launch of the program was well-

received by faculty and students. He lauded the efforts of team members in registering participants, checking their weight and giving advice on following a healthy lifestyle to fight obesity and reaching an ideal weight. Tamimi said such programs are very important, adding that the nursing institute believes in participating in executing the development plan of the PAAET in order to fulfill the development vision of Kuwait, and as part of the institution's vision to instill health awareness in the society through such programs. The program will continue throughout the school term with close follow-up to make sure the program meets its goals.

Crime

Report

FOUR ARRESTED WITH DRUGS

KUWAIT: Four Indians were arrested in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh with possession of heroin. Patrol officers had found the suspects in a suspicious place, and arrested them after discovering that they were under the influence of drugs. They were sent to concerned authorities.

Intruder stabbed

A citizen stabbed a stranger who entered his house in Naseem five times, then handed him to police. The citizen said he was surprised by the man in his house and attempted to catch him, but he resisted and tried to beat him, so he stabbed him. The house owner was also sent for questioning.

Family dispute

Two brothers struck a Yemeni man with an axe on his head and chest and pulled a firearm at him due to earlier disputes. The Yemeni had went to the house of his sister's in-laws in order to get her belongings, but a man emerged and started beating him. The attacker's brother then came out with a firearm, and following an argument, one of the brothers brought an axe and hit the Yemeni on the head. The victim's own brother went to Naeem police station and filed a complaint. Investigations are underway.

Thefts

Two Nepalese and a Filipina stole the contents of a beauty salon where they worked and disappeared, according to the owner. Investigations are underway. Meanwhile, a thief stole KD 3,000 and smartphones from a policeman's house. The victim lodged a complaint at Saad Al-Abdullah police station. The policeman found the door broken and discovered the theft when he looked for the money in the bedroom's cupboard. Jahra detectives are working on the case. — *Translated from the Arabic press*



ARAB MEDIA, PRESS CONFERENCE OPENS TODAY

KUWAIT: The Arab Independent Media and Press Freedom Conference organized by KJA in collaboration with The World Union Organizations for Arabic Press (WUOAP) will be launched today under auspices of Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Acting Minister of Information Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah. The two-day conference will be held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel (Al-Baraka Ballroom). It is set to witness several symposiums discussing the Kuwaiti press, freedom of press in the Arab world and a declaration of media freedom.

Al-Anbaa

DEDUCTING KD 55 FROM KUWAITIS' WAGES

By Thaar Al-Rasheedi

Some people always remain in the dark and appear in public only when the government intends to haunt citizens' pockets for economic reasons. By appearing in the media, those people create a state of panic about our economy, which I am not claiming is in a good place. It is actually falling apart. I mean that those people come out to explain how deteriorated the economy is due to the fall of oil prices. They will also argue that simple poor citizens have to take their part of the responsibility to solve the economic problem.

This amount is less than five percent of the value of one of the failing unfinished projects

Some of them would even go as far as suggesting that it would be okay if citizens give away a part of their salaries and incentives to contribute to reducing expenditure. The suspicious economic reform plan suggested by the government, approved by the 2013 parliament and promoted by the government's economists proves this. The plan suggested reducing the National Labor Support allowance by 10 percent. Well, assuming that citizens working in the private sector receive an average salary of KD 550 a month, this means deducting KD 55 a month and KD 660 a year.

According to the latest statistics, the total number of citizens working in the private sector is 73,000, which means that the government would annually save around KD 48 million by cutting down their salaries by 10 percent. I do not wish to speak about the legality, constitutionality or even logic in cutting down the allowances; which was originally set by law to encourage more citizens to join the private sector. Let me talk about the KD 48 million the state will save by this unusual economic procedure.

This amount is less than five percent of the value of one of the failing unfinished projects. It is not even worth half the value of the cost changes in projects worth millions of dinars. It is less than half the value of a tender to provide devices to ministries that are often end up not used. It is not even equal to 10 percent of the costs spent on the overseas treatment program. Solving financial squander should not go through the pockets of simple citizens and those with limited income. It should be done through solving the issue in various ministries. Citizens' pockets must be the last resort in any economic reform plans, but our politicians know nothing about economic principles when it comes to multibillion development projects. Such an economic reform attempt is but a sugarcoated form of corruption disguised as reform.

—*Translated by Kuwait Times*

الجريدة

Al-Jarida

COMAS AND ABUSE

By Mohammed Al-Sager

I had decided to give the current parliament a chance to prove itself after several tragic experiences of previous parliaments being annulled, suspended and politically disqualified. However, what happened since this parliament came in power makes me more grateful for previous ones, especially since so much was expected from it after the people put an end to boycotting the elections under the one-vote electoral system. However, it ended up with great disappointment.

The fact that this parliament only passed two bills since it came to office shows how much time is being wasted on political disputes and disagreements, instead of focusing on legislation, achievement and reforming laws that had been distorted by the previous parliament and are gradually being undone such as that of the DNA law, blasphemers' penalties, or juveniles' age reduction bill.

Nonetheless, the worst political phenomenon in the current parliament is the flowing threats of interpellations, both justified and unjustified. The distinguished lawmakers seem to have figured out that shouting louder, gaining more public support and electoral gains were much better than legislation. They also discovered that blackmailing the government is more useful than cooperating with it. They seem to have forgotten that a parliamentary inquiry is a real monitoring tool, that a press conference can support such inquiries, that media can be used for more pressure and that there are so many ways to achieve goals. Why, then, do they opt to the easiest methods and file grilling motions? Why are they turning such a tool into a silly one by overusing it?

I would like to remind you that former MPs Dr Ahmad Al-Kahteeb, Jassem Al-Qatami, Ahmad Al-Saadoun and Jassem Al-Sager have never filed a single interpellation throughout their parliamentary careers; neither have I, though we had so many confrontations with governments and their policies. We were fiercer in defending people's rights, liberties and the rule of law. Why do they opt to practices that are so strange for citizens and open for authoritarians, the enemies of democracy and those with bad intentions to attack and criticize the democracy?

I recently heard threats to file interpellations, then closely followed the process of grilling former information minister Sheikh Salman Al-Humoud Al-Sabah. And though I believe he failed in fulfilling his tasks in sports and information, I strongly believe that the motion was unsuccessful and that lawmakers abused this tool and started executing political agendas that are far beyond the right of monitoring as part of a balance-of-power game that would only harm Kuwait.

—*Translated by Kuwait Times*

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Alghanim Industries employees pose with the Minister of Commerce at GUST.

ALGHANIM INDUSTRIES STRENGTHENS RELATIONSHIP WITH LOCAL UNIVERSITIES

KUWAIT: Alghanim Industries, one of the largest privately owned companies in the region was a Platinum sponsor of Gulf University for Science and Technology's (GUST) career fair, and a Silver sponsor of the career fair in the College of Business Administration of Kuwait University.

The career fairs were able to attract many students and professors to the company booth to learn more about the businesses and programs that the company offers such as, the Alghanim Future Leaders Program (AFLP) and the Summer Internship Program.

Commenting on the company's participation in the career fairs, Chief Human Resources Officer at Alghanim Industries, George Lambros said: "We look for every opportunity to engage with Kuwaiti students, and to inform them about the exciting career opportunities we have at Alghanim Industries. Over the years, we have successfully recruited impressive talent from local universities and we're invested in retaining and developing them, once they join the organization. We look forward to having many of the students we met as interns or as employees in the near future."

The event served as a great platform for all students interested in learning more about the company, its history, and what it can offer to further develop their skills and build rewarding careers. Many resumes were received from students and alumni interested in joining Alghanim Industries.

The company is committed to empowering youth through education, with particular interest in acquiring talented graduates from both international and local universities. Alghanim Industries also focuses on gender diversity, recruiting and retaining female talent. In addition to its Kuwaiti Mentorship Program, which aims to further advance the skills and talents of Kuwaiti employees in the company.



KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) carried out an exercise at Sabah Al-Salem University in Shedadaya yesterday to gauge the readiness of fire and backup teams in dealing with accidents such as an explosion of an oxygen cylinder during welding.

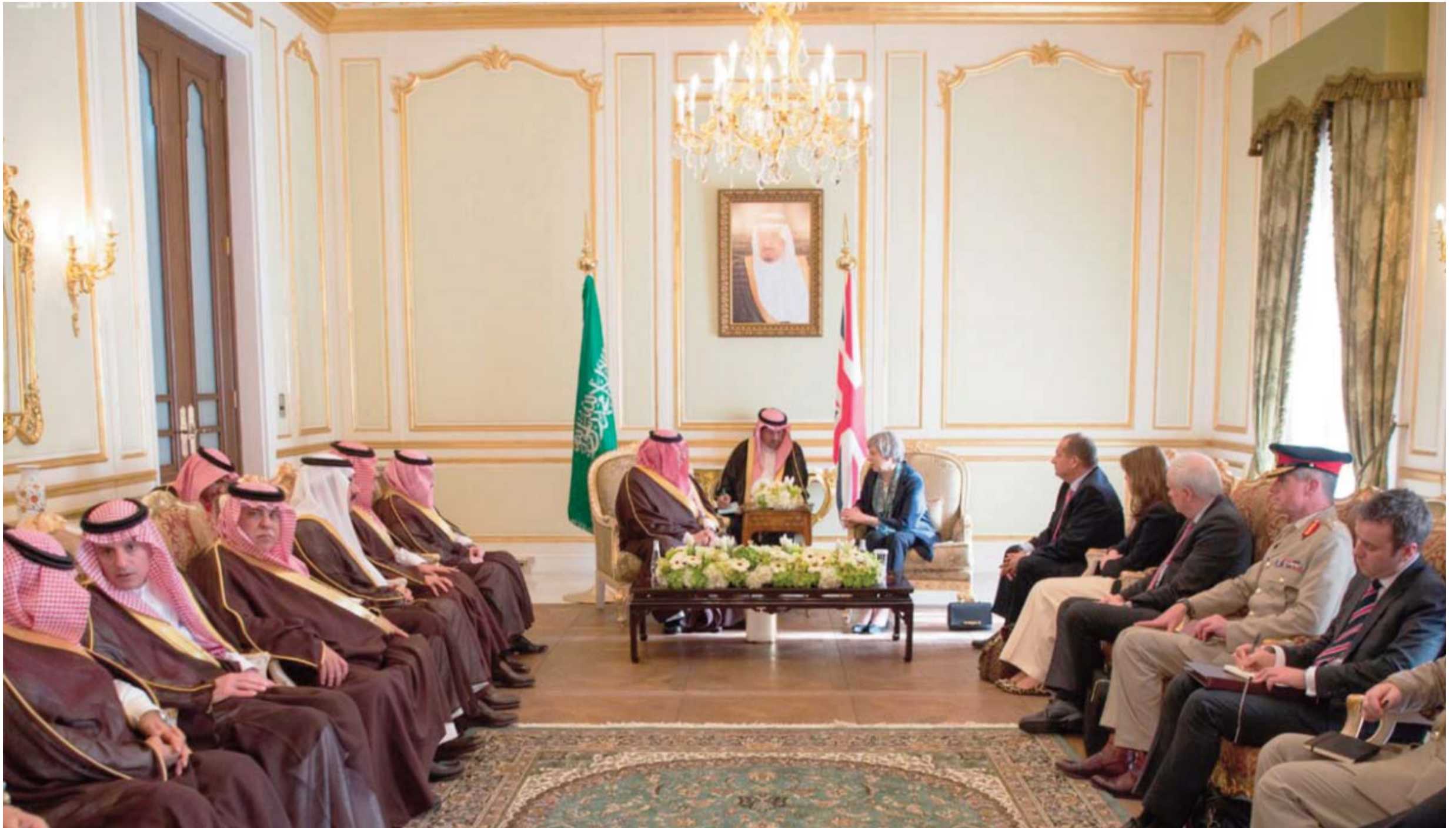


Alghanim Industries employees pose with the Dean of the college of Business Administration at Kuwait University.



**Out with the old?
 Outsiders shaking up
 French election**

TRUMP-XI MEET WATCHED FOR CLUES OF FUTURE RELATIONSHIP



RIYADH: In this photo released yesterday by Saudi Press Agency, SPA, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Naif bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, rear left, meets with British Prime Minister Theresa May. — AP

PM MAY IN SAUDI ARABIA SEEKING DEALS
 HOPING TO TAP THE KINGDOM'S 'IMMENSE POTENTIAL'

RIYADH: British Prime Minister Theresa May arrived in Saudi Arabia yesterday hoping to tap the oil-rich kingdom's "immense potential" as she looks to secure post-Brexit investment and trade. May landed at a military airport in the Saudi capital, state news agency SPA said, coming from Jordan. Facing criticism at home and calls to raise rights issues with Saudi leaders, May insisted she had no problem talking about "hard issues" on foreign visits.

But, less than a week after Britain officially started a two-year countdown for quitting the European Union, May made clear that economic issues were the priority. May began a three-day Middle East tour on Monday in Amman, where she touted cooperation between British forces and Jordan's military in the fight against the Islamic State jihadist group.

Both countries are part of the US-led coalition that has been carrying out air strikes and supporting local forces against IS in Syria and Iraq since mid-2014. May is expected to have two days of talks with senior officials including

King Salman and the country's powerful two crown princes. In a statement ahead of the visit, May said she would be looking to use the "immense potential for Saudi investment to provide a boost to the British economy".

Britain is looking to strike new trade deals as it prepares to leave the EU, with a major focus on longtime partners like the energy-rich Gulf states. Qatar, for example, announced plans last month to invest £5 billion (\$6.23 billion/5.8 billion euros) in Britain within five years. Saudi Arabia is Britain's largest trading partner in the Middle East, with exports of more than £6.5 billion in British goods and services to the country in 2015.

Saudi Arabia is also looking at boosting its foreign investments as part of a long-term plan known as "Vision 2030" to diversify its economy and reduce its dependence on oil revenues. May came under fire ahead of the visit, with opposition Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn demanding she raise concerns about "the dictatorial Saudi monarchy's shocking human rights record".

Call to halt arms sales

He called on Britain to halt arms sales to Riyadh immediately and to push for a ceasefire in Yemen, where a Saudi-led coalition intervened two years ago. The coalition has carried out hundreds of air strikes and sent troops to support Yemen's internationally recognised government against Iran-backed Shiite Huthi rebels who have seized control of large parts of the country.

More than 7,700 civilians have been killed and a further 42,500 wounded since the start of the campaign, according to the United Nations. Seven million Yemenis are also facing starvation. Rights groups including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have been among organisations calling for an end to arms sales from Britain and the United States to Saudi Arabia over the coalition's actions in Yemen.

On Sunday, Britain apologized after an egg was thrown at Saudi General Ahmed Assiri, the spokesman for the coalition, during a recent visit to London. An anti-war

activist last week attempted a citizen's arrest of Assiri, before another threw an egg that hit the spokesman in the back. Asked by British reporters if she would bring up humanitarian and rights questions in Riyadh, May told Sky News: "We have no difficulty in raising hard issues with those that we meet, be it in Saudi Arabia or elsewhere in the world."

May also pointed to social reforms announced in the Vision 2030 program, including plans to increase women's participation in the workforce from 22 to 28 percent by 2020. Saudi Arabia has some of the world's tightest restrictions on women, and is the only country where they are not allowed to drive. "I hope also that people see me as a woman leader, will see what women can achieve and how women can be in significant positions," May told the BBC. May is also due to meet Sarah Al-Suhaimi, who was appointed as the first female chair of the Saudi stock exchange earlier this year, and a Saudi princess appointed last year to oversee women's sports. — AFP

RUSSIA IDS METRO BOMBER AS NATION MOURNS 14 DEAD

SAINT PETERSBURG: Russian investigators yesterday identified the bomber in the deadly Saint Petersburg metro blast as 22-year-old Akbarjon Djalilov, as Russia's second city mourned the 14 people killed. The Investigative Committee said in a statement that Djalilov "carried out an explosion" in the carriage of a train travelling between two bus stations on Monday afternoon.

Djalilov's "genetic trace" was also found on a bag containing a second bomb left at another metro station and later defused, the statement said. Investigators gave no further details about Djalilov but his name and year of birth coincided with a statement from the Kyrgyz security services which said earlier yesterday he was a naturalized Russian citizen originally from Kyrgyzstan.

The remains of the bomber were found at the scene of the blast, but it was not clear if he is included in the official toll of the attack. Flags flew at half-mast in Russia's second city and flowers and candles piled up at an impromptu memorial outside the metro station rocked by the attack, as authorities beefed up security on the busy underground transport system.

The Kremlin said the bombing was "a challenge to every Russian", including President Vladimir Putin. The bombing raised jitters ahead of the Confederations Cup football tournament in June, with the opening game and final set to be held in Saint Petersburg as

Russia gears up towards hosting the World Cup next year. Commuters on the busy Saint Petersburg metro remained on edge after the system temporarily shut down Monday in the wake of the attack.

"Everyone in the metro can only think of this," said 45-year-old Svetlana Golubeva as she entered the underground. Resident Dmitry Leonov said there was a sense of shock that terror could strike the city as he picked his way through the candles and flower tributes lining the gates of the station. "Now we're all under threat," he said.

'Food for thought'

Putin, who hails from Saint Petersburg, was holding a meeting near the city at the time of the bombing and later on Monday added his own floral tribute at the scene. "The fact that the act of terror was perpetrated at the moment that the head of state was in the city is food for thought," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said yesterday.

A spokesman for Kyrgyzstan's security services, Rakhmat Sulaimanov, told AFP in Bishkek that authorities of the ex-Soviet republic were in contact with their Russian counterparts over the case. There has not been a claim of responsibility for the attack, which came after the Islamic State group called for attacks on Russia in retribution for its military intervention in Syria against the jihadists.

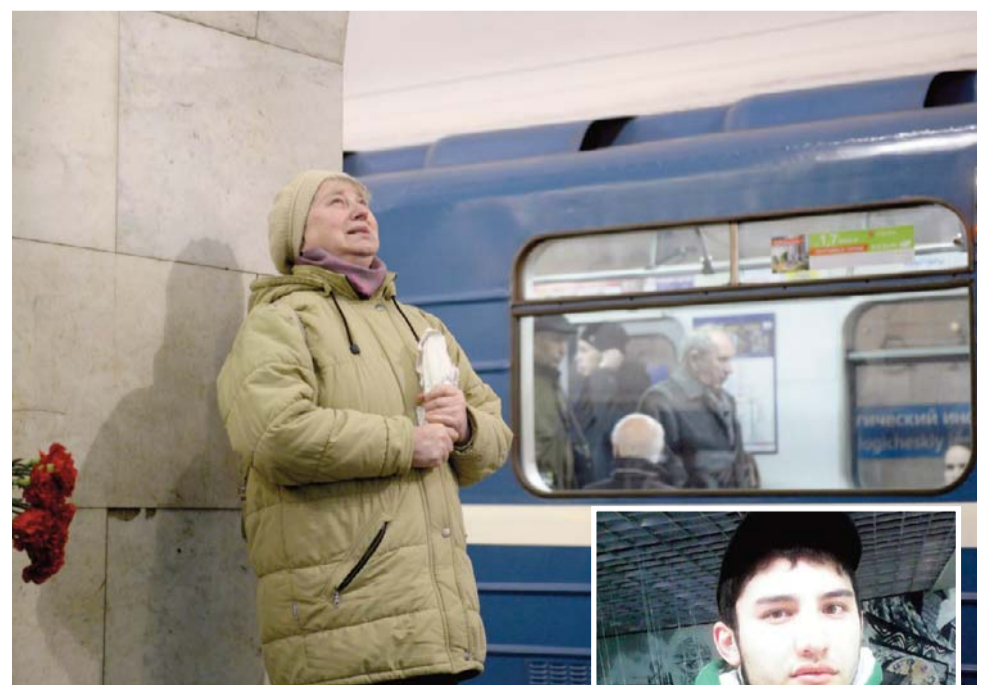
Russia has long been battling an Islamist

insurgency in its volatile Caucasus region and has suffered a string of bloody terror attacks over the years. Health Minister Veronika Skvortsova said the toll from the blast had climbed from 11 to 14 yesterday as three people succumbed to their injuries, adding that 49 more people remained in hospital.

Those hurt include citizens of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, as well as Russians from 13 different regions, according to the Saint Petersburg authorities. The chief of the Saint Petersburg metro, Vladimir Garyugin, said yesterday that quick actions by staff prevented a much higher toll and that passengers had helped each other instead of panicking. The second bomb was an explosive device fashioned from a fire extinguisher and hidden in a bag, he said. "A metro employee quickly cordoned off the area and called in experts," Garyugin said in televised remarks.

'Barbaric act'

In the wake of the attack Putin spoke to a string of leaders around the globe—including holding only his second phone call with US President Donald Trump overnight. Trump offered Putin the "full support of the United States Government," according to a White House statement. Putin also talked up cooperation in the fight against terrorism with leaders in Germany, France, Turkey and the king of Saudi Arabia. The attack in Saint Petersburg is the first in several years to hit a major city in Russia.



ST PETERSBURG: A woman reacts while placing flowers in honor of the victims of the April 3 blast on the platform of Technological Institute metro station. (INSET) An undated handout picture sourced by a Russia's VK.com social network page shows Akbarjon Djalilov, an alleged suspect in the April 3 blast in the Saint Petersburg metro. — AFP photos

In October 2015, a bomb attack claimed by IS downed a plane carrying holidaymakers back to Saint Petersburg from Egypt in October 2015. All 224 people onboard were killed. Russian ground transport has also been hit by extremists before, including in the Moscow metro and the Domodedovo airport,

where a blast claimed by Islamic insurgents killed 37 people in 2011. In an apparently unrelated incident, two traffic policemen were killed overnight in the southern city of Astrakhan when unidentified assailants opened fire on them, the regional governor said, calling them "radical Islamists." — AFP

SPANISH POLICE RAID ASSAD FAMILY'S ASSETS

MADRID: Police in southern Spain yesterday staged raids targeting assets of the family of Syrian leader Bashar Al-Assad, a judicial source said. The raids, in the Puerto Banus marina area of the plush resort of Marbella, are the result of a corruption investigation launched in France against Assad's uncle, Rifaat Al-Assad. The assets of Rifaat Al-Assad and his family in Spain are valued at 691 million euros (\$736 million), the source said, adding that "all these properties have been seized."

"Judge Jose de la Mata is coordinating the judicial operation against Rifaat Al-Assad, uncle of the current president of Syria, for money laundering in Puerto Banus and Marbella", the source said. In 1984, Rifaat Al-Assad was forced into exile for trying to overthrow his older brother, the late Syrian dictator Hafez Al-Assad. According to Spanish justice, Rifaat Al-Assad, now aged 79, received 300 million dollars of state cash which he used to buy real estate in France, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg and Curacao.

French and Spanish authorities have been cooperating on the case and Spain opened an investigation on the back of the French one. Madrid authori-

ties say the Spanish probe established that Rifaat and his family had 503 properties in their portfolio, ranging from holiday villas to plush hotel apartments-almost all in and around Marbella. One residence, "La Maquina" at Benahavis just outside Marbella is worth an estimated 60 million euros.

The investigating magistrate has frozen 16 people's bank accounts and a further 76 accounts in connection with the case, the judicial source said. Investigators say Rifaat Al-Assad first charged in France last June-holds some 90 million euros worth of property assets in France, including an office block in the eastern city of Lyon. Rifaat Al-Assad denies wrongdoing, saying much of his wealth stems from gifts bestowed by the Saudi royal family, which he says gave him political backing in the 1980s.

Last October, he told French authorities that former Saudi kings Fahd and Abdallah had provided those gifts, according to a source close to the French probe. The initial probe was triggered by an activist group, which represents victims of financial crime. Rifaat Al-Assad insists he does not keep close tabs on his property holdings. — AFP



MARBELLA: A woman walks past a luxury residence during a raid by the Spanish Guardia civil targeting assets of the family of Syrian leader Bashar Al-Assad in the Puerto Banus marina area. —AFP



AMMAN: In this Wednesday, March 29, 2017 file photo, a section of the twenty one kings, presidents and top officials who attended the Arab League summit pose for a group photo, at a gathering near the Dead Sea. — AP

AT WHITE HOUSE, JORDAN KING TO PRESENT ARABS' VIEW ON PEACE

A LOOK AT WHAT'S ON THE TABLE AND IN THE PIPELINE

AMMAN: Jordan's King Abdullah II will be able to deliver an Arab consensus on Mideast peace when he meets with President Donald Trump at the White House today, after a recent summit hosted by the monarch renewed an Arab offer of recognition of Israel in exchange for Palestinian statehood. Could the revived Arab plan, coupled with Trump's stated eagerness to strike a deal, signal an opening for restarting stalled Israeli-Palestinian talks? Here's a look ahead.

What's on the table?

At their annual summit last week, Arab leaders renewed an offer they first made to Israel in 2002 - recognition by dozens of Arab and Muslim nations in exchange for allowing the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem. Israel has balked, among other things, at the envisioned scope of withdrawal from the lands it captured in 1967 and unsuccessfully sought to renegotiate the initial proposal.

With the summit declaration to back his case, Jordan's king will be able to tell Trump that Arab leaders are serious about achieving what Jordan's foreign minister, Ayman Safadi, described as the "historic reconciliation between Israel and the whole Arab world." But the king will couple the enticing prospect of regional peace with a warning. Jordan argues that the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains at the root of regional turmoil and that, if allowed to fester, it will undercut the Trump administration's Mideast goals of containing Iran and defeating Islamic State extremists.

Will Trump engage?

Trump's international envoy, Jason Greenblatt, told Arab leaders on the sidelines of last week's summit in Jordan that the US president has a personal interest in achieving an Israeli-Palestinian deal and that he believes it is doable. Trump hasn't said what kind of agreement he seeks, but appears to have backed away from initial suggestions that he could envision alternatives to the globally backed two-state solution that has been supported by previous US presidents. For now, Trump envoys are trying to get Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to curb settlement construction on war-won lands and ease economic restrictions on Palestinians - a traditional US move when trying to restart Israeli-Palestinian talks. Greenblatt also won praise from Palestinian officials, who say he was surprisingly open to their concerns during his recent "listening tour" in the region.

A rare opening?

Early on, Trump positioned himself as a staunch Israel supporter, eliciting alarm in parts of the Arab world and cheers among Israeli hard-liners. The administration has since tried to adjust the balance on some issues, seeking a settlement slowdown and holding off on a promise to move the US Embassy in Israel to contested Jerusalem. US ally Jordan, custodian of a major Muslim-run shrine in Jerusalem, has warned such a move would fuel extremism.

Some argue that recent events could create an opening for resuming Israeli-Palestinian negotiations - despite perceptions that the Trump

White House hasn't formulated a clear Mideast strategy. Trump's personal interest in a deal contrasts with his predecessor Barack Obama's more hands-off approach, and the current president's amicable relationship with Netanyahu could give him greater leverage with Israel, said Jordanian analyst Musa Shteiwi. Another key ingredient - broad Arab support for negotiations - will be delivered by Jordan's king today. "There is an opening," said Shteiwi, head of the Center for Strategic Studies, a think tank at Jordan University. "We should be cautiously optimistic."

What does Jordan want?

The White House meeting will affirm the king's traditional role as Mideast mediator and raise his profile as an arbiter of Arab consensus. Jordan seeks a solid US promise that Washington will try to revive peace efforts, most importantly by persuading Israel to engage in credible talks on Palestinian statehood, said a government official who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to reporters about diplomatic efforts. There have been no serious Israeli-Palestinian talks since gaps widened with Netanyahu's 2009 election. Netanyahu hasn't formally reneged on the principle of a two-state solution, but has stopped short of mentioning it in recent weeks, and most of his Cabinet members oppose the idea.

What about Israel?

Netanyahu reportedly told Cabinet ministers last week that it's important for Israel to show goodwill and not be seen by Trump as an obstacle to any US initiative. Still, talks with the US on slowing settlement construction haven't led to results and Israel last week approved a new settlement - the first in 20 years - billed by Netanyahu as keeping a previous promise to settlers. At the same time, Netanyahu reportedly proposed unilateral Israeli construction limits. Netanyahu envoy Michael Oren, who recently met with Greenblatt, said on Monday that Israel wants Arab states to take concrete steps to "show that they are not just talking about peace, but actually mean it." This would include "aspects of normalization," Oren said, but did not elaborate. He described a process of mutual goodwill gestures that could gradually lead to a peace agreement.

What else will come up?

Another important issue for Jordan will be the fight against the Islamic State group, which controls territory in neighboring Iraq and Syria. The militants have shown with a series of recent attacks that they pose an internal and external threat to pro-Western Jordan. Jordan has been part of a US-led military coalition against IS for the past two years, hosting Western military trainers and carrying out airstrikes against IS targets. A senior White House official last week portrayed Jordan as a "critical" US partner in the fight against the extremists. Jordanian and US interests appear to converge, with both seeking to step up the anti-IS campaign. — AP

IRAQ TRIP NEWS WITH KUSHNER MIDAIR POSES SECURITY RISKS

WASHINGTON: The Trump administration's failure to keep senior adviser Jared Kushner's trip to Iraq secret isn't standard practice for top US officials visiting war-zones. Such trips are usually kept quiet, with the cooperation of journalists, until the officials arrive in order to ensure maximum security.

A senior administration official told reporters Sunday evening that Kushner - President Donald Trump's son-in-law - was in Iraq, even though he was still en route. For the military and security professionals managing the mission, the public disclosure of the unannounced trip was a security breach. Gen. Joseph Dunford, the Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman, also was on board.

Although the plane landed safely in Baghdad on Monday, the Iraqi capital is hardly a secure location, having suffered countless extremist attacks over the years. The threat is no less acute today as Iraq wages a bitter battle to try to rid the Islamic State from its territory. For trips to the city, the military seeks to avoid public mention of plans ahead of time so extremist groups can't plot attacks.

Reasoning is obvious

"It's been longstanding practice to strictly avoid announcing the visits of senior US officials in advance of their travels to war-zones," said George Little, a Pentagon and CIA press secretary for Leon Panetta, who managed both departments under President Barack Obama. "The main reason is obvious. You want to avoid giving the enemy any information that could help them to target these delegations, especially in areas where the battle lines aren't clear on the map."

Knowing when and where a senior US military or civilian official might arrive makes attacks easier. Such details could help groups target the plane as it takes off

or lands, or use roadside bombs or shoulder-launched rockets to strike dignitaries while they're on the ground. US security details work with host countries to make sure routes and buildings are secure, trying to do so in the most inconspicuous manner possible.

The choice of plane, too, is determined by danger level. In war-zones, officials often fly more rugged combat aircraft, such as the Air Force's heavy C-17 transport plane. These can take off and land quicker on shorter runways. Steeper, corkscrew landings are sometimes preferred to minimize the threat from surface-to-air missiles.

Reporters cooperate, too. Those traveling with top leaders into conflict areas must keep the trip secret, with reports generally "embargoed" until landing. Restrictions can be tighter on rare occasions. But these practices all are predicated on the administration not making the trip public prematurely. "The moment of vulnerability is, if they know you're coming, a surface-to-air missile going after the airplane," said Ari Fleischer, President George W. Bush's White House press secretary. "If you can diminish the time they know - and by the time you're there, the whole thing is a flood of security agents - it makes it almost impossible in theory for them to do anything bad."

Not according to plan

For the Trump administration, Kushner's voyage marks the second time a secret trip hasn't gone as planned. In February, the White House arranged for Trump to visit Dover Air Force Base in Delaware to honor the returning remains of a US Navy SEAL killed a week earlier. In keeping with the practice of past White Houses, the trip wasn't announced. News organizations agreed not to report on the trip until after Trump arrived at the base. — AP



BAGHDAD: Jared Kushner, US President Donald Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser, arrives at the Ministry of Defense. —AP

GERMAN OFFICIALS MEET WITH JOURNALIST JAILED IN TURKEY

ISTANBUL: German officials met yesterday with a German-Turkish journalist imprisoned in Istanbul for the first time since his incarceration, saying he was doing well but voicing concerns that he was being kept in jail for political purposes and calling for his release. German Foreign Ministry official Michael Roth, a deputy foreign minister, told reporters that Die Welt correspondent Deniz Yucel met with Consul General Georg Birgelen and a German consulate attorney in person.

"He's doing well overall given the circumstances, but is finding the solitary confinement a great strain," Roth said. It was the first consular contact Yucel has been allowed since he was arrested on charges of producing terrorist propaganda and incitement to hatred - accusations he denies. He was taken into custody in mid-February after reporting on a hacker attack on the email account of the country's energy minister and formally arrested later in the month.

Roth thanked Turkey for providing access to Yucel, and said Germany expects to be able to continue to send consular officials to meet with him and is working to have him freed. "He's obviously being made a political project of," Roth said, noting that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had mentioned the case. "The case has a political and a legal dimension." Roth said Yucel is only one of more than

100 journalists who are being detained in Turkey - something he said had been brought up in talks with officials there.

"Rule of law, democracy and press freedom played a large role in all conversations," he said. "And I emphasized once more that it's not just about one case... but about the situation of journalists in Turkey in general." The case has been one of several issues that have led to increased friction between Germany and Turkey in recent months. A German parliament resolution labeling the early-20th-century killing of Armenians in Turkey as "genocide" and an offensive poem about Erdogan by a German comic last year sparked the first round of tensions between the two countries.

Turkish officials' attempts to rally support among their citizens living in Germany last month for a referendum over whether to expand Erdogan's power then caused widespread irritation in Germany, and several of their public events were canceled. That caused Erdogan to accuse German officials of acting like Nazis which, in turn, prompted strong condemnation of the Turkish president's words from Chancellor Angela Merkel. Roth said part of the purpose of his visit to Turkey was also to try to ensure no further escalation, saying that the Nazi comparisons were "completely unacceptable" and "deeply hurt" Germany. —Agencies

IRAN CLERIC CLAIMS BAD DRIVING A SIN

TEHRAN: Some 700 people were killed over the Persian New Year on roads in Iran, which are among the deadliest in the world despite Islamic leaders declaring bad driving a sin. The two-week break for Nowruz that ended at the weekend actually saw a 12-percent improvement on last year's death toll, police chief Taghi Mehri said yesterday. But the horrific loss of life-with more than half a million killed over the past two decades-has led religious leaders to step in.

"Violating traffic laws is a sin, and following these rules is a religious duty," said Grand Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi last week. He was repeating a declaration he made in 2014, when he said: "Driving while tired and sleepy, illegally passing other cars and running red lights are haram (forbidden)." Iran is almost alone among middle-income countries when it comes to the scale of its road deaths.

The World Health Organization places it in the top 10 alongside extremely poor African countries such as Libya, the Democratic

Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic where drivers must contend with terrible roads and armed militants. The only other middle-income country in the top 10 is Thailand, though three-quarters of that country's road deaths involve motorcycles which are much less prevalent in Iran.

The reasons are unclear, though the highly aggressive nature of Iranian driving and poor quality of locally made cars are clearly factors. Police fight a desperate battle to keep drivers in line, with officers impounding 32,000 cars and 20,000 motorbikes for violations in the first three days of Nowruz alone.

"Unfortunately, every 71 minutes, one person dies on the country's roads due to accidents," deputy police chief Eskandar Momeni said, quoted by Tasnim news agency. "The figure for last year was one in every 60 minutes, so there has been an improvement. "But we should know that even the death of one person on the roads is shocking and we should all try to stop it." — AFP

CHELSEA CLINTON IN NO HURRY TO GET INTO POLITICS

NEW YORK: Congresswoman Clinton? President Clinton? For now, Chelsea Clinton says her only plan is to burnish her profile as an author of children's books. The former first daughter embarked on a six-state book tour yesterday that was scheduled back when she believed her mother was on the way to the White House.

There has been no internal polling, no private discussions with political consultants. No one scheduled the tour - to promote the paperback release of "It's Your World," a book aimed at middle-school students - thinking it would be an effective vehicle to launch a serious political run. She is also preparing to release an illustrated children's book in May that celebrates female leaders. "There's lots of TBD's in Chelsea's future," Clinton chief of staff Bari Lurie told The Associated Press, using the acronym for "to be determined." "But right now she's very clear: One of those TBD's is not running for office."

Still, with Hillary Clinton's political career possibly over following a devastating election loss, people can't stop speculating about whether her daughter intends to take up the family business. Chelsea Clinton was blunt in a Tuesday interview with "CBS This Morning," but also left the door open. "No, no, no," Clinton said, noting that she's pleased with her state and local public officials in New York City. "I clearly don't agree with our president, but I'm definitely not the right person to run to defeat him in 2020," she continued. "So right now, the answer is no. But I think we all need to be asking ourselves that question periodically."

Political standing

Asked whether a run for office is inevitable because her parents were both politicians, Chelsea Clinton, 37, would only say that people should be willing to fight for programs and poli-

cies they believe in. She said, "I hope that politics is in all of our DNA." The comments come as her mother's political standing reaches new lows. In December, more than 60 percent of Democrats and independents said Hillary Clinton should not run again for office, according to a Suffolk University/USA Today poll.

Political operatives in New York say that Chelsea Clinton, who lives in Manhattan, may have more options than her mother's poor numbers suggest. "The brand here is still pretty strong," said Jeffrey Pollock, a New York-based Democratic pollster, referring to liberal New York City and its suburbs. "For right now, if there's a future, it's going to be something more local than national."

Chelsea Clinton continues to serve as the vice chair of the board at the Clinton Foundation, an unpaid position that puts her at the center of decisions about the foundation's future. Among other

responsibilities, she plays an active role in fundraising, promotion and program evaluation.

She is also teaching a class on global health governance at Columbia University and recently joined the board of the internet travel site Expedia. And she is eager to speak out against President Donald Trump's policies. Late last week, she warned during a televised fundraiser for the American Civil Liberties Union that Republican-backed voter ID laws are threatening the right to vote. Over the weekend, she tweeted a link to the Los Angeles Times headline: "Our Dishonest President." And on Monday, she posted a message to her 1.6 million Twitter followers highlighting the Trump administration's plan to cut funding at the Environmental Protection Agency. "She's made it very clear: I can care deeply and fight for issues I'm passionate about and not be running for public office," Lurie said. — AP

BORDER WALL BIDDERS READY FOR A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT

SAN DIEGO: One potential bidder on President Donald Trump's border wall with Mexico wanted to know if authorities would rush to help if workers came under "hostile attack." Another asked if employees can carry firearms in states with strict gun control laws and if the government would indemnify them for using deadly force. With bids due on the first design contracts, interested companies are preparing for the worst if they get the potentially lucrative job.

A US official with knowledge of the plans who spoke on condition of anonymity because the details haven't been made public said four to 10 bidders are expected to be chosen to build prototypes. They will be constructed on a roughly quarter-mile (400-meter) strip of federally owned land in San Diego within 120 feet of the border, though a final decision has not been made on the precise spot, the official said. The government anticipates spending \$200,000 to \$500,000 on each prototype.

The Border Patrol and local police would establish a buffer zone around the construction site if necessary, the US official said. The San Diego police and sheriff's departments said Monday they will respect constitutional rights to free speech and assembly for any peaceful, law-abiding protesters. Enrique Morones, executive director of Border Angels, said his group plans to protest.

"There will be a lot of different activity - protests, prayer vigils - on both sides of the wall," said Morones, whose immigrant advocacy group is based in San Diego. "We pray and hope that they're peaceful." Michael Evangelista-Ysasaga, chief executive of The Penna Group LLC, a general contractor in Fort Worth, Texas, said he has received about a dozen death threats since publicly expressing interest in bidding, including one from a woman who told him she hired a private investigator to trail him.

Evangelista-Ysasaga said he bid in part because he wants broad immigration reform. Securing the border, he said, is a prerequisite for granting a path to citizenship to millions in the US illegally. "We didn't enter this lightly," he said. "We looked at it and said we have to be a productive part of the solution."

Betraying their country

Building a wall on the Mexican border



SAN DIEGO: In this June 13, 2013, file photo, hands from Daniel Zambrano of Tijuana, Mexico, hold on to the bars that make up the border wall separating the US and Mexico as the border meets the Pacific Ocean. — AP

was a cornerstone of Trump's presidential campaign and a flashpoint for his detractors. The multibillion-dollar project along the 2,000-mile border has many outspoken critics, including the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Mexico, which said last week that Mexican companies expressing interest were betraying their country. US Customs and Border Protection said in a statement that it would pick multiple contractors to build prototypes by around June 1 and will name only the winning bidders. The agency said last month that the prototypes should be about 30 feet long and 18 to 30 feet high.

The winning bidders must submit a security plan with details including "fall back positions, evacuation routines and methods, muster area, medical staff members/availability, number of security personnel, qualifications, years of experience, etc. in the event of a hostile attack," according to the solicitation. A chain-link fence with barbed wire around the construction site is required. The agency said it won't provide security.

Bidders are also asked to demonstrate experience "executing high-profile, high-visibility and politically contentious" projects. The agency, responding to questions from companies on a website for government contractors, said the Border Patrol would respond as needed if there is a hostile attack, but companies were responsible for security. The government won't allow waivers from state gun laws or indemnify companies whose workers use deadly force. The website for contractors lists more than 200 companies that signed up for email notifications on the design contract but it's unclear how many of those will apply. Bidders must have done border security or similar projects worth \$25 million in the past five years to qualify.

Ronald Colburn, Border Patrol deputy chief when hundreds of miles of fences were built under President George W. Bush's administration, said companies should plan on training workers to know when to seek cover and stay put and when to retreat. "Most of those organizations are probably fairly accustomed to that," said Colburn, who retired in 2009. "Some of them may be learning for the first time, that kind of risk at the borders." — AP



WASHINGTON: Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Sen Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, wraps up the meeting on Capitol Hill. — AP

SENATE BEGINS DEBATE ON GORSUCH, HEADED FOR DRAMATIC SHOWDOWN

'NUCLEAR OPTION' ON SENATE FLOOR REMAINS A POSSIBILITY

WASHINGTON: Democrats have secured the votes to block President Donald Trump's Supreme Court nominee under current rules, putting the Senate on a partisan collision course over confirming Neil Gorsuch to a lifetime appointment that could reverberate for decades. Debate over the 49-year-old appellate judge gets under way in the full Senate on Tuesday, with Republicans and Democrats bitterly divided over the next steps.

While Democrats have the votes for a filibuster, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell is ready to lead the GOP in a unilateral change in a Senate floor procedure so significant that it has been dubbed the "nuclear option." The tactic if invoked would lower the confirmation threshold to a filibuster-proof simple majority of 51 votes in the 100-member Senate rather than the 60 votes currently needed to stop delaying tactics by opponents.

The likelihood of more partisan wrangling left veteran GOP senators frustrated - and hoping that Democrats would relent in their opposition to the Colorado jurist. The nuclear option would be "damaging to the Senate, damaging to them and damaging to the country. Maybe a light will come on somewhere," said Sen Lamar Alexander, a Tennessee Republican.

Activist approach

After hours of debate Monday, the Judiciary Committee voted 11-9, along party lines, to send Gorsuch's nomination to the full Senate, where McConnell, R-Ky., has vowed he will be confirmed on Friday. Sen Chris Coons of Delaware became the key 41st vote for the Democrats, declaring during a committee debate that Gorsuch's conservative record showed an activist approach to the law, often in favor of business interests, and that he evaded questions during his confirmation hearings.

Coons also said that Republicans' treatment of former President Barack Obama's Supreme Court nominee, Merrick Garland, left lasting scars after they denied him so much as a hearing following the death of Justice Antonin Scalia early last year. "We are at a historic moment in the history of the United States Senate" due to actions by both parties, Coons said. "We have eroded the process for reaching agreement and dishonored our long traditions of acting above partisanship."

The long-term consequences of the coming confrontation could be profound, as the rules change Republicans intend to enact would apply to future Supreme Court nominees as well, allowing them to be voted onto the court without any input from the minority party. And though predicting a justice's votes can be difficult, confirmation of the 49-year-old Gorsuch is expected to restore the conservative majority that existed while Scalia was alive and that majority could be expanded in coming decades if Republicans remain in control of the process. Some of the more liberal justices are among the oldest on the court, so more court openings could pop up.

Bright spot

For Republicans and Trump, Gorsuch's confirmation would be a moment of triumph, a bright spot in a troubled young administration that's failed on the legislative front with the health care bill and is under investigation over Russia connections. The nomination of Gorsuch, by contrast, has won universal praise from Republicans, some of whom call his appointment Trump's best move so far as president.

Gorsuch has spent more than a decade on the federal appeals bench in Denver where he's issued consistently conservative rulings, and he appeared on Trump's list of potential candidates partly generated by the Federalist Society and Heritage Foundation during the campaign.

Gorsuch's confirmation would also serve as vindication for McConnell's strategy of refusing to fill Scalia's seat last year, instead leaving it open for the next president, even though few imagined then that that person would be Trump.

The showdown over the "nuclear option," expected on the Senate floor Thursday, is likely to be accompanied by much hand-wringing from senators bemoaning the decay of the chamber's traditions of bipartisanship and comity. But both parties are to blame. When the Democrats were in the majority, they removed the 60-vote threshold for nominees to federal benches lower in the judicial system than the Supreme Court. This change came in 2013 as Republicans, who were in the minority at the time, were blocking Obama picks for critical court vacancies. Republicans said at the time that Democrats would come to regret the move.

Gorsuch will be confirmed "and he should be," John Cornyn of Texas, the No. 2 Senate Republican, said during Monday's debate. "If Judge Gorsuch is unacceptable to our Democratic colleagues, there will never be a nominee by this president that you will find acceptable. Never."

Gorsuch now counts 55 supporters in the Senate: the 52 Republicans, along with three moderate Democrats from states Trump won last November - Joe Manchin of West Virginia, Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota and Joe Donnelly of Indiana. A fourth Senate Democrat, Michael Bennet from Gorsuch's home state of Colorado, has said he will not join in the filibuster against Gorsuch but has not said how he will vote on final passage. Democrats claim the Republicans' treatment of Garland was worse than anything they ever did or are doing, and with Trump in the White House they are under intense pressure from liberal voters to oppose the president on every front. — AP

HEAVY STORMS SWEEPING THROUGH SOUTH; 5 KILLED

JACKSON: A Mississippi woman who desperately tried to direct rescuers to her sinking vehicle after it skidded into a rain-swollen creek was among five people killed in storms across the South. Jacqueline Williams, 52, was running a newspaper delivery route when her car slid off a road into a creek in her hometown of Florence before dawn Monday, authorities said. She dialed 911 from the car as it went down, said Rankin County Coroner David Ruth.

Ruth said Williams was trying to relay her location to a dispatcher as the car settled into the swirling waters. "She was trying to tell the dispatcher where she was, and she could actually hear the sirens," Ruth said. The two lost contact, and Ruth said a swift-water recovery team later found Williams' body in the creek outside the car. Florence Police Chief Richard Thomas said the current where Williams died was fast and strong.

He said authorities got a call from a woman saying her car was being swept into the water.

Authorities immediately began looking but couldn't find her in time. Records from the county's 911 center show the first call came at 4:35 a.m., responders were dispatched within 17 seconds and arrived at 4:42 a.m. "It was really quick," Thomas said.

Williams' body was eventually recovered, and authorities pulled her small vehicle out of the water about three hours later. Florence is a town of about 4,000 people. The chief described Williams and her family as "really good people." "Twenty-some-odd years ago, our two boys played baseball together," Thomas said.

Destruction

In the tiny Mississippi Delta town of Glendora, the mayor's wife died Sunday when strong winds toppled a tree onto the couple's house. Mayor Johnny B. Thomas was briefly hospitalized with injuries after his wife Shirley was killed, said town clerk Aquarius Simmons. "She was a nice lady. Very sweet. Everybody

loved her," Simmons said of Shirley Thomas. Two other people died earlier in Louisiana, and a man died Monday in South Carolina after storms swept through the state. Some schools in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama canceled or delayed the start of classes Monday so students wouldn't travel in heavy rain or on flooded streets. Louisiana Gov John Bel Edwards signed a statewide emergency declaration Monday before embarking on a trip to survey storm damage in two central and southern parishes.

Some of the heaviest rains fell in central Louisiana from Sunday into early Monday. CS Ross, a National Weather Service hydrologist in Shreveport, said nearly 8 inches of rain was reported in Grant Parish in the north central part of the state. A tornado flipped a mobile home Sunday in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana, killing a mother and her 3-year-old daughter, while on Monday a weather event authorities also believed to be a tornado flipped a mobile home in Union County, South Carolina, killing



BREAUX BRIDGE: The remains of a trailer lie where a woman and her 3-year-old daughter were killed during a severe storm. — AP

one person, said Kim Bailey, administrative assistant to Union County Sheriff David Taylor.

JC Matthews Jr, 65, was dead by the time emergency help arrived at his destroyed home in Whitmire, the county coroner's office said

Monday. In Louisiana, the storm also brought hurricane-force winds, large hail and sparked flash flooding. Up to 6 inches of rain fell in some areas. Breaux Bridge is about 50 miles west of Baton Rouge. — AP

UK TOURISM BODY CALLS FOR VISA-FREE EU TRAVEL

LONDON: Britain should aim to secure visa-free travel between the UK and the European Union in upcoming negotiations to leave the bloc, an association of travel agents said yesterday, adding that a transitional deal could also help the sector. Britain formally began its divorce from the European Union last Wednesday, and airlines have demanded that their sector is prioritized in the forthcoming two

years of negotiations to ensure there is no disruption to flights.

The Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) said the maintenance of visa-free travel between the EU and UK after Brexit was among its key priorities. Other goals for ABTA included the protection of Britons' ability to travel freely to Europe and beyond and safeguards for consumer rights, as well as stabil-

ity and growth opportunities for British businesses.

"Travel and tourism is one of the UK's largest industries and it is vital that the Government makes sure it can continue to thrive during and after the negotiations," said Mark Tanzer, Chief Executive of ABTA. The trade body also said a transitional arrangement may be needed, to give consumers certainty given that some holidays are sold a year

and a half in advance. Currently Britain is due to leave the European Union in March 2019, whether or not an agreement over the terms of its departure can be reached.

Unlike trade arrangements, which will default to World Trade Organisation rules if no deal is reached, the aviation sector has "no international fall-back option," the ABTA report said. — Reuters

OUT WITH THE OLD? OUTSIDERS SHAKING UP FRENCH ELECTION

VOTER SENTIMENT IS CONSTANTLY SHIFTING

PARIS: Imagine if Americans elected a president who was neither Democrat nor Republican. France may be facing a similarly shocking scenario: As the 11 presidential candidates head into a debate, the traditional left-right contenders are overshadowed by rivals pledging to turn today's system on its head. The debate may be pivotal. Polls show voter sentiment is constantly shifting, and a third of voters remain undecided with less than three weeks left before the April 23 first round. The two top candidates then advance to the decisive May 7 runoff. Here's a look at the main candidates and their prospects:

Macron

Bookmakers and financial markets are assuming the presidency will go to independent centrist Emmanuel Macron, a 39-year-old upstart who has no party. However, polls show his support is wobbly, with many of his potential voters still unconvinced he's the man to run this nuclear-armed country. A former banker and protégé of Socialist President Francois Hollande, Macron became the surprise front-runner on

promises of energizing the world's sixth-largest economy and ditching the left-right political spectrum. Lacking an entrenched party machine, he may struggle to build a parliamentary majority. He's already looking beyond the presidential race, and courting political heavyweights among the Socialists and the conservative Republicans ahead of legislative elections in June.

Le Pen

Far-right leader Marine Le Pen has set the agenda for the presidential campaign by railing against immigration and a perceived "Islamization" of France. She's such a political force that, for many voters, the race is about Le Pen vs. the rest. While all polls suggest she would lose the runoff to Macron, she points to the victories of U.S. President Donald Trump and Brexit as proof that "anything is possible," and says she can pull off a surprise populist win. It's unlikely, but not impossible. French voters appear restless after years of economic stagnation and broken promises. Unlike Macron, Le Pen enjoys solid support unlikely to be diminished

by the debate or by new campaign scandals. And she has so successfully detoxified her once-pariah party that voters from left and right have joined her cause.

Melenchon

The latest poll darling is Jean-Luc Melenchon, an anti-globalization campaigner with Communist Party backing and a powerful social media presence. With humor and a far-left conviction, he shone in the last presidential debate and his ratings have spiked in recent days. Pollsters say voters think he understands their daily struggles and lives better than any other candidate. Melenchon would yank France out of NATO, European treaties and international trade pacts. He sports jeans and a Chairman Mao-style jacket at campaign events.

The old guard

So where does that leave the traditional parties that have led France for decades? Possibly in the dust. Conservative Francois Fillon hopes his long-standing support among farmers, observant Catholics and the finance world will be enough to push him into the runoff. But corruption charges are crippling his campaign and have deeply damaged his Republicans party. Accused of employing his wife and two children for taxpayer-funded jobs they never did, Fillon denies wrongdoing. But polls now put him a distant third, behind Macron and Le Pen. The governing Socialists, meanwhile, are on the verge of a stunning collapse. President Hollande is so unpopular he decided not to seek re-election, so the Socialists nominated Benoît Hamon. However, even his promise of a universal income have failed to charm voters. And his refusal to join forces with Melenchon will split the left-wing vote - and likely prevent either candidate from reaching the runoff.

The small candidates

The six other candidates could suck enough votes away from top contenders to sway the race. Right-winger Francois Asselineau is campaigning for a "Fxit" from the European Union, as is left-leaning Jacques Cheminade, while Nicolas Dupont-Aignan also wants to restore France's "sovereignty." The far left is further splintered between Trotskyist Nathalie Arthaud and Philippe Poutou of the New Anti-Capitalist Party. Centrist candidate Jean Lassalle made headlines in 2006 when he lost 21 kilograms during a hunger strike for preserving jobs in his constituency. — AP



AUBERVILLIERS: From left to right, Conservative presidential candidate Francois Fillon, Independent centrist presidential candidate for the presidential election Emmanuel Macron, Far-left presidential candidate for the presidential election Jean-Luc Melenchon, Far-right presidential candidate for the presidential election Marine Le Pen and Socialist candidate for the presidential election Benoit Hamon pose for a group photo prior to a television debate at French TV station TF1 on March 20, 2017. — AP

IN ST PETERSBURG, RELIEF AND ANGER AFTER BLASTS

SAINT PETERSBURG: Gently placing flowers outside a Saint Petersburg metro station to honor the 14 people killed in yesterday's devastating suicide bombing, Ksenia Zashikhina ponders what might have been. "I was going to take the metro a few minutes before the explosion," said the 27-year-old, her voice cracking with emotion. "I don't know why but I changed my mind and went on foot. I found out what had happened on the way. All day, I was thinking that that could have been me," she told AFP.

Alongside her, a sparse crowd of residents from Russia's second city came to pay their respects, adding bouquets and candles to the rapidly growing impromptu memorial. One man, Nikolai Kazachenko, was clearly in shock, his eyes red from sobbing and cradled from time to

time by his wife. He endlessly repeated to anyone who would listen how "God saved me" from the blast that claimed 14 lives and caused horrific injuries to dozens more. His friend was also in the metro and also survived. Mixed with the grief was a sense of shock that terror could strike their city that had seemed far from being a target-unlike Paris, Berlin or London. Even threats to Moscow "seemed far away from us," said Dmitry Leonov as he picked his way through the candles and flower tributes lining the gates of the station. "Now we're all under threat," he said.

Another resident, who gave his name as Arseny, said: "I don't understand it. We're all living together in a beautiful country, in a beautiful city. How could anyone do such a thing?" However, for others, the pain and grief is still raw.

One woman screamed that she still had no news from her son and berated politicians one by one until she was dragged by a friend from the crowd in floods of furious tears.

Nervous commuters

Meanwhile, life was gradually returning to normal in the city as boulevards that had been silent and blocked off in the aftermath of the attack on Monday again rang out with the noise of traffic and the honking of horns. The metro system, which carries hundreds of thousands of passengers daily and is seen as the lifeblood of the city, was also creeping gradually back to life-although with a heavy police presence and a nervousness running through the commuters.

"Everyone in the metro can only think of this," said 45-year-old Svetlana Golubeva, 45. "It's not nice

but I'm mainly scared for my children when they take the metro on their own." Saint Petersburg is also the hometown of President Vladimir Putin, who came himself to mourn late Monday and place his own flowers at the scene.

Just before the president's arrival, police politely but firmly pushed back a group of young men who had come to offer their services for the clean-up operation. One of them, Nikolai, 33, made no secret of the fact that he had been drinking for most of the day to dull the pain. Although there has yet been no claims of responsibility, Nikolai was in no doubt, blaming the president's "tolerance" towards "Islamists." "I'm angry at our own country. We can't protect ourselves from terrorists," complained Ilya, a friend of Nikolai's, before laying her own tribute to the 14 dead. — AFP



ST PETERSBURG: A boy lights a candle at a symbolic memorial at Sennaya subway station. — AP



BANJUL: A figure of the Arch 22 monument to mark the July 22, 1994 bloodless coup led by former President Yahya Jammeh is draped with a shirt-shaped banner reading 'Gambia has decided.' — AFP

GAMBIA PREPARES FOR ITS FIRST POST-JAMMEH POLL

BANJUL: The Gambia holds its first election Thursday since the downfall of longtime leader Yahya Jammeh, with expectations high that new lawmakers will overhaul a national assembly once derided as a mere rubberstamp. Gambians complain that under Jammeh, who ruled for 22 years, laws were often made by executive decree and buttressed by legislation much later on, if at all.

The 239 registered candidates representing nine different political parties yesterday ended campaigning for the 48 seats up for election in the Banjul legislature. Five seats are also appointed by the president, totaling 53 spots in the tiny west African nation's parliament, and with just 886,000 registered voters according to the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), every ballot matters.

Awa Lowe, a resident of Kanifing, a Banjul suburb, told AFP expectations were high that the new parliament would ensure true accountability for government decisions. "The next parliament will not be a rubberstamp National Assembly that passes any bill that comes before parliamentarians," Lowe told AFP. "Parliament will be diverse and that is what will make it interesting. No party would have the numerical strength to pass bills that are not in line with the interest of the people," Lowe added.

Altered landscape

The landscape of Gambian politics could not have shifted more dramatically since the last legislative elections in 2012, when Jammeh's Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC) took 43 seats, with a large number uncontested due to an opposition boycott. Among the parties running this year, the United Democratic Party (UDP) is fielding the greatest number of candidates after long being seen as the strongest opposition force in Gambian politics.

Alagie Darboe, deputy administrative secretary of the UDP who is standing for a seat in The Gambia's West Coast Region,

said the party was aiming to win in 44 constituencies. "The support we are getting from the electorate during the campaign is a clear indication that we are going to win," he told AFP. President Adama Barrow, who won December's presidential race, was a former UDP treasurer who had resigned to run as the candidate of an unprecedented opposition coalition.

After a drawn-out crisis caused by Jammeh's initial refusal to step down, mediation efforts by west African leaders and the threat of military intervention eventually delivered the country's first ever democratic transition. Barrow's cabinet is made up of the heads of seven different political parties, all of which will field candidates in Thursday's poll.

The president had initially said the opposition coalition was a "family" and would run again as a group in the legislative poll, but internal tensions broke apart the agreement. As a result, parties whose leaders govern together as ministers will be pitted against each other at the ballot box, stoking tensions that some close to the government say could play into the hands of the APRC.

Yankuba Colley, the APRC's campaign chief, said the party knew mistakes were made during the presidential election, but added that his candidates were working hard to show it was still a vital force. "We are optimistic that we are going to defeat our opponents in the 29 constituencies (where) we fielded candidates," he told AFP. "Some of our party militants felt they made errors in the presidential elections," he added. "Some of our militants thought APRC was dead... they are now convinced the party is alive."

Although much has changed since the last vote, one peculiarly Gambian institution remains firmly in place. Gambians vote with marbles dropped into colored metal barrels representing the different candidates, and despite rumors of reform, the system will be used again for the legislative elections, IEC chairman Aliou Momar Njie said. — AFP

POPE MAKES APPOINTMENTS AMID CRITICISM OF SEX ABUSE RESPONSE

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis yesterday named a new official to oversee the Vatican office that processes clerical sex abuse cases amid mounting criticism over a yearslong backlog of cases and Francis' handling of the problem.

The promotion of Monsignor John Kennedy to head of the discipline section of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith was the second abuse-related appointment in recent days. Francis named the Rev. Hans Zollner, one of the Catholic Church's top experts on fighting abuse and protecting children, as an adviser to the Vatican's office for clergy on Saturday. Francis and the Vatican have come under fresh scrutiny over their response to the abuse crisis since Irish survivor Marie Collins resigned from the pope's sex abuse advisory commission on March 1, citing "unacceptable" resistance to the commission's proposals from the Vatican's doctrine office.

Collins' departure laid bare the cultural chasm between the commission's outside experts, who proposed best-in-class ideas for protecting children, and the reality of the Vatican bureaucracy and its legal and administrative limitations. Kennedy was an assistant to the previous discipline section chief, the Rev. Miguel Funes Diaz, one of three congregation officials who recently left. The Vatican spokesman, Greg Burke, said Francis had approved their replacements as well as

additional staff to handle cases, which by some estimates take two to three years to process. The congregation assumed responsibility for processing abuse cases in 2001 after then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the future Pope Benedict XVI, determined that dioceses weren't disciplining pedophiles as church law required. The change required bishops and religious superiors to submit all credible accusations to the congregation, which decides how to proceed.

Cardinal Sean O'Malley, who heads Francis' abuse advisory commission, said in a recent interview that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith needed more resources to deal with the caseload and related issues.

Francis earlier this year named O'Malley to the congregation's membership in a first key move to place commission members inside Vatican offices to lend their expertise.

Zollner, the new addition to the clergy office's board of advisers, is another member of the pope's abuse advisory commission. He heads the Center for Child Protection at the Jesuits' Pontifical Gregorian University, which runs programs to train church personnel in child safety and abuse awareness. As an adviser to the Congregation for Clergy, he will have a hand in advising the Vatican office responsible for training the world's Catholic priests in best practices. — AP

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TRUMP-XI MEET WATCHED FOR CLUES OF FUTURE RELATIONSHIP

'WE'RE GOING TO GET DOWN TO SOME VERY SERIOUS BUSINESS'

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping probably won't give President Donald Trump a round of golf during their first face-to-face meeting this week, but he may find it worthwhile to ensure his American counterpart does not feel like he's leaving empty-handed.

Some view the informal venue of the summit Thursday and Friday - Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida - as a sign that neither side anticipates important outcomes. Trump, however tweeted last week that he expects "a very difficult" meeting, and on Friday said: "We're going to get down to some very serious business," referencing what he believes is China's negative impact on the US economy, especially manufacturing jobs. China, for its part, has remained largely sanguine about the event, with Vice Foreign Minister Zheng Zeguang telling reporters that "both sides look forward to a successful meeting so that a correct direction can be set for the growth of bilateral relations."

Like many nations, China is still grappling with Trump's mercurial nature after the relative transparency and predictability of the bilateral relationship under Trump's predecessor Barack Obama. Both during his campaign and after his victory, Trump complained repeatedly over China's allegedly unfair trade practices, its perceived lack of assistance in reining in North Korea's nuclear ambitions and its drive to cement control over the South China Sea.

Symbolic victory

Some analysts believe Xi might be willing to hand Trump a symbolic victory on trade to put a positive spin on the meeting. "Xi



This combination of pictures created on April 04, 2017 shows US President Donald Trump in St Louis, Missouri on October 9, 2016 and China's leader Xi Jinping in Beijing on December 5, 2012. — AFP

probably can't accommodate Trump on sovereignty and security issues, but he has a lot of leeway on economics," said Robert Sutter, a China expert at George Washington University in Washington, DC.

Yet even if Xi is able to offer Trump deliverables, he will still have to deal with "a restless US president valuing unpredictability and seeking advantage for his agenda going forward," Sutter said. Trump was seen as moving trade even more to the forefront when he signed a pair of executive orders

Friday focused on reducing the trade deficit. Coupled together, the orders appeared to be a symbolic shot at China, which accounted for the vast bulk - \$347 billion - of last year's \$502 billion trade deficit.

While aides insisted the timing was coincidental, the administration touted the moves as evidence of it taking an aggressive but analytical approach to closing a trade gap that is largely due to the influx of goods from China. Still, Trump told the Financial Times newspaper that during his meeting

with Xi, he doesn't "want to talk about tariffs yet, perhaps the next time we meet." Having suffered a major blow with the failure of health care reform, Trump will be seeking to claim some kind of victory in his encounter with Xi, said June Teufel Dreyer, professor of political science at the University of Miami.

Trump's comments on trade and other issues "portend some hard bargaining," Dreyer said. She added, however, that slowing economic growth in China could limit Xi's options for negotiating on trade. "So the stage is set for a battle royal," Dreyer said.

Meanwhile, China continues to oppose the tough measures demanded of it to address former close ally North Korea, fearing a collapse of the Pyongyang regime would bring a crush of refugees and possibly US and South Korean troops on its border. Trump told the Financial Times the US is prepared to act alone if China does not take a tougher stand against North Korea's nuclear program.

"China has great influence over North Korea," Trump said. "And China will either decide to help us with North Korea, or they won't. And if they do that will be very good for China, and if they don't it won't be good for anyone." Add to the mix the issue of the South China Sea, where China has built and armed man-made islands despite the concerns of neighboring countries; and Taiwan, the self-governing island democracy that China claims as its own territory, and that some in Trump's administration would like to build a stronger relationship with.

Positive relationship

Despite such divisions, Beijing seems committed to establishing a positive relationship between the two leaders. "It is fundamental for them to improve understanding between each other," said Xiong Zhiyong, a professor at Peking University's School of International Relations. "Both sides have shown their willingness to cooperate and they are expected to make a commitment for cooperation." China, Xiong said, realizes that Trump "is a leader with a strong personality."

So far, few details of the summit's agenda have been released. China has said only that Trump and his wife, Melania, would host Xi and his wife, famed songstress Peng Liyuan, at a welcoming banquet. As personalities, Xi and Trump are a study in contrasts. A lifelong Communist Party apparatchik and son of a former vice premier, Xi has built his career with a cautious approach, avoiding controversial reforms and rarely speaking out in ways that would distract from his core message. His nearly five years as head of the ruling party have been defined by a campaign to achieve the "Chinese dream" of increasing prosperity while tackling endemic corruption. While Trump is an avid golfer, Xi has never been known to hit the links. In fact, his administration has actually pursued a crackdown on golf-course development, pushing instead for mass participation in soccer. Still, outwardly cordial relations with U.S. presidents are also a longstanding Chinese tradition, in recognition of the importance of the relationship. — AP

News

in brief

North Korea warns to hit back over sanctions

SEOUL: North Korea has warned it will retaliate if the global community ramps up sanctions over its latest round of weapons tests. The warning comes as President Donald Trump threatened the United States was prepared to go it alone in bringing Pyongyang to heel if China did not step in. The isolated state has quickened its missile program in recent months, with a volley of tests it says are putting it closer to acquiring the ability to hit the US mainland with a nuclear weapon. US-based analysts have said North Korea appears to be preparing a new atomic test. It has staged five nuclear tests so far, two last year. North Korea's foreign ministry on Monday assailed Washington for its tough talk and for an ongoing joint military exercise with South Korea and Japan which Pyongyang sees as a dress rehearsal for invasion. The "reckless actions" are driving the tense situation on the Korean peninsula "to the brink of a war," a ministry spokesman was quoted as saying by the official KCNA news agency. The idea that the US could deprive Pyongyang of its "nuclear deterrent" through sanctions is "the wildest dream." "Now that the US fails to face up to the trend of times but incites confrontation to strangle the DPRK (North Korea), the DPRK is left with no option but to take necessary counteraction against it. "The world will soon witness what eventful steps the DPRK will take to frustrate the hideous and reckless sanctions racket," he said without elaborating.

Afghanistan sacks generals over brazen hospital attack

KABUL: Afghanistan yesterday sacked 12 army officers including two generals for negligence over an insurgent attack on the country's largest military hospital, which pointed to a spectacular intelligence failure. Gunmen disguised as doctors stormed Sardar Daud Khan hospital in Kabul last month, with multiple surviving staff telling AFP that insiders including two interns were among the attackers. The military head of intelligence and the official in charge of medical support were among those who have been dismissed and will face prosecution, the defense ministry said. "They have been sacked for negligence of duty over the hospital attack," ministry spokesman Mohammad Radmanish told AFP. The carnage inside the heavily guarded hospital was a major embarrassment for the military, spotlighting how insurgents have managed to infiltrate top government institutions in Afghanistan. The defense ministry denies that insiders were involved and asserts that only 50 people were killed. But security sources and the survivors, some of whom counted bodies, told AFP that the death toll exceeded 100. Public anger has grown over the episode, with speculation swirling on social media that such a brazen attack on the tightly guarded hospital could not have happened without the complicity of high-ranking officials.

Thai junta secures \$58m for more Chinese tanks

BANGKOK: Thailand's government yesterday agreed to buy 10 tanks from China for \$58 million in the latest defense spending by a junta with a taste for Chinese hardware. The military is replacing its US-made M41 rolling stock with Chinese VT-4 tanks, as it continues to upgrade its equipment three years after seizing power from a civilian government. The Southeast Asian country has already snapped up 28 Chinese tanks and secured around \$380 million for a submarine-with cash being sought for two more. Yesterday, the cabinet approved the purchase of 10 more VT-4s for around two billion baht (\$58 million), Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan told reporters. "These are to replace the M41 tanks which we have used since World War II," he added. Thailand is facing a decade-long insurgency in its southernmost provinces but rarely deploys tanks there. Its last international conflict came during border skirmishes with Cambodia in 2011.

MALAYSIA RIGHTS PANEL DISTURBED OVER 600 PLUS DEATHS IN PRISONS

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's national human rights panel yesterday said it was disturbed by more than 600 deaths at immigration detention centers and prisons over the last two years, and called for immediate reform. In its 2016 annual report, the panel, known by its Malay acronym, Suhakam, said there were more than 100 deaths in immigration detention centers and 521 deaths in prisons in 2015 and 2016. Twelve people died in police lock-ups in 2015.

Last week, citing documents from Suhakam, Reuters reported that 118 foreigners, including undocumented workers, refugees and asylum seekers, had died at detention centres in the last two years. More than half the dead were from Myanmar. Suhakam said deaths mostly stemmed from diseases in all prisons and detention centres, where the government should look to improve conditions and healthcare.

"There is little interest in the human rights of detainees," said Chairman Razali Ismail. "This attitude is reflected in government budgetary priorities and the resources made available for the running and upkeep of all places of detention." Particularly in immigration detention centres, people spent long periods unable to move freely or sleep comfortably in overcrowded cells, he said, where conditions sometimes deteriorated to become "inhumane."

The government did not immediately respond to requests for comment on Suhakam's report, published yesterday. Former detainees, government agencies and rights groups have told Reuters of grim living conditions in detention camps

that are overcrowded and unhygienic. Some said they received insufficient food, water or healthcare, and many developed skin and lung infections, or contagious diseases. All those interviewed also alleged they were beaten by camp guards or saw others being beaten.

'Unfit and unsafe'

Suhakam documents reviewed by Reuters showed detainees died from lung infections, heart-related conditions and the bacterial disease leptospirosis. No cause was attributed for 50 deaths. Last week, deputy home minister Nur Jazlan Mohamed told Reuters his ministry had hit a budget brick wall in efforts to improve conditions in immigration detention centers. Malaysia's 13 detention centres had a total of 86,795 detainees during various periods in 2016, the Enforcement Agency Integrity Commission says.

Two of the detention centers Suhakam visited last year were in dilapidated condition, the agency said in its report. Three blocks of a detention centre in southern Johor state, and two blocks on northern Penang island were held "unfit and unsafe for occupation," by the Public Works Department, it added. The rights agency said the immigration department last week informed it of "major reforms," such as better healthcare and repair of dilapidated structures. Southeast Asia-based migrant and refugee protection group Fortify Rights urged a criminal investigation into the deaths.—Reuters

DUTERTE FIRES MINISTER AFTER 'CORRUPTION' ROW

MANILA: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte said yesterday he had fired his interior minister for corruption as signs of infighting rocked his government. "It's corruption," Duterte said about the sacking of Ismael Sueno, who supervised the president's war on drugs that has left thousands dead.

Sueno, who was fired at a cabinet meeting late Monday, was blamed for what Duterte described as the anomalous purchase by the interior ministry of fire trucks from a foreign country. "I do not have to belabour the point. Just remember my promises to the people: No corruption, drugs, criminality," Duterte said. "I respect the president's decision but I am not corrupt," Sueno, 69, said in a statement.

Sueno said he was not involved in

the firetruck deal as it was approved by Duterte's predecessor. He also said his conscience was clear and he was willing to face any investigation. Asked if Sueno might face charges, Duterte's spokesman Ernesto Abella told reporters: "Let us wait for the president to take his subsequent actions." "The summary dismissal served as a warning that Mr Duterte would not countenance any questionable or legally untenable decisions by any member of the cabinet," Abella added.

Last month Perfecto Yasay was forced to quit as foreign minister after Congress ruled that he lied to them over his US citizenship. Abella said the loss of another cabinet member was not a sign of trouble but proof that Duterte was serious about restoring trust in govern-

ment. Duterte said he would scout for a replacement for Sueno.

In Congress, two other close Duterte allies, House Speaker Pantaleon Alvarez and Congressman Antonio Florendo, have been publicly feuding for weeks, with Duterte trying to stay out of the quarrel. Alvarez has accused Florendo, a key contributor in the Duterte election campaign, of corruption, but Florendo denies the charge. Duterte won election by a landslide last May largely on his promise to launch a war on illegal drugs. Although the campaign has proved popular at home, the president has faced international criticism for thousands of alleged extrajudicial killings which human rights advocates say were carried out as part of the anti-drug initiative.—AFP



TAGUIG CITY: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, right, reviews the troops with Army Chief Lt Gen Glorioso Miranda, left, during the 120th anniversary celebration of the Philippine Army. — AP



NEW DELHI: Tibetan monks sit on a bench outside a temple at Majnu Ka Tilla. — AP

INDIA-CHINA ROW DEEPENS AS DALAI LAMA ARRIVES IN INDIA

GAUHATI: India said yesterday that China should not interfere in its internal affairs, as the Dalai Lama began a weeklong visit to India's remote northeast that Beijing has protested. The Tibetan spiritual leader was greeted by cheering supporters as he arrived in Arunachal Pradesh. China claims the partly ethnically Tibetan Himalayan state as its own territory, and warned last month of "severe damage" to relations with India and increased regional instability if the Dalai Lama proceeds with his trip.

Indian Junior Home Minister Kiren Rijju said yesterday that New Delhi respects Beijing's "one China" policy and expects China to accept India's policies. "Arunachal Pradesh is an inseparable part of India and China should not object to the Dalai Lama's visit and interfere in India's internal affairs," he said. The Dalai Lama is visiting the state at the invitation of the people of Arunachal Pradesh, Rijju said. "As a democratic country, India cannot interfere in the religious affairs of any community," he said.

Hundreds of supporters, some waving Tibetan flags, cheered as the Dalai Lama's motorcade entered Bomdila, a town in Arunachal Pradesh that borders China. The Dalai Lama had to cancel his plans to fly to the state due to bad weather, giving people in Bomdila a surprise chance to greet their spiritual leader. This is the Dalai Lama's seventh visit to Arunachal Pradesh, and his first since 2009. Lama Tashi, a senior monk, said by phone from Bomdila that

there was "tremendous enthusiasm among all of us here over the visit." "This visit is purely related to culture and faith, and there is no politics involved," he said. The Dalai Lama will travel to the Arunachal Pradesh district of Tawang on Thursday, where he is scheduled to consecrate a monastery and address his followers. People from nearby areas, including from the Himalayan country of Bhutan, which borders Arunachal Pradesh, were already gathering at Tawang, local officials said. "The mood in Tawang is very joyous and spiritual," said Sonam Chombey, a Tawang official.

Last month, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said that Beijing has expressed its concerns to New Delhi on numerous occasions and urged India to avoid offering a place for the Dalai Lama to carry out anti-China separatist activities. The frontier between the two Asian giants remains tense more than 50 years after they fought a brief but bloody border war high in the peaks. China claims about 90,000 square kilometers in Arunachal Pradesh, referred to informally by some Chinese as "Southern Tibet." India says China is occupying 38,000 square kilometers of its territory on the Aksai Chin plateau. More than a dozen rounds of talks have failed to make substantial progress on the dispute, although there have been relatively few confrontations in recent years. — AP



KHAN SHEIKHOUN, Syria: Victims of a suspected chemical attack are seen in this town in northern Idlib province yesterday. — AP

OUTRAGE AS SYRIA 'CHEMICAL ATTACK' KILLS SCORES IN IDLIB

BEIRUT: A suspected Syrian government chemical attack killed scores of people, including children, in the northwestern province of Idlib yesterday, a monitoring group, medics and rescue workers in the rebel-held area said. The Syrian military denied responsibility and said it would never use chemical weapons. The head of the health authority in rebel-held Idlib said more than 50 people had been killed and 300 wounded. The Union of Medical Care Organizations, a coalition of international aid agencies that funds hospitals in Syria, said at least 100 people had died.

The British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the attack killed at least 58 people and was believed to have been carried out by Syrian government jets. It caused many people to choke, and some to foam at the mouth. Director Rami Abdulrahman told Reuters the assessment that Syrian government warplanes were to blame was based on several factors such as the type of aircraft, including Sukhoi 22 jets, that carried out the raid.

"We deny completely the use of any chemical or toxic material in Khan Sheikhoun town today and the army has not used nor will use in any place or time neither in past or in future," the Syrian army command said in a statement. The Russian Defence Ministry said its aircraft had not carried out the attack. The UN Security Council was expected to meet today to discuss the incident. Reuters photographs showed people breathing through oxygen masks and wearing protection suits, while others carried the bodies of dead children, and corpses wrapped in blankets lined up on the ground.

Activists in northern Syria circulated pictures on social media showing a man with foam around his mouth, and rescue workers hosing down almost-naked children squirming on the floor. Mounzer Khalil, head of Idlib's health authority, said hospitals in the province were overflowing with victims. "This morning, at 6:30 am, warplanes targeted Khan Sheikhoun with gases, believed to be sarin and chlorine," he told a news conference.

Warplanes later struck near a medical point where victims of the attack were receiving treatment, the Observatory and civil defense workers said. The civil defense, also known as the White Helmets - a rescue service that operates in opposition areas - said jets struck one of its centers in the area and the nearby medical point. The incident reported at Khan Sheikhoun would be the deadliest chemical attack in Syria since sarin gas killed hundreds of civilians in Ghouta near Damascus in Aug 2013. Western states said the Syrian government was responsible for that attack. Damascus blamed rebels.

The White House called the attack an "intolerable act" and said President Donald Trump was alarmed by the reports. Spokesman Sean Spicer said Trump had been briefed extensively on the incident, adding that the US was "confident in its assessment" that Damascus was to blame. Spicer also suggested it was in the "best interest" of Syrians for President Bashar Al-Assad not to lead the country.

French President Francois Hollande directly blamed Syrian government forces and said Assad's allies were emboldening him to act with impunity. Assad has enjoyed staunch military

backing from Iran and Russia in the war. Britain said he would be guilty of a war crime if it were proved his regime was responsible. The U.N. envoy for Syria said the "horrific" chemical attack had come from the air.

A series of investigations by the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) found that various parties in the Syrian war had used chlorine, sulfur mustard gas and sarin. A joint UN-OPCW report published in October said government forces used chlorine in a toxic gas attack in Qmenas in Idlib province in March 2015. An earlier report by the same team blamed Syrian government troops for chlorine attacks in Talmenes in March 2014 and Sarmin in March 2015. It also said Islamic State had used sulfur mustard gas. The OPCW said it had begun "gathering and analyzing information from all available sources" about the suspected Khan Sheikhoun attack.

Turkey, which backs the anti-Assad opposition, said the attack could derail Russian-backed diplomatic efforts to shore up a ceasefire. Turkey's state-run Anadolu news agency said 15 people hurt in the attack, mostly women and children, had been taken to Turkey. Footage from Turkey's Dogan news agency showed at least four people being brought out of ambulances on stretchers in the Turkish border town of Reyhanli by medical staff wearing face masks. One was a young boy. An official at the Turkish Health Ministry said Turkey's disaster management agency was first "scanning those arriving for chemical weapons, then decontaminating them from chemicals" before they could be taken to hospital.

Idlib province contains the largest populated area controlled by anti-Assad rebels - both nationalist Free Syrian Army groups and powerful Islamist factions including the former Al-Qaeda-linked Nusra Front. Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan and Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed the suspected attack, Turkish presidential sources said. They said the two leaders had also emphasized the importance of maintaining the much-violated Syrian ceasefire.

Idlib's population has ballooned, with thousands of fighters and civilians shuttled out of Aleppo city and areas around Damascus that the government has retaken in recent months as Assad has gained the upper hand in the war. The United States has also launched a spate of air strikes in Idlib this year, targeting jihadist insurgents. Following the 2013 attack, Syria joined the international Chemical Weapons Convention under a US-Russian deal, averting the threat of US-led military intervention.

Under the deal, Syria agreed to give up its toxic arsenal and surrendered 1,300 tonnes of toxic weapons and industrial chemicals to the international community for destruction. UN-OPCW investigators found, however, that it continued to use chlorine, which is widely available and difficult to trace, in so-called barrel bombs, dropped from helicopters. Although chlorine is not a banned substance, the use of any chemical is banned under 1997 Chemical Weapons Convention, to which Syria is a member. Damascus has repeatedly denied using such weapons during the six-year war, which has killed hundreds of thousands and created the world's worst refugee crisis. — Reuters

STATE TO INCREASE BORROWING FROM GLOBAL...

Continued from Page 1

The minister told the forum that the government has succeeded in reducing the current expenditures and maintained the pace of investment spending to boost economic growth in the country. But Saleh warned that the government is not ready to continue borrowing to finance a budget deficit resulting from "consumption spending" and not spending on development.

After registering a healthy surplus for 16 consecutive years, the Kuwait posted its first budget shortfall of \$15 billion in the 2015-2016 fiscal year following a slump in oil prices. Kuwait projected a deficit of \$29 billion in the 12 months to March 31. The country is expecting a deficit of some \$21.6 billion for the next fiscal year. Like other countries in Gulf, Kuwait has seen its main revenue stream hit hard by a prolonged drop in crude prices. An OPEC member state, it pumps around 2.8 million barrels per day.

Saleh said the government will soon discuss with the National Assembly "version 2" of its economic reform package, but declined to say if the new plan will include raising charges. Saleh said the ministry had held discussions with civil society organizations and this led to developing the economic reform package that was discussed by the previous Assembly. That package has come under harsh criticism by a majority of MPs in the present Assembly for envisaging hiking prices and

reducing public subsidies. Many MPs have called on the government to scrap the hike in petrol and electricity prices and have threatened to grill the prime minister if it failed to do so. But Saleh said yesterday that the government will soon start discussing the new form of the reform package to approve it, adding that it focuses on reforms in the country. He declined to answer questions if the government will scrap the price hikes that have come under fire from lawmakers. Opposition MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari said two days ago that he was told by the finance minister that the government had suspended the economic reforms package.

Meanwhile, MP Riyadh Al-Adasani said yesterday that he will file to grill the prime minister before May 3, when the constitutional court is due to issue a number of crucial rulings, including one that will determine the fate of the Assembly. The lawmaker however said he may not file the grilling if the government succeeds in dealing with squandering of public funds and applies more strictly the replacement of expatriate employees with Kuwaitis.

Adasani said the financial condition of the state is very dire and corruption and negligence are the main sources of squandering public funds. He said that the government must diversify the sources of income. He said that the current Assembly will set the reforms package with the government and will not be a rubberstamp one like the previous Assembly.









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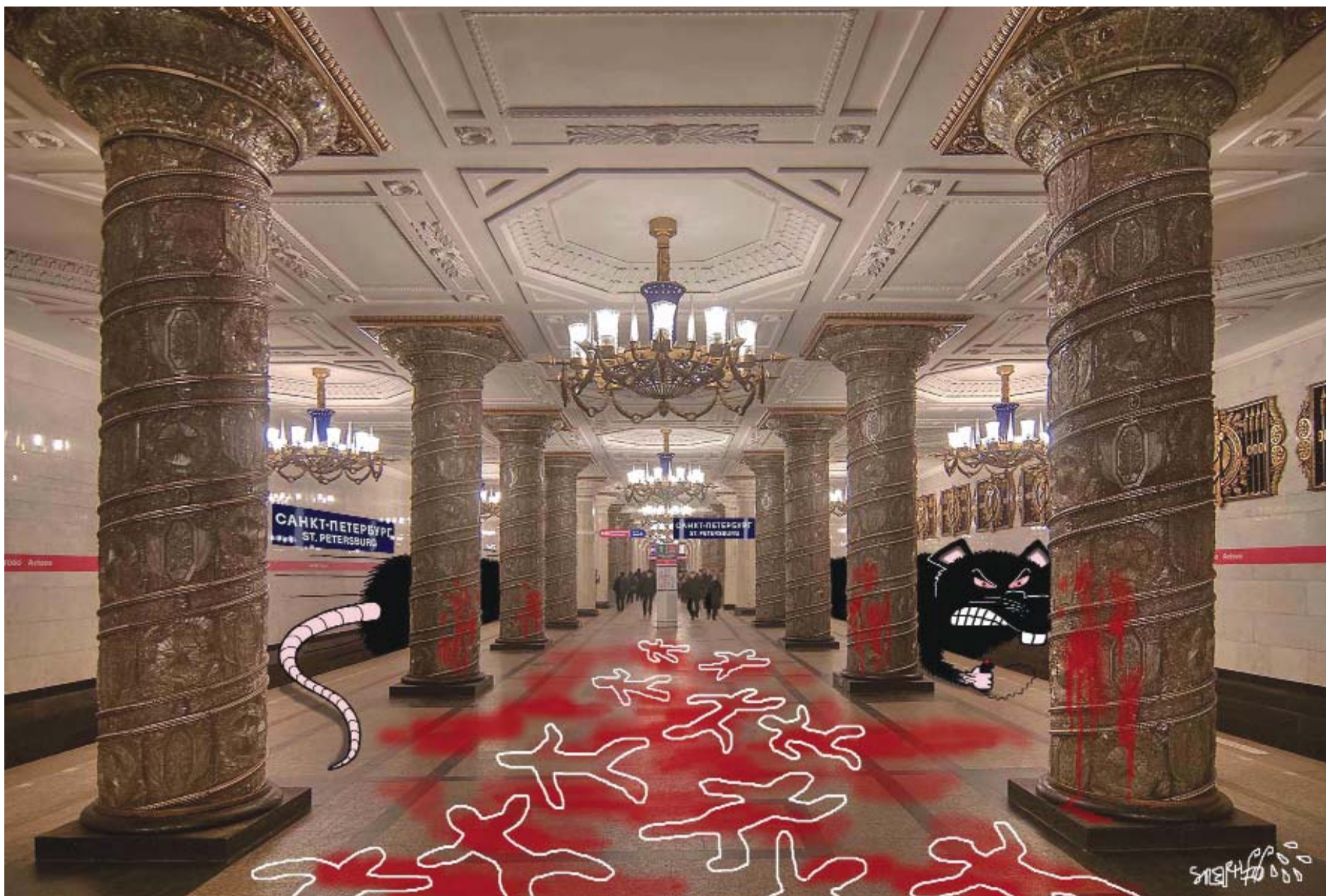
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DEAL FOR HISTORIC SOMALILAND PORT SPARKS LAND RUSH

Focus

The land along the road into Berbera is barren and empty. Somaliland's small, rusty Gulf of Aden port which for centuries made the town prosperous rises suddenly out of the ground as the road hits the coast. The crumbling town has languished for decades, but its fortunes look set to change following a multi-million dollar deal to revamp the port which has triggered a rush to buy land. Berbera, along the coast from Djibouti, has been a backwater since 1991 when Somaliland broke away from Somalia following a bloody civil war.

The town's buildings, some dating back to the Ottoman era, stand neglected. Unemployment is rampant, exacerbated by a devastating drought that has decimated livestock, a backbone of the export economy. But last September Somaliland's government signed its largest-ever investment deal which could allow Berbera to become a major trading hub for goods to and from the Horn of Africa.

The development will be carried out by DP World, a multinational port operator from the United Arab Emirates, which has valued the project at more than \$400 million. The deal was followed by another with the UAE, signed in March, for a military base a few kilometres down the road. Locals and investors believe Berbera is on the brink of an economic boom that will make the town wealthy once more.

Adan Abokor, a researcher at the Rift Valley Institute in the capital Hargeisa, says the project has sparked a "land rush", as diaspora Somalilanders and wealthy businessmen from nearby regions flock to buy a piece of the town. Though the surrounding land appears deserted, brick foundations enclose recently demarcated plots from the airport to the coast. Freshly built walls sprout into the distance. "There has been more building in the last two years than in the whole period from 1991," said Jimalé Abdulahi, a local government official. But not all residents are happy.

Land Tensions

Land has long caused trouble throughout Somaliland, and is behind the majority of violent incidents recorded in towns and cities, the Hargeisa-based Academy for Peace and Development (APD) reported in 2010. Clan disputes have for years been drivers of conflict, aggravated by the destruction or loss of legal documentation during the civil war, leading to competing title claims. Despite the existence of a national land law since 2001, clan ownership is still seen as the dominant, if unofficial property ownership system throughout most of the country.

In Berbera, the Ise Musa clan has dominated local politics since the late 1990s, and some fear the arrival of outsiders will threaten this. Sayeed "Sonny" Sayeed, a young resident, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation that many in the town are suspicious of the port deal, suspecting the plans will alter Berbera's clan composition. "People from other regions want to take over," he said. "If they move here then new people will be born in this place, so that they can vote here." His friend, Ahmed Nazal, said returning members of the diaspora were welcome, but only if they originally hailed from the area. "If not, they should go and invest in their own regions," he said. Others who spoke to the Thomson Reuters Foundation disagreed, saying diaspora investment would be good for the town. "These lands were empty, no one was investing here," said Salehan Adel, a young unemployed man. "It will give locals the chance to finally develop the lands that we own."

Simmering Unease

The port deal has also highlighted other tensions, with the role of the local council targeted for particular criticism. Unlike many other major towns in Somaliland, Berbera's government controls swathes of land, including a 70-km "free zone" around the port. This undeveloped land had been reserved for use by the port, but has been hurriedly allocated to newcomers since the DP World deal was signed, according to locals and Hargeisa-based experts.

"It is being sold off without clear procedures and guidelines," said Mohamed Farah, director of the APD think tank. Critics say most of this land has been allocated to those with government connections. "What we are seeing is land grabbing," said Ahmed Hussein Esse, president of Abaarso Tech University in Hargeisa. There is now almost no public land left in Somaliland, he added. Local official Abdulahi confirmed the council had been distributing public land, including parts of the "free zone", but said it had done so transparently. — Reuters

BRAZIL GANGS HIJACK PETROBRAS' OIL, FUEL

In September, police investigating a wave of killings in the northern Rio de Janeiro suburbs followed a tip to the isolated scrubland near the massive Duque de Caxias oil refinery. Police presumed the killings were linked to turf battles between criminal gangs in the run-up to municipal elections the following month. They found a different explanation buried beneath the grass: A system of tubes to siphon fuel from underground pipelines leading from the refinery, owned by state-run oil company Petrobras.

Some of the killings, police said, were part of a power struggle between rival gangs earnings millions of dollars a year from stealing crude oil, diesel and gasoline and selling it on a thriving black market. The discovery highlighted a fast-growing criminal enterprise in Brazil's oil heartland, between Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. From just one recorded incident in 2014, the number of thefts and attempted thefts from Petrobras rose to 14 in 2015 - before jumping five-fold to 73 last year, the company told Reuters.

The racket is part of a larger crime wave in Brazil, and especially Rio, amid the country's worst recession on record. Investigators believe the oil and fuel thefts were masterminded by the city's powerful militias - often made up of retired or off-

duty cops - as they seek to move away from terror and violence to lower-profile crimes following a crackdown by authorities in recent years. The thieves' methods range from hijacking tanker trucks to tapping the company's more than 11,000 km of pipelines - and processing stolen crude at their own secret refineries. "Not even Petrobras knows exactly how much is being stolen," said Ginton Lages, the Rio police chief who led the investigation at Duque de Caxias. "It's a huge business, moving millions of reais."

Inside Job

While oil theft - often with environmental damage from the accompanying spills - is commonplace in regions like the Niger Delta of Nigeria, it has not traditionally been a problem in Brazil. The thefts add to the steep challenges facing Petroleo Brasileiro SA, as the Rio-based firm is formally known. Amid weak oil prices, the company is scaling back under new CEO Pedro Parente and trying to emerge from a \$100 million pile of debt.

For the past three years, the state-run company has been hit by a sprawling investigation into corruption and political kickbacks in its dealings with construction firms. Police suspect corruption in the oil thefts as well. The taps and pipes near the

Duque de Caxias refinery were so precisely engineered that investigators concluded the thieves must have had help from inside Petrobras. "They knew what type of fuel was inside each pipe and what was the ideal point to place a tap without the change of pressure in the tube raising the attention of the company's security system," Lages said.

Petrobras, whose production of about 2.8 million barrels a day makes it one of the world's top 10 oil companies, said it was working with police to identify any employees or ex-employees that may have been involved in the crimes. "In 2016, there was a startling increase in theft from our pipelines," said Rodrigo Spagnolo, head of pipeline maintenance at Transpetro, Petrobras' transport subsidiary. The company, however, said the robberies had no material impact on its earnings. Petrobras reported revenues of \$81 billion last year.

Ruthless Gangs

The militias in Rio de Janeiro emerged to combat drug gangs in the city's violent hillside favelas. But they evolved into criminal organizations preying on those impoverished communities, controlling everything from real estate and electricity to cable TV. Some of the leaders entered local politics. In the wake of high-profile killings at the end of the last decade - prompting a

government crackdown - the militia have maintained a lower profile, said Ignacio Cano, a professor at the state university of Rio de Janeiro and a member of its Laboratory for the Analysis of Violence. "Stealing fuel was not typically a crime associated with militia, but they must see an opportunity for making millions," he said. "It's unusual for them to operate outside the territory they control."

Most oil and fuel thefts reported by Petrobras in 2016 took place on the populous Sao Paulo-Rio de Janeiro axis, which groups five of the company's biggest refineries. In Rio de Janeiro, thefts tripled last year to 33. Five of the incidents caused oil spills, Petrobras said. Police arrested 13 people for the Duque de Caxias refinery scam, including two military police officers. A judge has issued warrants for 26 others. The gang, set up in June 2015, stole 14 million litres of fuel last year, worth an estimated 33 million reais, prosecutors said.

Police believe the Rio branch of the gang was headed by Caxias Denilson Silva Passanha, a former city councillor in Duque de Caxias and the owner of illegal gasoline stations. Such service stations, operating without a license or a distribution contract with a fuel supplier, have become more common in Brazilian cities in recent years. — Reuters

TRUMP, XI WILL BE 'ODD COUPLE' AT SUMMIT

When US President Donald Trump meets Chinese President Xi Jinping this week, their summit will be marked not only by deep policy divisions but a clash of personalities between America's brash "tweet-in-chief" and Beijing's cautious, calculating leader. They may have one thing in common: their rhetoric about restoring their nations to greatness. But the two men differ in almost every other respect, from their political styles to their diplomatic experience, adding uncertainty to what has been called the world's most important bilateral relationship.

Five months after his election on a stridently anti-China platform, Trump appears to have set himself on a course for collision rather than conciliation with Xi, raising doubts as to whether the world's two biggest economies can find common ground. Topping the agenda at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida will be whether he will make good on his threat to use crucial US-China trade ties to pressure Beijing to do more to rein in its nuclear-armed neighbor North Korea, which is working to develop missiles capable of hitting the United States.

Trump, a 70-year-old former real estate magnate with no foreign policy experience before entering the White House, has tweeted that it will be a "very difficult" meeting with the veteran Communist Party leader seven years his junior, given Chinese trade practices he says are killing US jobs.

He has also demanded that Beijing do more to "solve" the North Korean problem - his biggest national security challenge - or he will act alone to deal with Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programs. Some White House aides believe Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser Jared Kushner

could be an influential moderating voice on how he handles Xi in their talks on Thursday and Friday. Contacts between Kushner and China's US envoy helped smooth the way for the meeting, according to current and former US officials. Even so, what worries the protocol-conscious Chinese more than policy clashes is the risk that the unpredictable Trump could publicly embarrass Xi, after several foreign leaders experienced awkward moments with the new US president. "Ensuring President Xi does not lose face is a top priority for China," a Chinese official said.

US presidents' meetings with their Chinese counterparts are usually more tightly scripted than with other foreign leaders, something Chinese officials insist on to make sure they are treated with the decorum they believe befits a global power. This summit should offer a study in contrasts: Trump impatient, outspoken and prone to angry tweetstorms; Xi, outwardly calm and measured, with no known social media presence.

Their shared nationalist tendencies could aggravate friction between their countries, which are increasingly global rivals. Trump insists the United States has been cheated economically for decades by countries like China and must regain its luster, while Xi wants China, once an ancient empire, to be able to flex its muscles on the world stage. "Xi and Trump are not natural friends," said a former senior US official specializing in Asia. "The question is when Trump's 'Make America Great Again' hits Xi's 'Chinese Dream', what's the result?"

Won't Pull Punches

It remains unclear how far Trump will go in translating populist rhetoric into policy that steps up pressure on China, given the risk of a trade war neither country can afford. But aides say he won't pull his punches, especially on trade, on which he has held an outspoken view for decades. This adds to doubts as to whether the two leaders can find common ground on North Korea and China's expansive claims in the South China Sea. Some analysts question whether Trump can get the better of Xi, who was born into a life of politics and has a reputation for being a tough tactician.

"Xi's performed pretty well in these types of environments," said Christopher Johnson, a China expert and former CIA analyst at Washington's Center for Strategic and International Studies. While Trump has been in office little more than 10 weeks, Xi has honed his US strategy since assuming the Chinese leadership in 2013. The son of a revolutionary leader, Xi has sought to project the image internationally of a strong advocate of globalization at a time when Trump has stoked fears of US protectionism.

Still, Chinese officials are mindful of the pitfalls if Trump veers off-script. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe found himself in a long, uncomfortable handshake at the White House in February, and Trump appeared to ignore German Chancellor Angela Merkel's offer of a handshake during

their meeting last month. An acrimonious call between Trump and Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull caused particular concern in Beijing, officials there say.

Still, the decision to hold a summit so early in Trump's presidency suggests both Washington and Beijing see the value of trying to build a personal relationship between the two leaders. Trump goes into the meeting with significant gaps in his team of Asia advisers and his China policy still not fully formulated. Hardliners like trade adviser Peter Navarro, who authored a book "Death by China," have feuded over the administration's approach to China with more pragmatic aides such as economic adviser Gary Cohn, a former Goldman Sachs president, current and former US officials say.

Administration officials argue Trump can use his "Art of the Deal" sales techniques to convince Xi that China needs the United States more than the United States needs China, especially when it comes to market access. But analysts say the Chinese are shrewd enough at geopolitics to fend off US demands. Xi may also see Trump politically weakened by his high-profile legislative failure on health-care as well as his low public approval ratings.

Trump has already backed down on China's most sensitive issue - Taiwan - having first infuriated Beijing by suggesting he might not abide by Washington's long-standing "one China" policy. Trump may now feel he is owed a favor in return. A fence-mending phone call in February was arranged by Kushner and China's US ambassador, Cui Tiankai, officials say, after Cui invited Trump's daughter Ivanka to the Chinese Embassy's Lunar New Year reception, where her daughter sang in Mandarin. — Reuters



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WEST HAM'S DUO ANTONIO, SAKHO RETURN FOR ARSENAL

LONDON: West Ham United midfielder Michail Antonio and striker Diafra Sakho are expected to feature in today's Premier League trip to Arsenal, manager Slaven Bilic has said. Antonio, the club's top scorer this season with nine goals, has recovered from a hamstring injury suffered against Leicester last month, while Sakho returned to training last week after four months out with a back injury. "Mikey (Antonio) is available for tomorrow night and we'll decide today if he's going to start," Bilic told in a news conference yesterday. "Diafra (Sakho) is back and when you talk to him he says he is ready. He was out for a long time, had a back operation, and looks good. Diafra may be on the bench tomorrow. I haven't decided yet, but he is very, very close." After West Ham lost their fourth consecutive league game at Hull City on Saturday, the club's owners felt compelled to issue a statement saying they had "100 percent faith" in the manager. Bilic was pleased to receive the vote of confidence and reiterated that he was not worried about his future at the club. —Reuters

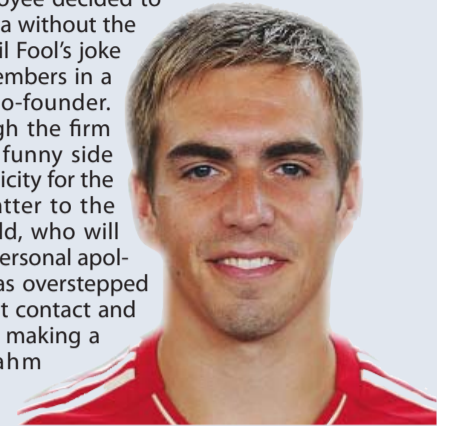


COACH DETAINED IN SPAIN IN MATCH-FIXING PROBE

MADRID: The coach of third division Spanish side Eldense was arrested by police investigating suspicions of match-fixing after his side's 12-0 defeat to Barcelona's B team on Saturday. Italian Filippo Di Piero was "arrested and questioned" a police source told AFP yesterday, adding that the investigation is ongoing. Eldense player Cheikh Saad was the first to point the finger at a number of his teammates and coach. Saad told radio station Cadena Copa that certain players stood to make "huge sums" of money from bets placed on the match. The club's president David Aguilar then reported his suspicions to the police and the Spanish football authorities. Di Piero was appointed as coach after an Italian investor took control of the club earlier this season with suspicions now raised over whether that investment was linked to illegal betting patterns. "At the very least, we must investigate it because there are certain links to an Italian group that has the look of what may be indications of an international betting ring when it comes to fixing matches," said president of the Spanish league Javier Tebas. —AFP

LAHM SEEKS ADVICE OVER APRIL FOOL STUNT

BERLIN: Ex-Germany captain Philipp Lahm has confirmed he is taking legal advice over a spoof April Fool's story gone wrong. A Munich-based fitness start-up issued a grovelling apology to the World Cup winner over a fake April 1 story, which hit the German media last Saturday, falsely claiming he had invested in them. The story even contained a fake quote attributed to the Bayern Munich star after an employee decided to circulate an internal newsletter to the German media without the knowledge of the company's bosses. "It was an April Fool's joke which should have been sent exclusively to our members in a newsletter," explained the company's red-faced co-founder. However, the stunt quickly backfired and although the firm apologised several times, Lahm failed to see the funny side with the prank having generated plenty of free publicity for the start-up. "I'm taking advice and bringing the matter to the detailed attention of a lawyer," said the 33-year-old, who will retire from all football in June, in a statement. "The personal apology reached me, but nevertheless, the company has overstepped the mark with this action. We will now get in direct contact and look for a solution." The firm has already suggested making a donation to Lahm's charity, The Philipp Lahm Foundation, in an attempt to make amends. —AFP



Golf

DAY BRIGHTENS AS STORM HITS MASTERS PRACTICE

AUGUSTA: Severe thunderstorms shortened Monday's first official practice session for the 81st Masters, but the outlook brightened for Australia's Jason Day ahead of the year's first major.

World number three Day played nine holes at Augusta National, his fourth consecutive day on the fabled course, before it was closed in the early afternoon when the area fell under a tornado warning. Day withdrew from the World Golf Championships Match-Play event two weeks ago to be with his mother, Dening, as she faced cancer surgery. Her uncertain prognosis through chemotherapy kept his status in doubt for the Masters. But Day said Monday that his mother is improving and she might even be at the course on the weekend to watch him compete for the green jacket. "She's good," Day said. "She had the left quarter of her lung taken out... I was with her pretty much every day back home. She is in a fair amount of pain but hopefully things are looking up."

A severe thunderstorm closed the course for more than an hour and forced evacuation of the course even before the tornado warning shut down the course the remainder of the day.

Heavy rains and strong thunderstorms are expected again today on the eve of the opening round, which could soften the greens and lead to more showers for early starters tomorrow.

After that, the forecast is for dry conditions at Augusta National, where weather has not suspended play since the third round in 2008 and not postponed a round since the opening round in 2003.

Even if greens and fairways are more receptive, it's likely the lightning-fast trademark putting surfaces will be back at full speed for Sunday's final round.

GREAT GOLF

"You've got to hit the shots in the right spots," warns world number one Dustin Johnson.

Among the newcomers hoping to become the first Masters debutante to take a green jacket since Fuzzy Zoeller in 1979 is Spain's Jon Rahm, who won his first PGA crown in January at Torrey Pines.

"A guy like Jon Rahm, obviously he has been playing great golf. I don't see any reason why he can't go and play well or be in contention this week and have a chance to win," said eighth-

ranked Rickie Fowler. "It's not a golf course that you have to be any certain type of player. He's shown that he can play and compete with the best. He has already won. So it will just be him going out and learning this golf course for himself." One of the crucial areas to master is Amen Corner—the noted par-4 11th, par-3 12th and par-5 13th holes. Jordan Spieth was on his way to defending his title in Sunday's final round last year only to find a watery grave twice into Rae's Creek and take a quadruple bogey at 12, helping England's Danny Willett take the title.

"Yeah, it's a really good stretch of golf especially with the way the forecast is looking for Thursday and Friday," said 2016 PGA Championship winner Jimmy Walker.

"The winds look like they're going to pretty gnarly, and that's a section of the course that gets really tough, especially if the wind swirls. You get through there even par, you're doing really well against the field. Seventh-ranked Justin Thomas says level par through the three-hole stretch is his goal too."

"If I went through those even each day, I probably wouldn't be complaining too much," he said. —AFP



Tommy Fleetwood

FLEETWOOD EYES MASTERS GLORY

AUGUSTA: Tommy Fleetwood is no one's favorite to win the 81st Masters, but the understated 26-year-old Englishman with the flowing locks and the tidy short game won't let that get him down.

Favorites have a habit of coming unstuck at the Masters and this year all eyes are on what the course holds for world number one Dustin Johnson, whose form puts him way ahead of all contenders here. "But I have beaten him," boasts soft-spoken Fleetwood, who slid to around 200th in the world rankings last year before a run of superb results vaulted him inside the top 50 and earned him a place at the world's most elite golf tournament for the first time.

"He's getting good, that's for sure," joked Fleetwood of Johnson, 32, who captured his first major title at last year's US Open at Oakmont, and has won three events in a row in the run up to Augusta: at Riviera in February and last month's WGC Mexico and the WGC Match Play in Texas.

ELITE COMPANY

"It's very very impressive what he is doing," said Fleetwood. "I think there are not been too many runs like he's had. I think Rory (McIlroy) did it when he won the Open and the PGA at Bridgestone. Tiger did it a few times. But he's in some pretty elite company at the moment with how he's playing." Even so, Fleetwood, whose trademark long hair flows down from his baseball cap, beat Johnson by one stroke to win

in Abu Dhabi in January and then was runner-up to the 32-year-old Texan at the WGC Mexico in March. Still, a smiling Fleetwood said he does not expect that Johnson was running scared.

"I mean, he's not very massively on my radar. I can't really think about what he is doing," he said smiling.

"I'm sure he can do stuff that I can't and I'm sure if you sat here and asked him if he was worried about me, he wouldn't say..." The son of a tarmac layer from humble origins in the northern England town of Southport says he is in with a chance.

"I'm not going to sit here and say I expect to win. But you never know," he said.

He said Augusta's course is "forgiving" off the tee and hard round the greens, where a precise short game comes in handy. "That's what it comes down to, being precise with your irons," said Fleetwood, not among the big hitters on the tour. "It's not only the power hitters that win... and if you are on your game and your irons are very precise, then you can use it to your advantage."

In the meantime, he intends to put every possible advantage on his side by teaming up with past Masters champion Fuzzy Zoeller at the traditional Par-3 Contest the day before tomorrow's first round. Not since Zoeller's 1979 triumph has a first-time Masters player won the title.

"He's the only (modern) one that has won the first time so I thought that might give me some vibes," he said. —AFP



Jason Day

RAHM SAYS SEVE LOOKING OUT FOR HIM AT MASTERS

AUGUSTA: Jon Rahm says fellow Spaniard Seve Ballesteros, the late golfing legend who would have turned 60 on Sunday, will be watching over him as he competes in his first Masters.

Rahm, one of golf's most exciting new talents, has always idolized Ballesteros, a two-time Masters champion, and the 22-year-old Augusta newcomer says he will count on help from past-master Seve all the way to the final hole on Sunday. "If I have a chance on Sunday I'll keep in mind that he'll be out there," said Rahm.

"I know he will be out there for the entire week. But hopefully on Sunday he can make a special present." Ballesteros died nearly six years ago and is remembered at Augusta National and other major golf venues as one of the greatest players who ever lived.

"Seve is my ultimate reference, idol," said Rahm. "I try to emulate a lot of things he did. You know, the name Seve Ballesteros is really important to me."

Though playing his first Masters in only his second year as a professional, Rahm, ranked 12th in the world, is billed as a potential future world number one and one of the genuine contenders to win the 81st Masters.

No Masters debutant has won the green jacket since Fuzzy Zoeller in 1979 but Rahm said he would not have troubled himself to come to Augusta if he thought he had no chance.

Rahm won at Torrey Pines in January in his first appearance at the event and felt he could follow up at Augusta.

"If I didn't think I could win it, I wouldn't be here. Truly, Torrey Pines is not one of the places rookies usually win for the first time and I was able to do it," he said.

"Obviously this is different. This is a major and my first time in Augusta. It is very, very impressive. I am going to tee up believing that I can

win. I might do it. I might not. But that's how I do it." At 6-ft-2 (1.88m) and 220 lbs (100kg), Rahm belongs to an emerging breed of big, fit power hitters but has a complete game reminiscent of Tiger Woods in his pomp.

If he has an Achilles heel, it may be his youthful inexperience in dealing with emotion and tension that he says have taken a toll in the past.

At last month's WGC Match-Play, Rahm took world number one Dustin Johnson all the way to the 18th hole in the final, showing his enormous

talent and potential. But he had to come back in the match after messing up the first nine holes because he failed to master his nerves. "I couldn't control my body, honestly," Rahm said. "I didn't know. It was like my body was independent from my mind. I was trying to focus and do my routine, but things just weren't happening."

Once he mastered his emotions, Rahm took away an important lesson from Texas. "I learned that when I am playing good, I can take on the number one player in the world," he said. —AFP



AUGUSTA: Jon Rahm of Spain hits a shot on the ninth tee during a practice round prior to the start of the 2017 Masters Tournament at Augusta National Golf Club yesterday in Augusta, Georgia. —AFP

LITTLE BIG MAN THOMAS HAS DRIVE TO COMPETE AT MASTERS

AUGUSTA: Justin Thomas is slight in stature but huge in driving distance, an odd combination that has produced impressive form and a chance for even greater success at the Masters.

The 23-year-old American has already won three US PGA Tour events this season, defending his title last October in Malaysia before back-to-back triumphs in Hawaii, shooting a rare 59 on the way to winning the Sony Open after taking the Tournament of Champions.

Despite standing only 5-ft-10 (1.78m) and 145 lbs (66kg), Thomas ranks 11th in average driving distance on the US PGA Tour at 306.5 yards.

"If you just sit down and look at my attributes on paper, look at it how I hit it, yeah, it looks surprising," Thomas said Monday. "When you get the conditions, you know you have the right conditions to hit it far and then it just happens."

Thomas grew up relying on his short game because he tee shots were shorter than rivals. But then he found formidable speed, power and swing rhythm as he matured.

"I was really short, like physically very short, so I hit it nowhere," Thomas said. "My junior year of high school, I started hitting it a little bit farther. Probably to do something with my form or maybe got a little bit stronger. I never really worked out."

"And then in college was when I started hitting it a little bit farther than just about everybody I was playing with. I've just gotten stronger since then and I've started to get up on the ball and speeds

are just getting faster. So kind of all that is just accumulated into it."

IN CONTENTION

It has accelerated Thomas in the rankings and despite a share of 39th last year in his Masters debut, he is confident he can contend at Augusta National.

"A lot of success was I was confident, playing well, driving it well," Thomas said. "The biggest thing is the short game. I was not making very many bogeys and I make a lot of birdies. So if I continue to do that, then would I feel like I have a good chance of being in contention."

"I feel very confident with my wedges. But at the end of the day, I was just playing really well... my game feels good. I've made a lot of great work and progress the last couple weeks on stuff I've wanted to work on. I know around here I don't need to be my best, I just need to manage it and I need to be smart."

Thomas also sought advice from three of the greatest champions in Masters history—Jack Nicklaus, Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson.

"In terms of learning things, I tried to pick a lot of guys' brains," Thomas said. "Talked to Mr. Nicklaus last year, was here earlier this week and played a couple rounds with Phil and been talking to him and talking to Tiger some. I want to be around guys that are successful here and it's kind of hard to get much better than them." "I feel like a lot of stuff just in terms of course management and picking your spots that I've heard from those guys is key." —AFP

RELATIONSHIP WITH ROOT WILL BE ABSOLUTELY FINE, SAYS COOK

LONDON: Alastair Cook is confident his relationship with newly appointed test captain Joe Root will be "absolutely fine" and the former England skipper has assured his successor he will get all the support he needs in the role.

Cook, who was appointed captain in 2012, led England in a record 59 tests including Ashes victories at home in 2013 and 2015 as well as series wins in India and South Africa.

The 32-year-old stepped down in February after a 4-0 defeat in the five-test series in India at the end of last year. He was replaced by Root, who will captain England for the first time against South Africa at Lord's on July 6.

"A lot will be made of it, there always is, it's a good story to write about but I think it'll be absolutely fine in terms of our relationship," Cook told British media.

The former captain said he hoped his

transition back to just playing for the team would be smooth.

"I feel like I can get back in the troops and get on with it and hopefully score some runs and help England win cricket games, which ultimately is what everyone wants to see," he added.

The left-handed opening batsman has scored more test centuries than any of his predecessors and is also England's most prolific run-getter with 11,057 runs

in 140 tests. With the emergence of a pair of batting prospects in India for England's fragile top order, Cook hoped he could continue making an impact with the willow.

Haseeb Hameed and Keaton Jennings became Cook's 10th and 11th opening partners since the retirement of Andrew Strauss, with both youngsters showing signs they might have bright futures after impressive debuts in India.

"You're always under pressure, that's what life is about," Cook said. "That is what playing international cricket or being a professional sportsman is. You're there to score runs.

"If you don't do that over a period of time, people will look elsewhere. That hasn't changed and that'll never change, whether it's myself or Jimmy Anderson, you've got to play to a certain level to be picked for England or even Essex." —Reuters



BANGALORE: In this photograph taken on May 29, 2016, Indian Premier League Chairman Rajeev Shukla (L) presents an award to Sunrisers Hyderabad captain David Warner (2R) during the presentation ceremony after the Twenty20 cricket final between Royal Challengers Bangalore and Sunrisers Hyderabad at The M. Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bangalore. The tenth season of the Indian Premier League kicks off today, marking a decade of scandal and success for the flashy Twenty20 competition beloved by India and watched across the globe. —AFP

NZ'S 'TWO-METRE PETER' RETIRES AFTER 16-YR CAREER

WELLINGTON: Former New Zealand batsman Peter Fulton retired yesterday after a 16-year first-class career that was highlighted by two stints in the international arena.

The towering 38-year-old, nicknamed 'Two-Metre Peter', made his first class debut in the 2000/01 domestic season and played 121 times for Canterbury, 66 of which were as captain.

Fulton made his international debut in a one-dayer in 2004 against Bangladesh and had a roller-coaster ride for New Zealand, making the test side in 2006 as a middle-order batsman and accumulating just 10 appearances in nearly four years before dropping out of contention.

He was recalled in early 2013 as an opening batsman against England and became the fourth New Zealander to score a century in both innings of a test when he scored 136 and 110 against the tourists at Eden Park in Auckland.

"When I was growing up I had dreams of playing for Canterbury and New Zealand, but when I was younger I didn't think I was going to do it," Fulton said in announcing his decision.

"From making my debut, I never would have thought I would play this many times and achieve these records for Canterbury.

"At that stage, I was just stoked to play one." —Reuters



Peter Fulton

CASH-RICH IPL MARCHES INTO SEASON 10 TODAY

NEW DELHI: The 10th season of the Indian Premier League starts today, marking a decade of scandal and success for the flashy Twenty20 competition beloved by India and watched across the globe.

The latest edition of the glitzy league-famous for its pyrotechnics, cheerleaders and huge signing bonuses-gets under way with defending champions Sunrisers Hyderabad hosting Royal Challengers Bangalore.

Since its debut in 2008 the shorter-format league has evolved into India's most popular sporting event, filling stadiums and attracting TV audiences well beyond that enjoyed by Test and one-day competitions in the cricket-mad subcontinent.

"Its unique selling proposition is that most of the stadiums are packed, and it is being watched around the world," IPL chairman Rajeev Shukla told AFP.

Its appeal has outlasted numerous controversies-most notably corruption and match-fixing charges-that at times have raised more eyebrows than the showy theatrics on the pitch.

Three of the eight teams from the inaugural edition, and two others since, have been taken over by new owners, suspended or simply vanished altogether.

Chennai Super Kings and Rajasthan Royals were barred for two seasons in 2015 over a spot-fixing saga, while Hyderabad's original franchise Deccan Chargers were terminated for breaching contract terms.

The league's founder Lalit Modi, mean-

while, is in self-imposed exile in Britain, refusing to return to India to face corruption charges.

GLOBAL APPEAL

Shukla acknowledged the league's muddy past but said all possible checks and balances were in place to ensure the 10th edition was a success.

"There may have been some aberrations but the strongest possible action was taken. We have ensured that corruption does not creep in," he said. "I am quite optimistic that this edition will be another grand success and be very significant for us."

Despite a litany of off-field troubles the league has never struggled to attract foreign talent. A host of international stars have become household names in India, shaping their careers on the IPL stage or resurrecting former glories.

England pace bowler Tymal Mills recently signed a \$1.8 million-contract with Bangalore-despite having played just four T20 internationals.

Fellow countryman Ben Stokes-who joined Rising Pune Supergiant for more than \$2 million-said the IPL was an opportunity unavailable in England, where the format is not yet franchised.

"A big reason for coming out here is to get that exposure and try and take the Twenty20 game to new level," he said.

Australia skipper Steve Smith, who has replaced former India captain Mahendra

Singh Dhoni at the helm of Pune, said he had benefited immensely from playing in the league.

"You get to learn different parts of the game, and what people from different parts of the world are thinking," he said.

CASH TALKS

But cash, and plenty of it, has been the single most important ingredient for the IPL's success, experts say. "Money is the magnet," ESPNcricinfo senior editor Sharda Ugra told AFP.

"I think IPL was always going to succeed... because so many people directly connected with the BCCI (India's cricket board) and Indian business were involved at that time. They were like determined to see it succeed."

Signing deals for up-and-coming stars are also growing, with Afghanistan leg-spinner Rashid Khan signed by Sunrisers for 40 million rupees (\$615,700) — the most ever offered to a player from an associate (non-Test playing) nation.

Khan and teammate Mohammad Nabi will be the first players from Afghanistan to play in the IPL, highlighting the league's ever-expanding global appeal.

While Royal Challengers Bangalore captain and run-machine Virat Kohli will be absent for the opening week of the competition, big hitters abound such as Kohli's teammate Chris Gayle and Sunrisers' David Warner.

The tournament ends on May 21 with the final in Hyderabad. —AFP

BANGLADESH SKIPPER MASHRAFE QUILTS TWENTY20 CRICKET

COLOMBO: Bangladesh's limited-overs captain Mashrafe Mortaza announced yesterday his retirement from Twenty20 international cricket after he completes the ongoing two-match series against Sri Lanka.

Mashrafe's decision came just before the first match of the series against the home side in Colombo's R. Premadasa Stadium. "It has been a great honour for me to represent Bangladesh in T20I for more than 10 years," Mashrafe said on his official Facebook page.

"I believe that this team is currently a balanced one and there are some promising young stars. This is high time for me to say good-bye to T20 format so that many youngsters can get the opportunity to showcase their talent," he said.

Mashrafe made his Twenty20 international debut against Zimbabwe in 2006, the first ever game played by the South Asian country in the shortest for-

mat, and has been an integral part of the side ever since.

Beloved by fans, the 33-year-old played 52 Twenty20 internationals to claim 39 wickets and score 368 runs. He led Bangladesh in 27 of his 52 Twenty20 internationals and won nine matches.

But he was hobbled by knee injuries during much of his career, forcing him to avoid Test cricket since 2009 and to undergo a series of operations in Australia.

Bangladesh selectors welcomed his decision to retire from Twenty20 international cricket. "Mashrafe is a true legend of our game and he has made the right decision," Bangladesh's chief selector Minhajul Abedin told AFP by phone.

He will now play his final Twenty20 international against Sri Lanka on April 6 in Colombo. He is expected to continue to lead Bangladesh in one-day internationals. —AFP



Bangladesh's cricket captain Mashrafe Mortaza.

AL MULLA EXCHANGE PROMOTION GIVES FREE TICKETS TO IPL FINAL TO WINNERS

KUWAIT: With the exciting Indian Premier League season due soon, Al Mulla Exchange Company begins its new promotion to provide its Indian customers the unique chance to be part of the electrifying finals on May 21, 2017, in Hyderabad.

Starting from today, (April 5), anyone transferring money to India through any of Al Mulla Exchange branches or via the company's online services will automatically enter a draw for to get two tickets to the IPL 2017 finals, in addition to two airline tickets. A winner will be chosen every week until May 14, 2017.

This promotion will see 11 winners and a total of 22 tickets to the dream IPL final match. The highlight of the draw is the grand prize which includes special hospitality services in addition to the other prizes. The grand prize winner will be announced on May 15.

Talking about the latest promotion, Rakesh Joshi General Manger Al Mulla Exchange, said cricket has

always been a craze in India and with the advent of T20, the cricket fever has gone higher. The IPL has become a festivity in India that has the whole country in frenzy. As a token of our gratitude to the support and trust of our loyal Indian customers, we thought of providing them with a chance to be part of the peak of this season, the final match.

The Indian customers are an important part of the Al Mulla Exchange business, "and we have been providing continuous promotions to them as a token of our gratitude. This is one of the biggest promotions we have conducted so far and we believe this will be well received in the community.

The IPL matches are being played between April and May with approximately 57 matches played between eight teams. Al Mulla Exchange with 71 branches in Kuwait continues to give customers out of the box marketing promotion.

SARACENS SIGN WALLABIES LOCK SKELTON

LONDON: Australia second row forward Will Skelton secured a permanent move to English and European champions Saracens yesterday after impressing during a short stay earlier this season the club announced.

The 24-year-old-capped 18 times by the Wallabies-has put pen to paper on a two year deal which will see him leave Australian Super Rugby franchise the NSW Waratahs and join up with Saracens for the beginning of next season.

"We're absolutely delighted that Will is returning," Saracens director of rugby Mark McCall told the club website.

"In a very short space of time here his contribution to the side was superb, he showed a real appetite to improve his game and he was very popular among all the players and staff.

"There's still so much more to come from him, which is incredibly exciting for us as he is already a proven interna-

tional player so we're looking forward to welcoming him back later this year."

Skelton, who played three Premiership games for Saracens in his spell there earlier this season, admitted the decision to leave Australia and give up for at least two years any hope of playing for the national side had been tough.

"I am very excited to be returning to Saracens," Skelton told the club website. "This time around I am sign-

ing a longer-term deal, so it's been a really big decision and one I haven't made lightly.

"It's not easy leaving the NSW Waratahs and the Wallabies-Darryl Gibson and Michael Cheika have been fantastic for my career so far and I want to thank them for everything they have done for me, on and off the field.

"Not being able to pull on the gold jersey while I am playing in England has made the decision especially diffi-

cult, but this is about family as much as it is football. One day I'd love to play for Australia again and if that opportunity comes up I will give everything I've got for my country."

Skelton, first capped in 2014, is Saracens fourth signing for next season, joining Wales international Liam Williams, Toulouse and France hooker Christopher Tolofua and Northampton Saints and England flanker Calum Clark. —AFP

News

in brief

Aspas extends Celta deal

MADRID: Spanish international Iago Aspas tied his future to Celta Vigo by extending his contract to 2022, the club said yesterday. "Unbeatable news for Celta and their fans," the club said in a statement. "Aspas will play in light blue until 2022." "Both the club and I wanted to close the renewal and today we managed to do it," said Aspas. Aspas, 29, has scored 21 goals this season to help Celta reach the quarter-finals of the Europa League, where they will face Belgian side Genk. The former Liverpool striker's form has also seen him earn his first international honours this season with three caps, including a goal against England on his debut.

Tottenham's Winks out for season

Tottenham Hotspur midfielder Harry Winks has been ruled out for the rest of the season after sustaining an ankle injury in Saturday's 2-0 win at Burnley, the club confirmed yesterday. The 21-year-old, who has made 33 appearances for Tottenham this season, left the field on a stretcher. "We can confirm that Harry Winks sustained ligament damage to his left ankle during Saturday's win at Burnley," the club said on their website (www.tottenhamhotspur.com). "He will continue to be monitored by our medical team during his recovery and will be unavailable for the remainder of the season."

England out of Sudirman Cup

Badminton England expressed "deep disappointment" yesterday as they announced they were pulling out of the prestigious World Mixed Team Championships (Sudirman Cup) because of the withdrawal of Olympic funding. There was shock that badminton was included last December in the sports to be stripped of their Olympic funding by UK Sport because they came back from the Rio Olympics with a men's doubles bronze medal. Badminton England—who oversee Britain's Olympic programme—have already made several people redundant. However, on Tuesday it was decided further savings could be made by not sending a team to the event on Australia's Gold Coast, where the 2018 Commonwealth Games will be held. "It is with deep disappointment that we have had to withdraw the England team from participating at the Sudirman Cup," said Badminton England performance director Jon Austin. "We are now working through an unprecedented financial situation as a consequence of the recent funding decisions. The decision is a tough one to make but we have had to consider the investments we now make very carefully." The Badminton World Federation says England's place will be taken by Germany.

De Lange joins Glamorgan

Pace bowler Marchant de Lange has been hailed a match-winner by Glamorgan coach Robert Croft after the South African signed a three-year contract yesterday. The 26-year-old, who has adapted his bowling action since suffering a stress fracture in his back in 2012, is especially effective in the shorter formats of the game and has played in Twenty20 franchise teams round the world. "Marchant is a match-winner. He has pace, aggression—and he's the right age and at the right stage of his career to make an impact for us," said Croft. "He will be a great addition to our squad." De Lange, who played the last of his two Tests for South Africa in 2012 and his last one-day international in 2014, is in the "prime of his career", said Glamorgan's director of cricket Hugh Morris. "We are delighted to have signed Marchant de Lange and to see him arrive in Wales today," said Morris. Glamorgan open their second division County Championship campaign against Northamptonshire on Friday.

Jesus returns to training

Brazilian sensation Gabriel Jesus boosted Manchester City's trophy hopes as he returned to training earlier than expected on his 20th birthday, the club revealed on its website. The striker—who joined City in the January transfer window after they paid Palmeiras an initial £27 million (\$33 million, 31 million euros) —made a sensational start to his English career with three goals in five matches. His hot streak was stopped in its tracks when he broke a bone in his foot against Bournemouth in mid-February—he was expected to be out for between two and three months. "Gabriel Jesus stepped up his recovery from injury today (Monday) when he returned to the training field for the first time since February," read the City statement. "The early prognosis (of the injury) suggesting he could be out until the end of the season. He recently began working in the gym in a bid to keep his fitness levels high—and this afternoon, on his 20th birthday, he returned to the training field just seven weeks after his initial setback. "And although he didn't take part in full training, focusing instead on some light ball work, it's a sight City fans will nonetheless have been pleased to see "We wish Gabriel well in his continued recovery and hope to see him back in a blue shirt as soon as possible." His return comes at a timely moment for City manager Pep Guardiola, who is desperate to maintain his record of never going trophyless through a season with any club he has managed. City's best hopes of ensuring that proud record stands is perhaps in the FA Cup where they face Arsenal in the semi-finals later this month. In the league they are 11 points adrift of leaders Chelsea.

OLYMPICS

LA, PARIS PREPARE TO SHARE 2024 PLANS WITH OLYMPIC LEADERS

AARHUS: Los Angeles and Paris are making a direct appeal to Olympic sports leaders, aside from ongoing politics of possibly awarding future hosting rights. In the first of three campaign events this year, the two 2024 Olympic candidates will focus on small details in their plans that are key to athletes and organizers - a break from the big picture talk of also choosing a 2028 host when IOC members meet on Sept. 13.

"We understand that without the federations there are no competitions," LA 2024 bid chairman Casey Wasserman told The Associated Press on Tuesday ahead his team's meeting with sports officials. "Our job is to give them the greatest platform to host the ultimate competition in what we think is one of the greatest cities in the world."

LA was due on stage first to make a 10-minute presentation followed by five scheduled minutes of questions from the audience. Paris will follow in what is now a two-horse race that could yet have two winners, according to speculation fueled by IOC President Thomas Bach. That would make both cities a three-time Olympic host.

Paris bid co-chairman Tony Estanguet said an Olympics in the French capital would showcase "the best iconic places" in the city.

The Paris presentation was expected to stress its more compact plan treating much of the city as a big Olympic Park. Its project also includes building projects, including an athletes village.

LA, which will stage most sports in four separate venue clusters, hopes to score by promising to use only venues that already exist. That means no new construction projects that have given recent Olympics a reputation for huge overspending.

"I would argue that Los Angeles is the poster child for Agenda 2020," said Wasserman, referring to Bach's signature



LOS ANGELES: In this Feb. 1, 2016, file photo, International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach, second from left, is flanked by Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, left, LA 2024 chairman Casey Wasserman, second from right, and UCLA chancellor Gene Block, right, during a news conference in Los Angeles. As the IOC moves the goalpost in the 2024 Olympic contest, bid leaders from Los Angeles and Paris head to a campaign event in Denmark yesterday unsure of exactly what they are shooting for. —AP

plan to cut hosting costs that have scared off voters in would-be candidate cities.

Earlier yesterday, Bach told the AP he would not attend the two presentations. Still, he praised both in the context of his pro-

gram that he hopes will safeguard the Olympics' future under his leadership.

"We have two excellent bids which are embracing Olympic Agenda 2020 by making use of many existing facilities, by having a

sustainable project, by having very low infrastructure investments compared to previous bids," Bach said. Asked if the contest could yet have two winners, the IOC head chuckled before adding: "We'll see." —AP

TENNIS

FIRED UP BY TEAM SPIRIT, KYRGIOS SAYS IN 'BEST' MENTAL SHAPE



Nick Kyrgios

MELBOURNE: Nick Kyrgios is relishing being in the "best" mental shape of his career and credited the camaraderie of Australia's Davis Cup team for his ominous form during the US hardcourt swing.

The world number 16 pushed Roger Federer to the wall in a classic Miami Open semi-final on Friday and beat world number two Novak Djokovic twice in succession in the past month.

The emotional 21-year-old now carries Australia's hopes of reaching the Davis Cup semi-finals when the hosts play the United States in Brisbane this weekend. Having long felt ambivalent toward the sport and admitted to struggling for motivation, Kyrgios has brought a new intensity to training and a stronger focus on court.

"I think my level's always been there but I think where I'm at mentally at the moment, I'm just competing for every point and playing hard and I haven't really had that mindset before," Kyrgios told reporters in Brisbane yesterday.

"I'm feeling motivated and I want to get out there more. I want to compete and I want to play. "I'm probably in the best place I've ever been in." It was little more than two months ago that Kyrgios bowed out of the Australian Open in acrimony, jeered by home spectators after giving up a two-set lead in defeat to Italian Andreas Seppi.

But weeks later, he returned to play in the Davis Cup in the first round tie in

Melbourne, playing a pivotal role in the 4-1 defeat of Czech Republic.

Kyrgios's commitment to the team tournament has not always been so wholehearted. He was reported to have said, "I don't want to be here" during a singles rubber defeat during the 2015 quarter-final against Kazakhstan in Darwin and withdrew from last year's first round tie against the United States in Melbourne, citing "illness".

That withdrawal prompted criticism from team mate Bernard Tomic, who publicly upbraided him for the decision to pull-out.

Kyrgios returned to the fold for the World Group play-off win over Slovakia and has been a fixture since, while Australia's number two Tomic has opted out.

Kyrgios said the win over Czech Republic had worked wonders for his motivation. "I think the last Davis Cup tie helped me a lot. Ever since then I've been in a good mental space," he said.

"I prefer the team environment, I love being around these guys, I love training with them and I love being on the sidelines watching them compete.

"I've been wanting to play and they've all been supporting me. It's good to know these guys have my back and I think it's just the chemistry.

"I feel like I'm playing well and I've got a really good opportunity now to battle against the USA." —Reuters

MISSING MIAMI TITLE DEFENCE WAS REFRESHING: DJOKOVIC

BELGRADE: Sitting out last week's Miami Open was rejuvenating for Novak Djokovic although it meant missing the chance to win a record seventh title in the tournament, Serbia's world number two said yesterday.

Djokovic missed the Masters series event with an elbow injury and, having recovered, is eager to face Spain in the Davis Cup quarter-finals in front of a boisterous home crowd next weekend.

"Of course I wanted to be on the court and defend my title but it just didn't happen this time," Djokovic told a news conference in the Serbian capital's Aleksandar Nikolic arena.

"At the same time, it was also rather refreshing to get some rest and sit out Miami at home with my wife and son. It was quality family time which I don't get enough of and it made me very happy," he said.

"A hardcourt tie is not an ideal preparation for the clay court season but given that I was away for a few weeks after a patchy start to the season, I need as many matches as possible to get back into my stride irrespective of the surface."

Djokovic added: "The Davis Cup is a very special event

as it generates the kind of home crowd atmosphere you don't see on the ATP Tour, so I am really looking forward to



Novak Djokovic

performing in front of our fans. I always draw very positive energy from the Davis Cup as it invariably brings out the best in me."

Having dominated for several years to rack up 12 grand slam tournaments after clinching his maiden French Open title last June, Djokovic then suffered a dramatic loss of form which saw him ousted as the world number one by Briton Andy Murray.

With Murray also playing in fits and starts in the early stages of the season, Djokovic heaped praise on the ever-green Roger Federer after the Swiss maestro won the Miami Open following his Australian Open triumph in January.

"What Federer has accomplished this year is admirable and it shows that one can play at the top level even at his age. He's had his ups and downs in the last three or four years but came back swinging and revitalised after a six-month layoff last year," said Djokovic.

He said the Miami Open final between Federer and Nadal was "as outstanding as anyone might have expected from the greatest rivalry ever".

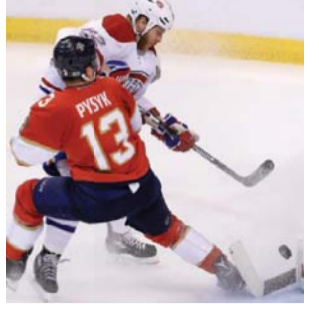
Nadal will skip Spain's clash with Serbia. —Reuters

Sports

Bangladesh skipper quits Twenty20 cricket



Montreal clinches Atlantic Division title with 4-1 win



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LA, PARIS PREPARE TO SHARE 2024 PLANS WITH OLYMPIC LEADERS Page 17



WASHINGTON: Adnely Hechavaria #3 of the Miami Marlins turns a double play as Ryan Zimmerman #11 of the Washington Nationals slides into second base in the Opening Day game against the Miami Marlins on Monday at Nationals Park in Washington, DC. Washington won the game 4-2. — AFP

BASEBALL

WASHINGTON BEAT MARLINS, ORIOLES TOP BLUE JAYS

WASHINGTON: Adam Lind's first swing as a member of the Nationals resulted in a pinch-hit, go-ahead, two-run homer in the seventh inning while Bryce Harper went deep on opening day for the fifth time in his young career, leading Washington past the Miami Marlins 4-2 on Monday. Stephen Strasburg (1-0) earned the win, allowing two runs and six hits in seven innings, pitching out of the stretch the whole way. It was his return to action after missing last September and the playoffs with a right elbow injury. Matt Wieters singled ahead of Lind's drive off David Phelps (0-1) that made it 3-2.

ORIOLES 3, BLUE JAYS 2

Mark Trumbo homered off Jason Grilli (0-1) with two outs in the 11th inning in a rematch of last year's AL wild card playoff, won by Toronto 5-2 on an 11th-inning home run by Edwin Encarnacion. Tyler Wilson (1-0), the fourth Baltimore reliever, pitched one shutout inning in the 25th Camden Yards opener.

METS 6, BRAVES 0

Noah Syndergaard struck out seven over six sharp innings in his first opening day start for New York before leaving with a blister while Asdrubal Cabrera snapped a seventh-inning tie with a single as the Mets broke through following a pivotal replay reversal at the plate in which Wilmer Flores initially was

called out. New York took advantage of five walks by a shaky Braves bullpen in a six-run bottom of the seventh that lasted 35 minutes. Curtis Granderson had a sacrifice fly and Lucas Duda busted the game open with a three-run double off Eric O'Flaherty. Hansel Robles (1-0) worked a perfect inning for the win. Ian Krol (0-1) was the loser.

RED SOX 5, PIRATES 3

Rookie Andrew Benintendi hit a three-run homer off Gerrit Cole (0-1) that capped a five-run fifth inning as Boston began its post-David Ortiz era. Rick Porcello (1-0) gave up three runs and six hits in 6 1/3 innings while striking out five. Craig Kimbrel retired Starling Marte on a game-ending pop up with two on for the save.

ROCKIES 7, BREWERS 5

Bud Black won his debut as Colorado manager while Greg Holland got a save in his first game with the Rockies. Mark Reynolds homered, had three RBIs and scored the tying run in a two-run seventh following two defensive lapses by Milwaukee. Milwaukee's Junior Guerra left his first opening-day start in the big leagues after three innings with a strained right calf, grimacing as he broke out of the batter's box after laying down a bunt. The right-hander will go on the disabled list. Carlos Estevez (1-0) pitched a hitless sixth. Holland, who missed last season while recovering

from Tommy John surgery, walked Jonathan Villar leading off the ninth, then retired Eric Thames one a lineout to center and Ryan Braun on a game-ending, double-play grounder started by third baseman Nolan Arenado, who dove to his left.

TWINS 7, ROYALS 1

Miguel Sano homered and drew the third bases-loaded walk during a dreadful seventh inning for Kansas City's bullpen as the Twins won an opener for the first time in nine years. Ervin Santana (1-0) gave up two hits and two walks while striking out three over seven innings, aided by two diving catches of sinking line drives by center fielder Byron Buxton. Matt Strahm (0-1) and Travis Wood allowed four runners while recording only one out.

PHILLIES 4, REDS 3

Cesar Hernandez opened the Phillies' season with a homer on Cincinnati's eighth pitch while Jeremy Hellickson drove in a run with his first career triple. Hellickson (1-0) pitched into the sixth, allowing a run and six hits, and he also contributed his RBI triple in the sixth. Right fielder Scott Schebler failed to make a diving catch of his two-out liner, letting the ball get by him as Hellickson chugged across an infield turned muddy by several innings of rain. Jeanmar Gomez gave up Scooter Gennett's two-out, two-run homer in the ninth before retiring Billy Hamilton on a rou-

tinge fly for the save. Scott Feldman (0-1) allowed three runs and seven hits over 4 2/3 innings in his third opening day start.

DODGERS 14, PADRES 3

Joc Pederson launched a grand slam as the Dodgers backed Clayton Kershaw with a franchise-record four home runs on opening day. Pederson drove in five runs while Yasmani Grandal homered twice and Corey Seager added a three-run shot. Kershaw (1-0) allowed two runs - one earned - and two hits in seven innings, struck out eight and walked none in his seventh consecutive opening day start. Jhoulys Chacin (0-1) gave up nine runs and eight hits in 3 1/3 innings in his Padres debut.

INDIANS 8, RANGERS 5

Abraham Almonte singled in the go-ahead run in a three-run ninth as Cleveland won the opener of its AL title defense. Making his first opening-day start for Texas, Yu Darvish had a 5-1 lead behind Rougned Odor, who homered twice and drove in four runs. Edwin Encarnacion tied the score 5-5 with an eighth-inning homer off Matt Bush as the Indians went ahead against Sam Dyson. Carlos Santana added an RBI double and scored on Michael Brantley's single. Andrew Miller (1-0) struck out two in a perfect eighth, and Cody Allen got the save by striking out the side around Elvis Andrus' triple.

ASTROS 3, MARINERS 0

Dallas Keuchel (1-0) allowed two hits over seven innings while Luke Gregerson and Ken Giles completed the three-hitter and Houston won its fifth straight opener. George Springer became Houston's first player since Terry Puhl in 1980 to lead off the first game with a home run. Carlos Correa homered and drove in two runs. Felix Hernandez (0-1), making his 10th opening day start, allowed two runs and five hits while striking out six in five innings before leaving with tightness in a groin.

ATHLETICS 4, ANGELS 2

Khristian Davis hit a go-ahead homer in the sixth and connected again leading off the eighth to lead Oakland past Anaheim. Davis had just the second multihomer game on opening day in Oakland history - Jason Giambi did it in 2000 - to back Kendall Graveman (1-0). The right-hander struck out seven over six innings. Mike Trout hit a two-run homer in the third inning for the Angels then Yonder Alonso's RBI single in the fifth tied it at 2. Davis, who dealt with a sore quadriceps muscle leading up to the opener, connected first against Angels starter Ricky Nolasco (0-1) then JC Ramirez for his 12th career multihomer game. The slugger didn't hit his first home run last season until April 21 then finished with a career-high 42. — AP

SOCCER

QATAR IN TALKS TO HOST CLUB WORLD CUP

DOHA: Qatar is in discussion with FIFA to host several major international tournaments ahead of 2022 including the Club World Cup currently held by Real Madrid, sources familiar with the matter have told AFP.

The Gulf state could also be the venue for the Under-17 and Under-20 World Cups. Sources say all three tournament options are currently being considered by the Qatari authorities and football's governing body, and all three could be staged in the Gulf.

Qatar is urgently looking for test events to try out the multi-billion dollar infrastructure it is putting in place and which is reshaping the country for the 2022 World Cup finals.

But unlike other recent World Cup hosts, Qatar will not have the advantage of staging the Confederations Cup, traditionally played 12 months before as a rehearsal for the main event. Concerns about Qatar's fiercely hot summers which prompted FIFA to move the World Cup from June/July 2022, to November/December that year also meant football's governing body ruled out playing the 2021 Confederations Cup in Doha. No host has yet been chosen for 2021, but the venue will be another country from the Asian Football

Confederation. On a trip to Qatar in February, FIFA president Gianni Infantino said "all options were open" for Qatar to host rehearsal tournaments but at the time said no specific discussions were taking place.

"We have to make sure there will be some test events, test matches organised here and all the options are open at this moment in time," he said. The Club World Cup is held annually, and was most recently won by Real Madrid who beat Japan's Kashima Antlers in the final. The tournament is traditionally played in December, the same time of the year the 2022 World Cup will be played.

The U-17 tournament is held every two years, the next event taking place in India in October this year. The U-20 World Cup is also held biannually, and the next competition begins in South Korea in May.

Qatar is spending almost \$500 million every week on major infrastructure projects for the World Cup, the country's finance minister, Ali Shareef Al-Emadi said this year.

That eye-watering level of spending could continue until 2021 and covers not only stadiums but also huge projects such as roads, a metro, new airport and hospitals. — AFP



DOHA: This file photo taken on February 16, 2017 shows FIFA President Gianni Infantino attending a press conference during the FIFA Executive Football Summit in the Qatari capital Doha. Qatar is in discussion with FIFA to host several major international tournaments ahead of 2022 including the Club World Cup currently held by Real Madrid. —AFP

Kuwait Times 55th Anniversary BUSINESS

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Iran's Aseman Airlines signs \$3bn deal for 30 Boeing jets

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US trade deficit falls as exports hit 2-year high

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Elderly Greeks protest against pension cuts

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S&P CUTS SOUTH AFRICA'S CREDIT RATING TO 'JUNK'

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KUWAIT: Anwar Jassem Al-Kharafi Coast Investment & Development Co Chairman of the Board is pictured with other top executives.

CIDC RECORDS KD 2.06 MILLION NET PROFITS

KUWAIT: Coast Investment & Development Company (CIDC) recently announced its results for the fiscal year which ended on December 31, 2016. The company made showing KD 2,068,398 as net profits, which is a 123.67 percent change compared to 2015 when the company lost KD 8.7 million. The company's total assets hit KD 54,278,654.

Speaking on the occasion, CIDC's Board Chairman Anwar Jassem Al-Kharafi said that ever since the beginning of 2017, KSE has been witnessing a remarkable surge in liquidity and trading volumes, which had positive impacts on all indexes compared to the same period in 2016. He added that market value for all companies, including CIDC, had increased giving hopes for recovery for CIDC and KSE.

Al-Kharafi stressed that shareholders' spirits were lifted in 2016 as a result of UAE's Adeptio overtake of Americana shares by purchasing 268.5 million shares (66.7%) for KD 2,650 per share and the total of KD 711 million. Al-Kharafi also explained that the deal was a major step in KSE's history and that it had a positive impact on economic situations in general by pumping more liquidity into the market thus,

attracting foreign investments. Further, Al-Kharafi explained that GCC stock exchanges performed well in the last quarter of 2016, including KSE which achieved 8 percent increase in weight index. In addition, he added that CMA regulations also helped organized KSE performance and contributed in enhancing more transparency and investors protection.



This combination of pictures shows the Yahoo logo and the AOL.

AOL PLUS YAHOO TO EQUAL NEW 'OATH'

SAN FRANCISCO: AOL and Yahoo will be combined into a unit called "Oath" after telecom titan Verizon buys the pioneering internet firm, according to a tweet Monday by the AOL chief. Confirmation of a new name for what the world has long known as Yahoo was tweeted from a verified @timarmstrongaol account after reports of the new name leaked in US media reports. "Billion+ Consumers, 20+ Brands, Unstoppable Team. #TakeTheOath. Summer 2017," the Twitter post read. But the rebranding was greeted with derision by some on the Internet who mocked the name, including from one person who tweeted: "Oath is the name of the evil tech company in the sci-fi story you wrote in 7th grade." Another Twitter user also made sport of the company's new name.

Yahoo announced in September that hackers in 2014 stole personal data from more than 500 million of its user accounts. And in December it admitted to another cyber attack from 2013 affecting more than a billion users. The US Justice Department last month charged two Russian intelligence operatives and a pair of hackers over one of the largest cyber attacks in history, which had apparent twin goals of espionage and financial gain. The Kremlin denied any official Russian involvement in cybercrimes after the US indicted two FSB intelligence agents over cyber attacks on Yahoo that compromised 500 million accounts.

Under the terms of the revised acquisition agreement, Yahoo will continue to cover the cost of a US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) probe into the breaches as well as shareholder lawsuits. However, other government investigations and third-party litigation related to the hacks will be shared by Verizon and Yahoo. The deal with Verizon was expected to close by July, and will end Yahoo's run of more than 20 years as an independent company. Yahoo is selling its main operating business as a way to separate that from its more valuable stake in Chinese internet giant Alibaba, which will become a new entity, to be renamed Altaba, Inc., and will act as an investment company.

Yahoo boasted having more than a billion users monthly in 2016. Yahoo's most recent earnings report showed the company swung to profit in the final three months of last year, after a massive \$4.4 billion loss in the same period of 2015. Yahoo reported a loss of \$214 million for 2016 on revenue that inched up to \$5.2 billion from \$5 billion in 2015. —AFP

Oath:

A Verizon company

Is "Oath" Yahoo or AOL?
Boath, read the tweet from the poster, who then doubled down on the gag.

What will determine success?
Growth, the tweet read. A price cut early this year kept Verizon on track to consummate the purchase of Yahoo's internet business, and share the costs from a pair of epic hacks that threatened to derail the deal. Yahoo slashed the price of its core internet business by \$350 million. Under revised terms of the delayed deal, Verizon's purchase of Yahoo assets will total \$4.48 billion.

TESLA OVERTAKES GIANT FORD IN MARKET CAPITALIZATION

CHICAGO: Tesla has become the second-largest US car maker in terms of market capitalization, displacing Ford, whose sales lagged amid concerns about the ability of the US market to keep growing. Many major auto makers reported US sales declines in March compared to a year ago, but Tesla over the weekend said it saw a huge jump in vehicles delivered to consumers in the first three months of the year. That was enough to send the electric car maker's stock soaring Monday, even as investors punished major car brands for reporting lower-than-expected March sales.

Tesla said it delivered 25,000 of its high-tech vehicles in the January-March period—a 69 percent surge compared to the first three months of 2016—indicating it was on its way to meeting its goal of 50,000 vehicle deliveries by mid-2017. Late last year, the company reported its first quarterly profit in more than three years, but then slipped back into unprofitability in the following quarter. Investors still rewarded the company on Monday, with stock movements reshuffling the hierarchy among US carmakers. Tesla Motors overtook Ford for the number two spot and closed the gap with GM, the biggest US automaker by market capitalization.

At market close, Tesla was up 7.3 percent to \$298.52 for a market capitalization of \$48.63 billion. Ford, which at one point was down as much as three percent, had a market capitalization of \$45.47 billion. At its low, GM fell 4.4 percent, but maintained a market capitalization above \$50.9 billion. Tesla founder and CEO Elon Musk marked the occasion on Twitter with a dig at short sellers, investors who bet that a company's stock will decline. "Stormy weather in Shortville," Musk wrote.

Major brands struggle

For the industry as a whole, it may indeed be stormy weather. Car companies failed to meet forecasts of an overall March sales increase, which fell instead industry-wide by 1.6 percent, according to an estimate by the tracking firm Autodata. The seasonally-adjusted annual rate for US vehicle sales fell to 16.62 million units, versus 16.67 million

units a year ago, Autodata reported. Despite the bad news, there were bright spots among established auto makers. GM saw sales gain 1.6 percent, helped by Americans' strong demand for light trucks and sport utility vehicles, as well as bigger discounts.

as sales slipped 0.7 percent, when accounting for declines at its Acura luxury brand.

In an earlier forecast note, Edmunds analyst Jessica Caldwell struck a cautionary tone for the industry, saying there were several areas of concern. "Inventories have reached levels not seen in



LOS ANGELES: Photo shows a sign posted on the exterior of a Tesla service center in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

Nissan sales also rose, up 3.2 percent compared to March 2016, helped by its popular Rogue compact SUV. But the news was not good for many other big players. Ford reported that sales fell a worse-than-expected 7.2 percent, while Toyota sales dropped 2.1 percent, compared to the same period last year. FCA US, the American arm of Fiat Chrysler, continued to struggle, reporting a five percent decline last month, while in the first three months of the year, sales were down eight percent. Record Honda truck and SUV sales could not help the Japanese car maker notch an overall increase last month,

more than a decade, and incentives are rising," Caldwell said, referring to discounts and other enticements offered to consumers. "We're also seeing an increase in loan terms and indications of a rise in subprime lending, which demonstrate sales aren't coming as easily as they used to," she said. But while Toyota echoed that cautionary tone, pointing to a declining selling rate, GM remained optimistic. "More people are working, consumer confidence is at a 16-year high, fuel prices are low," Kurt McNeil, head of GM's US sales, said in a statement. "We see more growth ahead for our brands," McNeil said. — AFP

EU INDUSTRY CHIEF SEES 'FAST' PHASE-OUT OF DIESEL MPS BACK TOUGHER RULES ON NEW CAR APPROVAL

BRUSSELS: Europe's industry chief said she saw diesel engines disappearing from markets much faster than expected as the European Parliament yesterday endorsed tougher rules aimed at preventing a rerun of the Volkswagen emissions cheating scandal. In response to the German car maker's admission in September 2015 that it used software to cheat US diesel pollution controls - a scandal that spotlighted the EU's lax vehicle regulations - the European Commission proposed an overhaul of rules on how vehicles are licensed and tested across the bloc.

EU lawmakers voted 585 to 77 in favor of the draft bill, which would bolster EU oversight and allow Brussels to fine car makers up to 30,000 euros (\$31,923.00) per vehicle. The new measures will eventually take diesel cars off the roads, European Commissioner Elzbieta Bienkowska said. "Diesel will not disappear from one day to another,"

Bienkowska told EU lawmakers yesterday. "But after this year of work ... I am quite sure they will disappear much faster than we can imagine."

Under the draft law, car makers would no longer directly pay testing agency - in a bid to break their cosy relationships. EU nations now have to fund car exhaust testing centers - although they may levy fees from car makers to do so. Brussels would get powers to carry out vehicle spot-checks and levy fines, while national authorities would be able to peer-review each other's decisions.

The bill calls for fines levied by EU regulators to be used to compensate car owners and boost environmental protection or market surveillance measures. The law still needs to be finalized in negotiations between EU lawmakers, the Commission and member states. The proposed rules, however, stopped short of creating an independent market surveillance agency in the style of

the US Environment Protection Agency - one of the key recommendations of a parliamentary report into the Dieselgate scandal. Environment groups called it a missed opportunity, saying the scandal had clearly shown the need for stronger oversight.

The non-binding report adopted in a plenary yesterday also accused EU legislators and governments of caving in to lobbying efforts and being too slow to adopt reforms. Following the VW scandal, national investigations revealed on-road nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions as high as 15 times the regulatory limits, as well as the use of devices to reduce exhaust treatment. The use of such devices is illegal under EU law, but car manufacturers have invoked an EU legal loophole that allows them to use software to scale back emissions controls when necessary to protect car engines. All deny breaking the law. —Reuters



FRANKFURT: The new 50 euro bank note is presented at the German Federal Bank in Frankfurt, Germany. The new note, that went into circulation yesterday. It has a similar design as the previous one, but is equipped with better security features. —AP



ATHENS: A dog stands in front of pensioners holding a banner and chanting slogans as they gather to march in central Athens yesterday to protest against pension cuts and changes in the taxing system. —AFP

ELDERLY GREEKS PROTEST AGAINST PENSION CUTS MORE AUSTERITY LOOMS

ATHENS: Thousands of elderly Greeks protested peacefully yesterday against more pension cuts, as cash-strapped Greece remained locked in talks with lenders on further austerity and unpopular labor reforms. Pension cuts have been a regular feature of austerity drives to ensure that financial aid continues to the indebted country. Greece has needed three multi-billion bailouts since 2010 to stave off bankruptcy.

Greece is now negotiating new cuts to keep its latest 86 billion-euro (\$91.54 billion) bailout. They would represent the 12th reduction in pensions in seven years, a controversial issue for Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, whose Syriza party vowed to fight austerity when it was elected to office in 2015. "Tsipras has betrayed us," said Stelios Vitzilaios as he marched with about another 4,000 pensioners through Athens with the aid of a walking stick. He started work at the age of 14, and now takes a 550-euro pension a month, 100 euros less than pre-crisis levels.

Pensioners in the country are often the sole means of support in a house-

hold, where a quarter of the workforce is jobless. Several said their pensions were financially supporting unemployed adult members of their family and that they scrimped on food. "We have cut everything. We only eat beans," said Triaios Softsis, 82. His 800-euro pension was cut to 650 euro during the crisis, and now, he says, he financially supports two children and grandchildren.

Greece has agreed to cut pension spending after its current bailout expires in 2018. It has sought to implement the cuts gradually, over two or three years. But Germany and the International Monetary Fund want them implemented in 2019, sources said. Greece's finance and labor ministers were due to fly to Brussels on Tuesday for consultations with lenders, hoping to wrap up a long-delayed bailout review that will unlock more aid before repayments loom this summer. One placard summed up the mood at Tuesday's demonstration: "Don't slash pensions. Go slash your throats." —Reuters

GERMANY'S NEW CAR SALES ZOOM

FRANKFURT AM MAIN: New car sales in Germany motored ahead with a double-digit increase in March, official data showed yesterday, rounding off a powerful first-quarter performance for the crucial sector. Some 360,000 new vehicles were registered in Europe's largest economy in March, the KBA transport authority said, an 11.4-percent increase on the same month in 2016.

Part of the increase was attributable to the timing of the Easter holidays, which fell in March last year, while this year there were more shopping days in the month. Growth in private car sales stood at 13.3 percent last month, outpacing business registrations which were up 10.4 percent. Looking at the three months since January, 845,000 vehicles were sold in Germany, a 6.7-percent increase on the first quarter of 2016. It was "the best quarter since the year 2000," aside from 2009, when Berlin offered a scrappage subsidy to new car buyers, said Reinhard Zirpel, head of the VDIK foreign carmakers' association.

"Now we just have to keep up the momentum into the second quarter, when there are three fewer working days than last year," he added. One dark spot

in the data came with sales of diesel vehicles, which fell 2.8 percent in March as the fallout from Volkswagen's 2015 'dieselgate' emissions cheating scandal continued to weigh on demand for the technology. Some German cities are considering banning diesel vehicles from urban centres altogether. "Ongoing discussion about possible diesel bans is clearly worrying drivers, even when they go to buy new cars," said Matthias Wissmann, head of the German Association of the Automobile Industry (VDA).

But "clean and efficient" modern diesels "are necessary to meet European carbon dioxide targets," he insisted. Brand-by-brand figures from the KBA showed the first quarter was a struggle for Volkswagen, Germany's biggest carmaker. Sales of its own-brand cars declined by 4.3 percent year-on-year as negative headlines about the scandal refused to go away, but sales at its luxury subsidiaries Audi and Porsche and lower-end units Seat and Skoda all increased. Looking to the export market, March saw 9.0-percent growth year-on-year with some 431,000 vehicles sold abroad, while the industry booked 4.0-percent growth over the whole first quarter. —AFP

US TRADE DEFICIT FALLS AS EXPORTS HIT 2-YEAR HIGH EXPORTS RISE 0.2%; IMPORTS DECLINE 1.8%

WASHINGTON: The US trade deficit fell more than expected in February as exports increased to a two-year high and slowing domestic demand weighed on imports.

The Commerce Department said yesterday the trade gap declined 9.6 percent to \$43.6 billion. January's trade deficit was revised slightly down to \$48.2 billion from \$48.5 billion. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the trade gap falling to \$44.8 billion in February. When adjusted for inflation, the deficit decreased to \$59.7 billion, with exports of goods the highest on record as an earlier drag from a strong dollar fades.

The real trade deficit was \$65.1 billion in January. The dollar held modest gains versus a basket of currencies after the data, while prices for US Treasuries were little changed. Most economists expect trade will likely be a small drag on gross domestic product in the first quarter after subtract-

ing 1.82 percentage points from fourth-quarter growth.

In addition to trade, weak consumer spending also likely constrained the economy in the first three months of the year.

The Atlanta Federal Reserve is forecasting GDP rising at a 1.2 percent rate in the first quarter, a deceleration from the 2.1 percent pace logged in the October-December period.

Rising exports

The Trump administration is eyeing trade as a vehicle to lift annual economic growth to 4 percent and boost the manufacturing sector. President Donald Trump last Friday ordered a study into the causes of US trade deficits and a clamp-down on import duty evasion. Trump also wants to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which was signed in 1994 by the United States, Canada and Mexico.

In February, exports of goods and services increased 0.2 percent to \$192.9 billion, the highest level since December 2014. Exports were lifted by gains in the shipments of automobiles and parts, which were the highest since July 2014. Exports of industrial supplies and materials were the highest since December 2015. There was an 8.0 percent jump in exports to the European Union, with goods shipped to Germany surging 8.6 percent. Exports to the United Kingdom soared 17.3 percent and Japan also bought more goods from the United States. However, exports to China fell 2.7 percent and Mexico saw a 7.1 percent drop in goods shipped from the United States. Imports of goods and services fell 1.8 percent to \$236.4 billion amid declines in imports of cell phones and motor vehicles. Imports had risen in recent months, in part on higher oil prices. There was a drop in

crude oil imports in February. Some of the decline in imports in February likely reflects slower consumer spending. Data on Friday showed real consumer spending decreased for a second straight month in February, the first back-to-back monthly decline since April 2009.

Still, food imports hit a record high in February and imports of capital goods were the highest in nearly two years. Imports of goods from China tumbled a record \$8.6 billion to \$32.8 billion in February, a 20.8 percent drop from January. The nation also saw a decline in goods shipped from the European Union, Canada and Japan. As a result, the politically sensitive US-China trade deficit dropped 26.6 percent to \$23.0 billion in February. The trade deficit with Germany was the smallest since January 2013. The trade gap with Mexico jumped 46 percent to \$5.8 billion. —Reuters



CALIFORNIA: Tugboats assist a container ship mooring at the Port of Oakland, as seen from Alameda, Calif. —AP

ALL EURO BUSINESS 'SHOULD BE MOVED' FROM UK AFTER BREXIT

STRASBOURG: All financial business denominated in euros should be moved from London to the European Union after Britain leaves the bloc, an EU lawmaker said yesterday. London is the world's leading financial centre for the clearing of derivatives denominated in euros, a lucrative business that the European Central Bank had tried in vain two years ago to relocate to the euro-zone.

But with Brexit, the case for London maintaining its leading role in euro-denominated business has become weaker. "People expect that we do the euro business and all the business which is linked to the euro on European soil," Manfred Weber, who heads the conservative grouping, the largest in the European Parliament, told a

news conference in Strasbourg. Weber, an ally of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, said that it was not conceivable that after Brexit business conducted in euros should remain in London.

He added that the bloc should protect the interests of EU financial hubs, like Paris, Frankfurt, Dublin and Amsterdam. Weber declined to answer specific questions on whether this would involve the moving of clearing of euro-denominated derivatives. The European Commission could propose a forced relocation from London to the European Union of the clearing business in legislative proposals on derivatives that are upcoming. But the EU executive has so far refrained from taking a clear position on the

issue, which could sour Brexit talks. The ECB considers it crucial to have the clearing business in the euro zone to facilitate the supervision of activities that could endanger financial stability if not properly monitored. Weber said his remarks on relocating business from London were general but added they were about "European supervision, the European Banking Authority (EBA) and defending European jobs". No reference was made to the relocation of financial business in the draft Brexit resolution that the European Parliament will adopt yesterday. Lawmakers only said in their draft text that the London-based EBA, the European agency monitoring banking rules, should be relocated as quickly as possible. —Reuters

Lean, Mean, and Ready to Scream: All-New 2017 F-150 Raptor

Charges into the Middle East as Ford's Toughest, Smartest and Most Capable Truck for Ultimate Off-road Performance



- **Toughest:** All-new, purpose-built high-strength steel frame unique to Ford F-150 Raptor, and high-strength, aluminium-alloy body help save 227 kg of weight for improved performance and capability
- **Smartest:** Powered by all-new, high-output 3.5-litre EcoBoost® engine with more horsepower and torque than previous Raptor's 6.2-litre V8; all-new 10-speed transmission; advanced LED lighting, camera technology for improved visibility day or night
- **Most capable:** Redesigned, larger FOX Racing Shox with more suspension travel and all-new terrain management technology help F-150 Raptor tackle toughest offroad trails
- Check out a video of the All-New 2017 F-150 Raptor in action here - <http://ford.to/2ovWIZZ>

Kuwait city, Kuwait, April 4, 2017 – Eagerly anticipated and still unmatched by any auto manufacturer, Ford – America's truck leader – introduces the all-new 2017 F-150 Raptor to the Middle East, adding agility, versatility and roominess to the toughest, smartest, most capable F-150 Raptor ever.

Developed with the DNA of a Baja race truck, F-150 Raptor is unique among off-road and performance vehicles, with a purpose-built engine, chassis and suspension that enables it to travel fast over challenging desert landscapes or crawl over rocky terrain.

Using the same high-strength, aluminium alloy body and a fully boxed high-strength steel frame as the current F-150 trucks, the 2017 Raptor is up to 227 kg lighter than the 2014 model. Combined with a new high-output second-generation EcoBoost engine and 10-speed transmission, it delivers a 21 per cent improved average torque-to-weight ratio and a 23 per cent improvement in EPA-rated combined fuel economy compared with the previous generation Raptor. The new engine produces more power with greater efficiency than the current 6.2-litre V8, delivering 421 PS* at 6,000rpm and 678 Nm of torque* at 3,750rpm.

"Raptor was designed to be a no-compromise, off-road performance machine," said Thierry Sabbagh, managing director of Ford Middle East. "The 2017 Raptor is the best high-performance off-roading pickup truck available, and as one of the most successful and popular trucks in the world, represents Ford's willingness to consistently sit on top of the truck food chain."

Toughest F-150 Raptor ever

The all-new F-150 Raptor starts with a purpose-built fully boxed frame – the backbone of the truck – that is the strongest in the F-150 line-up, featuring more high-strength steel than the outgoing Raptor.

The F-150 Raptor's chiselled looks are reminiscent of

Trophy Trucks – the fastest and most powerful class of off-road pickups. F-150 Raptor is more than 150 mm wider than the standard F-150 for enhanced stability off-road. The all-new F-150 Raptor also boasts its first-ever dual exhaust and new 17-inch wheels with next-generation BFGoodrich All-Terrain tyres designed for off-road performance.

Smartest F-150 Raptor ever

F-150 Raptor is powered by Ford's all-new, second-generation high-output 3.5-litre EcoBoost® engine that produces more power with greater efficiency than the outgoing 6.2-litre V8.

Within performance circles, Ford's EcoBoost engine has gained a following among truck enthusiasts and racing fans alike. Already robust and efficient, Ford developed the second-generation 3.5-litre EcoBoost, which the Ford Performance team then tuned specifically for the new Raptor.

Key 3.5-litre EcoBoost engine improvements include a new twin direct and port-fuel injection strategy, stronger and lighter crank and valvetrain components, a redesigned twin-turbocharger system with electronic wastegate, and a redesigned valvetrain and variable-displacement oil pump.

Among the high-output EcoBoost performance enhancements for Raptor are more aggressive turbo compressors with increased boost calibrations, cast stainless steel manifolds and full dual exhaust, oil-cooled pistons and more aggressive engine control calibrations.



An all-new four-wheel-drive, torque-on-demand transfer case, with advanced, easy-to-use off-road mode driver-assist technology, further improves Raptor's performance so it is easy to drive off-road across varying terrain.

F-150 Raptor's new transfer case, which manages power distribution between the front and rear wheels, combines the best attributes of clutch-driven, on-demand all-wheel drive with durable, mechanical-locking four-wheel drive to send power to the wheels in slippery conditions.

The pioneering off-road driving mode technology has evolved into an all-new Terrain Management System™ that enables the driver to select modes to optimise driving dynamics to environmental conditions – from snow to mud, sand and more.

All-new 10-speed automatic transmission

The all-new 10-speed automatic transmission, standard on the 2017 Raptor, features Auto Start-Stop and an integrated electric pump that improve driving efficiency.

The transmission's closer ratio between gears and Ford-patented hydraulic control system better optimise the power and torque curves of the new 3.5-litre high-output EcoBoost engine.

Raptor's all-new adaptive shift algorithms monitor more than a dozen powertrain and driver control signals in real time – ensuring the right gear at the right time for an engaging driving experience, including Raptor's normal, sport, weather, mud/sand, rock/crawl and Baja modes. In addition, a high-speed,

one-way clutch allows for non-sequential shifting.

Weight savings play a key role in improved shift performance. The 10-speed gearbox – the first from Ford not to employ cast-iron components – uses advanced materials and alloys that result in less weight. Additionally, an integrated torque converter/turbine clutch helps shed around one kilogramme, while also reducing the packaging footprint.

By re-engineering almost every part, Ford proudly introduces its ultimate high-performance off-road pickup truck, the all-new 2017 Ford F-150 Raptor, across the Middle East now.

- As per Gulf Standardisation Organisation (GSO) ratings.

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The All-New 2017 F-150 Raptor is now exclusively available in Kuwait at Alghanim Auto. To learn more, customers are encouraged to visit the Alghanim Auto New Vehicle Showroom in the Shuwaikh Industrial Area, opposite from the Classical Car Museum and Sirbb Circuit. Working hours are 9AM to 10PM from Saturday to Thursday and 2PM to 8PM on Fridays. For more information, please call the customer care center at 1898900; visit www.fordalghanim.com; or on social media @FordAlghanim.

About Ford Motor Company

Ford Motor Company is a global automotive and mobility company based in Dearborn, Michigan. With about 201,000 employees and 62 plants worldwide, the company's core business includes designing, manufacturing, marketing and servicing a full line of Ford cars, trucks and SUVs, as well as Lincoln luxury vehicles. To expand its business model, Ford is aggressively pursuing emerging opportunities with investments in electrification, autonomy and mobility. Ford provides financial services through Ford Motor Credit Company. For more information regarding Ford and its products and services, please visit www.corporate.ford.com.

Ford's history in the Middle East goes back more than 60 years. The company's local importer-dealers operate more than 155 facilities in the region and directly employ more than 7,000 people, the majority of whom are Arab Nationals. For more information on Ford Middle East, please visit www.me.ford.com.

Ford Middle East is also a responsible corporate citizen with currently three CSR initiatives running in the region including the Ford Motor Company Conservation & Environmental Grants, Ford Warriors in Pink® breast cancer awareness campaign and Ford Driving Skills for Life safe driving awareness programme for young drivers and teens.

AUSTRALIA KEEPS RATES ON HOLD, WARNS ON HOUSING

INFLATION REMAINS BELOW RESERVE BANK'S 2-3%

SYDNEY: Australia's central bank held interest rates at a record low 1.50 percent for a seventh straight meeting yesterday as it juggles a booming property market with mixed economic data. The Reserve Bank of Australia slashed rates 300 basis points between November 2011 and August last year to support non-resources industries as the economy transitions out of a mining investment boom. It has remained on hold since then.

In a statement, Reserve Bank governor Philip Lowe said the board "judged that holding the stance of monetary policy unchanged at this meeting would be consistent with sustainable growth in the economy and achieving the inflation target over time". Economists expect a better reading on the bank's intentions moving forward

once it considers first quarter inflation data due later this month, potentially making the board's May meeting more interesting.

Inflation remains below the Reserve Bank's 2-3 percent target band, while the jobless rate has edged up to 5.9 percent since the bank last met. At the same time wages growth remains weak, eroding consumers' purchasing power. Data this week showed continued softness in retail sales. The central bank is juggling all this alongside surging property prices, particularly in Sydney and Melbourne, amid fears the market is entering bubble territory. This is widely seen as why it has held off on further rate cuts owing to worries it would stoke more debt-fueled speculation and push the cost of housing even higher.

Lowe noted that "growth in household borrowing, largely to purchase housing, continues to outpace growth in household income". "Lenders need to ensure that the serviceability metrics that they use are appropriate for current conditions," he added. "A reduced reliance on interest-only housing loans in the Australian market would also be a positive development." The decision to stay on hold was widely expected by economists, and the Australian dollar was largely unchanged at 75.93 US cents after the statement. Lowe noted the economy was "continuing its transition following the end of the mining investment boom". "Recent data are consistent with ongoing moderate growth," he said. — AFP



FLYDUBAI APPOINTS JPA DESIGN TO DESIGN ITS CABIN INTERIOR

KUWAIT: Dubai-based carrier, flydubai yesterday announced that it has appointed international transport design specialist JPA Design to design the cabin interior for its new fleet of aircraft. The announcement was made at the Aircraft Interiors Expo in Hamburg and marks flydubai's continued commitment to further enhance its product offering and overall onboard customer experience. flydubai, which operates a fleet of 58 Next-Generation Boeing 737-800 aircraft, placed an order for up to 100 Boeing 737 MAX 8s at the 2013 Dubai International Airshow. The carrier has partnered with JPA to entirely reimagine a new look for both Business and Economy Class which will feature on the new 737 MAXs scheduled for delivery from the second half of 2017.

Commenting on the new partnership with JPA, flydubai's Chief Executive Officer, Ghaith Al Ghaith, said: "We have been committed to investing in product enhancements and technologies that exceed the expectations of the industry and our customers since day one. flydubai was the launch customer for the Boeing Sky Interior in 2009, we introduced a top of the line Inflight Entertainment system to our fleet in 2010 and in 2013 we launched our two-cabin configuration with the introduction of Business Class."

"We are teaming up with JPA, as one of the world's leading design specialists, to deliver a new cabin interior reflective of the airline's maturity, offering our more than 10 million annual passengers a more comfortable onboard experience across our growing network", added Al Ghaith. JPA Design, who has offices in London, Singapore and most recently Dubai, are designing all elements of the two-class cabin interior for the fuel-efficient single aisle aircraft. In Business Class, a more bespoke seat that promises to be unique to flydubai will be developed, giving added comfort and value to passengers.

John Tighe, JPA's

Design Director leading the flydubai design project said: "To seek inspiration that will help inform the final cabin design, JPA has already spent a good deal of time immersing into the culture, color and sights of Dubai. We've compared flight experiences on airlines in the region and have been getting to know the flydubai family of crew, engineers and management team. They are a warm, friendly, smart and ambitious airline, have a clear vision of where they wish to go and value their customers highly. And we both share in the commitment to constantly innovate and strive for best in class solutions."

"The Middle East region and the dynamism of Dubai in particular has interested us for some time and has led us to forming a local presence. There exists in Dubai a truly positive attitude and a desire to achieve great things in the 21st Century. This approach reflects our own values and we were keen to establish and build on relationships in this fascinating region. Partnering with flydubai is a pleasure and an honor," said James Park founder and chairman of JPA Design. JPA Design's full scope of work takes in all cabin elements, including seat design and customization for Economy and Business class, lavatories, full CMF (color materials and finishes), soft furnishings - including curtains and carpets, service wear - bulkheads, lighting and Inflight Entertainment GUI (Interface) menu content. "As chosen design partners for flydubai, we see this as a very exciting and positive experience for JPA Design," Tighe concluded.



Ghaith Al Ghaith, CEO flydubai

ROSNEFT HOPES IRAN RULINGS CAN HELP IT BEAT SANCTIONS

LONDON: Russian oil major Rosneft hopes to benefit from European court rulings that have allowed some Iranian banks to escape from European Union sanctions. Russia's largest oil firm has been subject to sanctions since 2014, following Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea region. Chief Executive Igor Sechin, a close ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, is himself under sanctions. Sanctions complicate fund-raising for the state-run Rosneft and have prevented western companies from helping it develop deepwater, shale and Arctic oil deposits, including a large venture with Exxon Mobil.

Rosneft is attempting to annul EU sanctions in the European General Court, following a ruling by the European Court of Justice that the matter can be heard in Brussels. Rosneft is challenging the legality of sanctions, saying the General Court set a precedent when it annulled some EU sanctions against Iranian banks. The decision was later confirmed by the European Court of Justice. Rosneft said the Iranian banks had successfully challenged sanctions intended to curb Iran's nuclear program because there was no evidence of wrongdoing by the banks.

The General Court had recognized that the banks were not involved in Tehran's nuclear activities, Rosneft said in legal arguments. Rosneft is hoping to benefit from a similar attitude to sanctions imposed over Ukraine. The oil firm said it had "not committed any illegal actions in any jurisdiction, including Ukraine, and has nothing to do with the Ukrainian crisis". In 2014, the European Court of Justice struck down an EU decision to freeze the assets of Iran's central bank, a measure put in place prevent Iran developing nuclear weapons. —Reuters



BURGAN BANK ANNOUNCES WINNER OF THE AL THURAYA SALARY ACCOUNT

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank, the second largest in terms of assets, announced yesterday MONA AHMED ABDULMOHSEN AL ALI as the lucky winner of the Al Thuraya Salary Account monthly draw. The winner was presented with a Nissan Patrol SUV. The draw rewards new and existing customers who transfer their salary to Burgan Bank by offering them a chance to win a Nissan Patrol SUV every month. With every KD 10 available in the account, the customer receives one chance to enter the draw.

The Al Thuraya account holders have the option to hold money in Kuwaiti Dinar and any other major currencies and can access other account-related services such as standing orders, loans and credit cards and much more. Customers wishing to open the Al Thuraya account can do so by simply visiting the nearest Burgan Bank branch and obtain all the necessary details, or simply call the bank's call center on 1804080. For further information, customers can also visit the bank's website on www.burgan.com.

GMC Yukon

An effective element to «Command Respect» Traffic Patrols



In a move that reinforces GM's philosophy of Command Respect as a vehicle for GMC Yukon, Mohammed Saleh and Reza Yousef Behbehani delivered 150 cars to the Ministry of the Interior - Traffic Patrol Sector.

The choice of the traffic sector for GMC Yukon vehicles for its roles in the roads of the State of Kuwait for its excellence and durability and the availability of several factors combined, provided by the distinguished partnership between General Motors and GMC Behbehani, including:

The strength and stability of the vehicle:

Yukon offers a full suite of Drive Alert and Active Safety technologies that rely on a sophisticated network of sensors to help prepare the driver for the unexpected. The advanced driver and safety technology includes lane change alert, rear cross traffic alert plus GM-exclusive StabiliTrak technology to help the driver to maintain control. Thus, The Ministry of Interior management has chosen a vehicle that applies high standards of protection systems to ensure the safety of its commanders and officers.

Built-in Protection Features:

Yukon protects the driver in the event of a collision with features engineered to give the driver greater peace of mind, these includes the industry's first Front Center Airbag to protect driver and front

passenger which is a key factor that command respect in ensuring the safety of traffic patrol officers in dangerous pursuits, as well as improvements to the new reinforced chassis and suspension systems. The unique structure of the new SHEAR-STYLE BODY MOUNTS enhances the advantages of rigidity and contributes to Yukon's outstanding driving performance.

Performance & Engine Advanced Technology:

The 2017 Yukon features EcoTec V-8 Engine 5.3L combines innovative new technologies to let the driver go wherever he wants and tailor what he wants with control and confidence. Yukon's EcoTec3 engine family combines three engine technologies: Direct Injection, Active Fuel Management and continuously Variable Valve Timing to deliver exceptional power, torque, efficiency and durability.

Compared with previous models, the driving experience of the new SUVs is further enhanced with:

- Wider rear track that contributes to a more planted stance
- Wheels that are a half-inch wider, reducing tire flex for improved cornering performance
- New, electric variable-assist power steering system enhances fuel economy and tailors steering assist to vehicle speed

- New 9.5-inch (241.3 mm) rear axle and standard automatic locking rear differential, Standard StabiliTrak electronic stability control, tow/haul mode, trailer sway control, auto grade braking and hill start assist

Distinguishing Maintenance Service at GMC Behbehani Service Centers:

GMC Service Center is the largest maintenance center in the Middle East and is equipped with state-of-the-art car maintenance technology with a dedicated technical team undergoing continuous

training courses. The most important features are speed of delivery due to the availability of a large number of maintenance lanes.

About GMC

Built on the philosophy of 'Commands Respect', GMC has built pickups since 1902. With a rich heritage in the Middle East and an impressive 111 years of presence, innovation and engineering excellence is built into all GMC vehicles. The brand is evolving to offer more fuel-efficient pickups, crossovers and SUVs.



HUAWEI CELEBRATES MOTHER'S DAY WITH ITS '9' COMPETITION

KUWAIT CITY: Huawei Consumer Business Group (CBG) in Kuwait today announced the winners of its competition titled "9", which was launched in celebration of Mother's Day. Huawei Kuwait invited participants to snap a photo of the number "9" wherever they see it in their everyday life for a chance to win a Huawei Mate 9 smartphone.

To enter the draw, participants were asked to take any picture featuring the number 9 and post it on their Instagram account, tagging @HuaweiKW. Winners of the competition were Taleb Al Shammari and Yazan Ziyadeh. On Dec 1, 2016, Huawei Kuwait introduced its most coveted flagship smartphone, the Huawei Mate 9, which revealed to be the third successful device launch in the country within a year.

The Huawei Mate 9 offers a high performance and unprecedented images with its camera co-engineered with Leica. With the Mate 9, Huawei continued to push the limits of performance and advanced features, making it the ideal device to support business users and complement consumers' lifestyle in general.

Revolutionary speed
Built with the new Kirin 960 processor and intelligent Machine Learning algorithm, this groundbreaking interplay between hardware and software means the Huawei Mate 9 is born fast and stays fast.

Enhanced power
The Huawei Mate 9 offers a truly revolutionary battery life. With its large 4000mAh battery and smart power-saving technology, the battery lasts up to two days of usage. The state-of-the-art Huawei Supercharge technology safely charges the device for a full day's power in 20 minutes.

Breathtaking photography
The Huawei Mate 9 offers exceptional sharpness in its second-generation Leica Dual Camera, which renders images in unprecedented detail. The Mate 9 is also equipped with a front camera.

Groundbreaking user experience
The Mate 9 was designed with EMUI 5.0 and a beautiful and smart user interface for a stunning experience. Huawei plugged in the VR technology to support

Daydream, a highly-demanded VR system launched by Google.

Fingerprint unlock speed
The Huawei Mate 9 comes with 4 Level Fingerprint which includes 3D fingerprint recognition and an encrypted file safe that you can access with the fingerprint sensor. It's also 20% faster when compared with the Huawei Mate 8.

Global connectivity
With incredible network support and integrated dual SIM support, the Huawei Mate 9 offers outstanding performance worldwide. Users can experience consistent call quality and a stable Internet connection with reduced power consumption and data usage around the globe.

Bold, meticulous and refined
The Huawei Mate 9 has inherited the Mate Series' design DNA, with a visual and sensual feel that's uniquely glamorous. It is available in two versions: The Huawei Porsche Design Mate 9, which uses 5.5 inches 2K curved screen, and the Huawei Mate 9 with 5.9 inches 1080P screen.



CALIFORNIA: This photo provided by Drew Wharton shows a female black bear wearing GPS collar in Yosemite National Park.—AP

TRACK JOURNEY OF YOSEMITE BEARS ONLINE

FRESNO, California: Wildlife enthusiasts around the world can now follow the daily journey of Yosemite National Park's black bears from their laptops and smartphones, tracking the iconic animals as they lope up steep canyons and cross vast distances in search of food and mates. Park rangers unveiled keepbearswild.org on Monday showing where select bears fitted with GPS collars are heading. The tracking tool, which pings the bears' steps from satellites, have already revealed surprises, wildlife biologists say.

"I think people are going to be blown away," said Ryan Leahy, a wildlife biologist at Yosemite National Park who leads the project. "It's our responsibility to keep bears wild." A bear's location is delayed so people aren't tempted to track it down in real time, rangers said. But the tracking collars alert rangers so they can block a bear from going to a campground or parking lot in search of food. The goal of the website is to draw in the public so they know to slow down while driving and properly store food when they visit the park's towering granite cliffs, charging waterfalls and abundant wildlife, including up to 500 black bears.

Yosemite attracted more than 5 million visitors last year. Too often, black bears - many of which are actually brown in

Yosemite - are hit and killed by drivers on Yosemite's winding roads. The website shows where 28 bears were struck by cars last year, many fatally. The park has used up to 20 GPS collars for the last three years, learning that bears in the park begin mating in May, more than a month earlier than previously thought, rangers said.

Leahy also said that the tracking devices show that bears move more than 30 miles in a day or two, moving with ease up 5,000-foot canyon walls. The Yosemite Conservancy has spent \$1.2 million since 1998 to help the park manage bears. The latest project cost \$279,000, rangers said. The tracking technology and public website help rangers learn even more about bears' habits to protect them, said Frank Dean, the conservancy's president, and it raises awareness among visitors about what they can do to save bears.

"People love to see bears," Dean said. "Protecting them is something we can all do." Yosemite's effort drew praise from Jesse Garcia, a black bear specialist with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. He said it's important for park visitors to understand bears while in the animals' natural territory. "You've got to give them their distance and always be aware, knowing that they're there," Garcia said.—AP

INVENTOR OF WORLD WIDE WEB WINS COMPUTING'S NOBEL PRIZE

BERNERS-LEE NAMED AMONG IMPORTANT PEOPLE OF 20TH CENTURY

SAN FRANCISCO: Most people who search on Google, share on Facebook and shop on Amazon have never heard of Sir Tim Berners-Lee. But they might not be doing any of those things had he not invented the World Wide Web. Berners-Lee, 61, is this year's recipient of the A.M. Turing Award, computing's version of the Nobel Prize. The award, announced yesterday by the Association for Computing Machinery, marks another pinnacle for the British native, who has already been knighted by Queen Elizabeth II and named as one of the 100 most important people of the 20th Century by Time magazine.

"It's a crowning achievement," Berners-Lee said in an interview with The Associated Press. "But I think the award is for the Web as a project, and the massive international collaborative spirit of all that have joined me to help." The honor comes with a \$1 million prize funded by Google, one of many companies that made a fortune as a result of Berners-Lee's efforts to make the internet more accessible. He managed that largely by figuring out a simple way to post documents, pictures and video - everything, really, beyond plain text - online.

Spinning the web

Starting in 1989, Berners-Lee began working on ways digital object could be identified and retrieved through browser software capable of rendering graphics and other images. In August 1991, he launched the world's first website, <http://info.cern.ch>. Besides coming up with the web's technical specifications, Berners-Lee "offered a coherent vision of how each of these elements would work together as part of an integrated whole," said Vicki Hanson, president of the Association for Computing Machinery.

In an even more significant move, Berners-Lee decided against patenting his technology and instead offered it as royalty-free software. That allowed other programmers to build upon the foundation he'd laid, spawning more than a billion websites today that have helped lure more than 3 billion people online.

Caught in the web

The web's widespread appeal gratifies Berners-Lee, who now splits his time shuttling between the US and Britain as a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the



CAMBRIDGE: In this photo, Tim Berners-Lee poses outside his office at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts.—AP

University of Oxford. But he fears parts of the web will become less accessible in the US if the Federal Communication Commission dismantles regulations protecting "net neutrality."

That's the principle that internet service providers should treat all websites equally instead of favoring some destinations that might be willing to pay for special treatment. If the Trump administration tries to dump net neutrality, "it's going to have a fight on its hands because I think the American people realize it's important," Berners-Lee said. "It allowed America to benefit from a thriving internet market for connectivity and content. It has become part of the spirit of America."

Berners-Lee also worries about governments around the world using the internet as a surveillance tool, calling it a "recurrent threat." He admits that preserving personal privacy as technology advances remains a thorny problem, one that he doesn't have a ready solution for. But figuring that out is "really important to the future of society," he says. "As an individual, I should be able to keep my

own notes, keep my own journal and not share it with anybody. That is just part of being a person."

Beyond the web

Like several other prominent figures in technology, Berners-Lee isn't sure if humanity will be better or worse off as computers grow better at thinking like people via artificial intelligence. "Computing has grown exponentially more powerful, so it's only logical that it will get to the point when computers will become smarter than us," Berners-Lee said. "So, yes, we should logically think about those consequences."

This is the 50th anniversary of the A.M. Turing award, named after English computer scientist Alan Turing, whose revolutionary work with early computers and artificial intelligence helped crack Nazi Germany's codes during World War II. Previous award winners include Vint Cerf and Robert Kahn, who did some of the pioneering work on the internet that Berners-Lee spun into the World Wide Web.—AP

CHASING LAZARUS: A HUNT FOR THE INFAMOUS HACKERS TO PREVENT LARGE BANK ROBBERIES

DUBAI: Kaspersky Lab has published the results of its more-than-year-long investigation into the activity of Lazarus - a notorious hacking group allegedly responsible for the theft of 81 million dollars from the Central Bank of Bangladesh in 2016. During the forensic analysis of artefacts left by the group in South-East Asian and European banks, Kaspersky Lab has reached a deep understanding of what malicious tools the group uses and how it operates while attacking financial institutions, casinos, software developers for investment companies and crypto-currency businesses around the world.

This knowledge has helped to interrupt at least two other operations which had one goal - to steal a large amount of money from financial institutions. In February 2016, a group of hackers (unidentified at that time) attempted to steal \$851 million USD, and managed to transfer 81 million USD from the Central Bank of Bangladesh. This is considered to be one of the largest, most successful cyber heists ever.

Further investigation conducted by researchers from different IT security companies including Kaspersky Lab revealed a high chance that the attacks were conducted by Lazarus - a notorious cyber espionage and sabotage group responsible for a series of regular and devastating attacks, and known for attacking manufacturing companies, media and financial institutions in at least 18 countries around the world since 2009. Although several months of silence

followed the Bangladesh attack, the Lazarus group was still active. They had been preparing for a new operation to steal money from other banks and, by the time they were ready, they already had their foot in a financial institution in South East Asia.

After being interrupted by Kaspersky Lab products and the following investigation, they were set back for another few months, and later decided to change their operation by moving to Europe. But here

too, their attempts were interrupted by KasperskyLab's security software detections, as well as the quick incident response, forensic analysis, and reverse engineering with support from company's top researchers.

Lazarus Formula

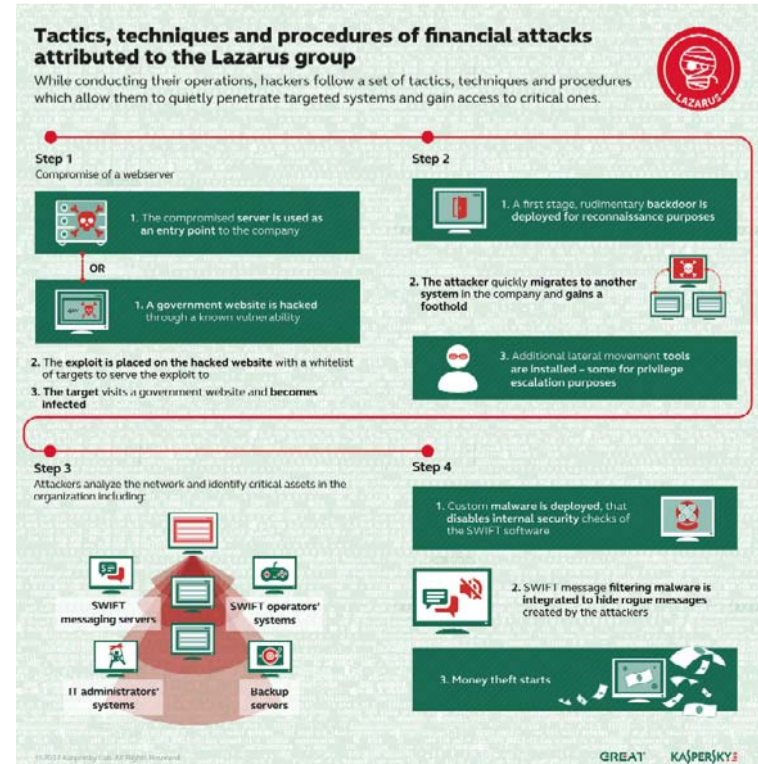
Based on the results of the forensic analysis of these attacks, Kaspersky Lab researchers were able to reconstruct the modus operandi of the group. Initial compromise: A single sys-

tem inside a bank is breached either with remotely accessible vulnerable code (i.e. on a webserver) or through a watering hole attack through an exploit planted on a benign website.

Once such a site is visited, the victim's (bank employee) computer gets malware, which brings additional components. Foothold established: Then the group migrates to other bank hosts and deploys persistent backdoors - the malware allows them to come and go whenever they want. Internal reconnaissance: Subsequently the group spends days and weeks learning the network, and identifying valuable resources. One such resource may be a backup server, where authentication information is stored, a mail server or the whole domain controller with keys to every "door" in the company, as well as servers storing or processing records of financial transactions. Deliver and steal: Finally, they deploy special malware capable of bypassing the internal security features of financial software and issuing rogue transactions on behalf of the bank.

Geography and Attribution

The attacks investigated by Kaspersky Lab researchers lasted for weeks. However, the attackers could operate under the radar for months. For example, during the analysis of the incident in South-East Asia, experts discovered that hackers were able to compromise the bank network no less than seven months prior to the day when the bank's security team requested incident response.



STUTTGART: In this file photo, the logo of Mercedes is photographed at the annual news conference at the company's headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany.—AP

DAIMLER, BOSCH TO COOPERATE ON FULLY AUTOMATED CARS

FRANKFURT AM MAIN: German luxury car-maker Daimler and auto parts supplier Bosch will work together to create completely driverless cars in the next few years, the two companies said yesterday. A development agreement between the Mercedes parent and Bosch aims at "production-ready development of a driving system which will allow cars to drive fully autonomously in the city," the firms said in a statement.

"By the beginning of the next decade," the firms hope to produce "level 4" self-driving vehicles - able to take over from the driver only under certain conditions as well as the more challenging "level 5", or completely automated driving under all circum-

stances. Firms like Bosch and Daimler, both dating back to the 19th century, are joining the race launched by Silicon Valley technology firms like Google or Uber to create a vehicle that can drive itself in busy, unpredictable urban environments.

Beyond practical considerations, Daimler and Bosch expect the new technology to change people's relationships to cars, with car-sharing becoming more popular as automated driving spreads. "Customers will be able to order an automated shared car with their smartphone. The vehicle will then make its way autonomously to the user," the firms suggest.—AP

US TO END FUNDING FOR UN POPULATION FUND OVER ABORTION

WASHINGTON: The US government plans to stop funding the United Nations Population Fund because of the organization's "coercive" family planning practices, including providing abortions, officials in Washington said late Monday. According to a State Department official, President Donald Trump has instructed Secretary of State Rex Tillerson "to take all necessary actions, to the extent permitted by law, to ensure that US taxpayer dollars do not fund organizations or programs that support or participate in the management of a program of coercive abortion or involuntary sterilization."

The funding cut would go into effect during the

2017 fiscal year, the official said in a statement. The decision to terminate US donations to the UN agency was "based on the fact that China's family planning policies still involve the use of coercive abortion and involuntary sterilization, and UNFPA partners on family planning activities with the Chinese government agency responsible for these coercive policies," the statement said. "The determination will result in withholding \$32.5 million of fiscal year 2017 funding, provided for UNFPA," it said, adding that the funds instead will be directed to other global health programs.

The UN Population Fund in 2015 received contributions totaling \$979 million, according to its web-

site. The organization, which provides reproductive health and birth control services in more than 150 countries and territories, said early Tuesday that it "regrets" the decision by Washington "to deny any future funding for its life-saving work the world over." UNFPA said in a statement in which it also vigorously pushed back against "erroneous" US charges that it plays a role in forced abortions and sterilizations in China.

"UNFPA refutes this claim, as all of its work promotes the human rights of individuals and couples to make their own decisions, free of coercion or discrimination," it said. "Indeed, United Nations Member States have long described UNFPA's work

in China as a force for good." The organization lamented the loss of funding by Washington, a "founding member" of the UNFPA.

The group said it has saved "tens of thousands of mothers from preventable deaths and disabilities, in addition to 'combating gender-based violence and reducing the scourge of maternal deaths in the world's most fragile settings.' And in the controversial area of reproductive choice, the organization said that Washington until now had 'partnered with UNFPA to protect and promoted the reproductive health and rights of women and girls, thereby fostering healthier women and girls and their families.'—AFP

INDIAN CLINIC TREATS BANGLADESHIS SEEKING MERCY DEATHS FOR FREE

MUMBAI-BASED INSTITUTE OFFERS STEM CELL THERAPY

DHAKA: Three Bangladeshis suffering from a highly debilitating form of muscular dystrophy are receiving free treatment in India after a relative's plea for them to be allowed to die brought their plight to global attention. Fruit seller Tofazzal Hossain sparked a rare debate about euthanasia in conservative Bangladesh in January when he pleaded with the authorities to allow his grandson and two sons to die. All three suffer from Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, a rare genetic disorder characterized by progressive muscle degeneration. Patients rarely live beyond 30.

Now the Mumbai-based NeuroGen Brain and Spine Institute has offered to treat them using a new stem cell therapy that it says has improved the condition of hundreds of patients. Spokeswoman Avantika Patil said the family had arrived at the clinic on Sunday after an Indian airline flew them free of charge. "The disorder is incurable of course. They suffer from severe form of muscular dystrophy," she said, adding what the clinic was trying to do was to improve their conditions.

Hossain said the treatment was the last hope for his sons and the grandson. "I am hopeful. They have carried out the first round of operations," a tearful Hossain said by phone from Mumbai. "I hope they will be cured by the grace of Allah." One of Asia's poorest countries, Bangladesh has no free health care and medical treatment is often beyond the reach of many of the country's 160 million people. An estimated 600,000 Bangladeshis suffer from incurable diseases, yet the country has just one palliative care centre and no hospice services.



DHAKA: Fruit vendor Tofazzal Hossain (top right) poses with his family in Bangladesh.—AFP

This leaves few treatment options for Hossain's sons, aged 24 and 13, and his eight-year-old grandson. Hossain said his sons were unable to move and could do little for themselves. The younger boy's condition is better, but is worsening. Their plight has sparked a rarely-

seen debate about euthanasia in Bangladesh, where attempted suicide can land you in prison. So-called "mercy killing" is forbidden both under the secular law of the land, and by the religious code adhered to by Bangladesh's Muslim-majority population.—AFP

SCIENTISTS FIND COMMON ANTIBIOTIC COULD PREVENT OR TREAT PTSD

LONDON: A common antibiotic called doxycycline can disrupt the formation of negative thoughts and fears in the brain and may prove useful in treating or preventing post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), according to research by British and Swiss scientists. In a specially designed trial involving 76 healthy volunteers who were given either the drug or a placebo dummy pill, those who were on doxycycline had a 60 percent lower fear response than those who were not.

Scientists said the antibiotic works in this way because it blocks certain proteins outside nerve cells, called matrix enzymes, which our brains need to form memories. "We have demonstrated a proof-of-principle for an entirely new treatment strategy for PTSD," said Dominik Bach, a professor at University College London and the University of Zurich, who co-lead the research team. In the trial, volunteers were given either doxycycline or a placebo and put in front of a computer.

The screen would flash either blue or red, and one of the colors was associated with a 50 percent chance of getting a painful electric shock. After 160 flashes with colors in random order, participants learnt to associate the 'bad' color with the shock. A week later, under no medication, the volunteers repeated the experiment. This time there were no electric shocks, but a loud sound played after either color was shown. Fear responses were measured by tracking eye blinks, as this is an

instinctive response to sudden threats.

The fear memory was calculated by subtracting the baseline startle response - to the sound on the 'good' color - from the response to the sound when the 'bad' color was showing. While the fear response was 60 percent lower in those who had doxycycline in the first session, the researchers found that, importantly, other cognitive measures - including sensory memory and attention - were not affected. "When we talk about reducing fear memory, we're not talking about deleting the memory of what actually happened," Bach said in a statement about the findings.

"The participants may not forget that they received a shock when the screen was red, but they 'forget' to be instinctively scared when they next see a red screen." "Learning to fear threats is an important ability ... helping us to avoid dangers. (But) over-prediction of threat can cause tremendous suffering and distress in anxiety disorders such as PTSD." PTSD is caused by an overactive fear memory and includes a broad range of psychological symptoms that can develop after someone goes through a traumatic event. Bach said he and his team would now like to explore doxycycline's potential effects further, including in a phenomenon called "reconsolidation" of fear memories - an approach to helping people with PTSD - in which memories and associations can be changed after an event when the patient experiences or imagines similar situations.—Reuters

MICRO-GRIDS POWERED BY THE SUN BOOST FORTUNES OF LAKE VICTORIA FISHERMEN

MUHURU BAY, Kenya: Mary Atieno was often forced to sell her tilapia well below the market rate because she had to get rid of the fish quickly in the searing heat bearing down on her village on the shore of Lake Victoria. Lack of electricity meant Atieno was at the mercy of commercial fish buyers and made little or no profit because she could not refrigerate her catch of tilapia and Nile perch.

Poor rural communities, like Muhuru Bay in western Kenya where Atieno lives, are often far from markets where they can sell their produce and lack basic infrastructure and electricity despite rapid electrification elsewhere in the country. Atieno's fortunes changed when British-based charity Renewable World joined forces with community groups and a private company to set up solar micro-grids, small local power networks not connected to the national electricity grid.

With a grant by British charity Comic Relief, fishing cooperatives in the area received solar freezers to chill their catch rather than having to resort to preserving it with smoke, a practice that makes the fish chewier and harder to sell. "With the deep freezers, we can store fish for up to four days while we source for a profitable market," Atieno, a 43-year-old married mother of four and secretary to Ngoré Mtakatifu Women Group, said.

With its year-round sunshine, solar power is ideally suited to Kenya where electricity access surged to around 60 percent in 2016 from 27 percent three years before, according to government data, due to a drive to achieve universal access by 2020. Remote areas such as the lakeshore settlements on Lake Victoria lag behind though, experts said. "For a long time, some of these settlements along the lakeshore have been neglected," said Herick Othieno, a solar energy expert at Maseno University in Kenya. "It's only recently that power started getting there," said Othieno, who led the creation of Renewable Energy Solutions for the Lake Victoria Environment (RESOLVE) with Renewable World and its local partners. Soil in the area is poor and hard to cultivate, leaving commercial fishing in Africa's largest lake as one of the few alternatives to make a living. Increasing access to solar power is helping to lift local people out of poverty by improving their income and sparking business opportunities beyond fishing, experts said.

Community power

The Muhuru Bay community solar hub is one of six that RESOLVE established on the lakeshore, with their power capacity ranging from 1.5 to 2.0 kilowatt (KW) which can be expanded and support up to 50 connections. Users pay a connection fee and are charged by the hour for using the technology as

part of a pay-as-you go system for off-grid electricity that has become popular across Kenya and many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

Thirty households are connected to the system in the Muhuru Bay area, managed by community organization Ngoré Renewable Energy and Auxiliary Project (REAP) and benefitting 1,400 people, including small businesses. "We also have some running barber shops and phone charging businesses with the solar power," said Lucas Okoth, REAP's chairman. The micro-grids installed by Renewable World are simple steel frame structures that hold the solar panels and a control box housing batteries, a charger and energy distribution systems.

Each grid has a smart meter connected to mobile phone-based money transfer service M-Pesa through which customers make their payments before they are transferred electronically to the solar hub's bank account. The fishermen have also been able to cut costs by using solar rechargeable lamps on their boats during night time fishing. They now spend 200 Kenyan shillings (\$1.94) a day, a quarter of what it used to cost them to fuel their fishing lamps with kerosene, said REAP's Okoth.

Villager Lovis Odhiambo said his home is healthier since he has become a customer as he no longer has to use sooty and smoky kerosene lamps and his children are more comfortable studying at night thanks to solar lighting. It is also cheaper - he used to spend 50 shillings a day on paraffin compared to the 200 shillings he now spends every month on solar power. "The table cloths were always dirty with soot and the smoke was irritating to the eyes. Sometimes it felt like we were short of breath and the house would smell of the paraffin," said Odhiambo.

A solar 'graveyard' no more. The amount of solar energy captured into the national grid is currently negligible despite the government's call for investments in renewable energy sources. Kenya's Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) identified high initial capital costs and low awareness of the potential opportunities and economic benefits offered by solar technologies as some of the reasons. Some projects also fell into disrepair despite receiving large subsidies.

"In the past they used to say Africa was a 'graveyard of failed solar projects' because of all the 100 percent subsidized installations which broke down and never got fixed because no mechanism was put in place for operation and maintenance," said Charlie Miller, director for national programs at Power for All. "That's really starting to change now," said Miller, whose coalition of more than 170 public and private organizations campaigns for universal energy access by 2030.—REUTERS



MOCOA: Aerial view of the extensive damage caused by mudslides as a result of heavy rains, in Mocoa, Putumayo department, Colombia.—AFP

WHY IS S AMERICA BEING HIT BY DEADLY LANDSLIDES?

BOGOTA: It starts with torrential rain in the mountains. Then a wall of mud and boulders comes barreling down the slopes, sweeping away houses, cars and people. Like a video stuck on repeat, the story has played out over and over again in recent weeks in South America, where hundreds of people have been killed in landslides. First they hit Peru, where the indigenous Quechua language has a word for these flash flood-landslides: "huaycos."

More than 100 people have been killed since the start of the year in flooding and landslides in Peru, and more than 100,000 have lost homes or otherwise been affected. In Colombia, the devastation is even worse. The southern town of Mocoa was hit by an enormous landslide Friday that killed 262 people, including 43 children. Why do these natural disasters occur? And why is South America being hit so hard right now?

"Nature has always been like this. Our ancestors understood it better than we do today," said Peruvian architect Augusto Ortiz de Zevallos. "Just look at the archaeological sites that remain, sheltered from the onslaught of water," he said. Modernization has led to forests being replaced by farms, eliminating the natural barriers that restrain the water from torrential rains. "During the floods of 2010 and 2011, 71 percent of the flooding happened in pasture land that had lost its trees," the head of the weather warning system for the Colombian meteorological institute, Christian Euscátegui, told newspaper El Tiempo. Colombia's weather authorities, who keep a close eye on deforestation, say it slowed by 12 percent in 2015. But that still meant forest losses of more than 124,000 hectares.

Nature doesn't forgive
Global warming, which is melting the region's

glaciers, is also driving the problem. "Climate change is generating dynamics and we see the tremendous results in terms of intensity, frequency and magnitude of these natural effects, as we have just seen in Mocoa," said Martin Santiago, UN chief for Colombia. Experts say chaotic urbanization is also to blame. Mocoa's population was swollen by poor migrants and especially people uprooted by Colombia's half-century civil war. These displaced residents and their often precarious houses were hit especially hard by the disaster.

"The centralization of society means people try to move closer to cities, no matter where it is, without considering whether a river used to flow there or if it's a ravine where rain accumulates," said architect Ortiz de Zevallos. In the case of Mocoa, the town "was the victim of a lack of urban planning,"

said Colombian ecologist Rodrigo Botero. "That's the case in nearly every region of Colombia." Even Mocoa's own mayor, Jose Antonio Castro, said it "is not a place where a town should be," because of all the rivers surrounding it. Three of them flooded Friday, triggering the landslide.

In the Peruvian capital Lima-also hit hard recently by flooding and landslides-Mayor Luis Castaneda said nature "got the better of engineering." But that misses the whole point, said Ortiz de Zevallos. "Engineering is about understanding nature," like the ancient Incas did, said the architect. The bishop of Mocoa, Luis Maldonado, had his own take when asked if God had abandoned the town's people. "God always forgives, man sometimes does, but nature doesn't forgive," he said.—AFP

EXPERTS URGE HUGE EXPANSION OF ONLINE THERAPY FOR MENTAL ILLNESS

LONDON: A "massive and growing" mental health burden across the world can only be tackled successfully with a major expansion of online psychiatric resources such as virtual clinics and web-based psychotherapies, specialists said yesterday. With resources tight and the global mental health system only serving around 10 percent of patients even now, specialists speaking at the European Congress on Psychiatry (ECP) said the web is the only option for significant extra treatment capacity.

The World Health Organization (WHO) said last week mental disorders - in particular depression - are now the leading cause of ill health and disabili-

ty worldwide. Rates of depression have risen by more than 18 percent since 2005, the WHO says, and a lack of support for mental health combined with a common fear of stigma means many do not get the treatment they need.

Michael Krausz, a professor of psychiatry at the University of British Columbia in Canada, and a leading specialist at the World Psychiatric Association, said "E-mental health" should be a major part of the answer. "Through a proactive approach we can create an additional virtual system of care which could build capacity, improve the quality of care and make mental health care more effective," he told the ECP.—Reuters



BLISNA: A woman feeds one of two orphan bear cubs, named Masha and Brundo, in Blisna, a village located some 20 kilometers north of the capital Podgorica.—AFP

ORPHANED BEAR CUBS WIN HEARTS IN MONTENEGRO

PODGORICA, Montenegro: Two orphaned bear cubs have captured hearts in Montenegro after a farmer rescued them from starving to death in the wild. The cubs were found last month by March Ilinka Bigovic, who lives in a village perched on the Pusti Lisac mountain, some 80 kilometers from the capital Podgorica, near the Bosnian border. "I heard some screams. Persistent, day and night, for two or three days," the 61-year-old said.

Bigovic searched the area with her brother until they almost stumbled over the cubs "separated, on the brink of death, weak," she said. "We brought them home, put at a warm place near the stove and fed them milk and honey." Montenegro's mountains are home to 50 to 100 brown bears, according to ecologists, while the national hunters' association puts their number at 357. Bigovic, who breeds goats, is used to close encounters with wild animals—a wolf recently killed a goat just near her house and she often sees bears.

The story of the two orphans has spread like wildfire in the Balkan country, with many people coming to have their photo taken holding the cubs. But engineer and animal-lover Miljan Milickovic was worried—he realized the cubs were on the way to

become irreversibly domesticated, and if nothing was done, their future could be only a zoo or a circus. Milickovic persuaded Bigovic to let him take the two animals as a temporary measure until they can be moved to a specialized facility that can prepare them to return to the wild.

The cubs, now named Masha and Brundo, are living at his family property, some 20 kilometers north of Podgorica, where they live in the company of a deer, an emu, a boar and a llama. Masha and Brundo approach people and other animals without fear, looking for a hug, food or to play. "In a bid to save their lives humans ... made their return to the wild more difficult," said Jovana Janjusevic of the Center for Bird Protection, which is also involved in protecting larger animals.

"After two months with humans, the cubs cannot be rehabilitated and successfully returned to the wild," she said. Activists are now racing against time to get the permits needed to move the Masha and Brundo to Greece or Romania, which—unlike Montenegro—have centers that specialize in dealing with orphaned bear cubs. Masha and Brundo would spend between a year and 18 months in such a centre before returning to their mountains.—AFP

STRIKE FORCE: WORLD'S MOST VENOMOUS SCORPION IN ACTION

PARIS: The world's most lethal scorpion, the death stalker, has been caught on high-speed camera for the first time lashing out with its lethal stinger, scientists reported yesterday. A comparison of half-a-dozen scorpion species shown in ultra-slow motion revealed an unsuspected variety of strike modes, they reported in the journal Functional Ecology. The death stalker had the fastest lunge of all, with its venomous stinger snapping over its head like a whip at 130 centimeters per second.

It has a no-nonsense trajectory, moving straight towards its target before flicking upward. The emperor scorpion—the world's largest—has a similar open strike. Other species, such as the black spitting scorpion, which can squirt venom at a distance, and various members of the hottentotta genus, strike with a more circular motion, forming an "O". "We found that different 'tail shapes'—some slim, some fatter—appear to permit different strike performances," said senior author Arie van der Meijden, a professor at the University of Porto in Portugal.

To record and analyze the lightning-fast strikes, van der Meijden and his team built a small platform

surrounded by mirrors on all four sides. They filmed the scorpion strikes from above with a video camera at 500 frames per second, and then created 3D models with computers. "Just taking them out of their container and putting them in the arena was enough to get them in stinging mood," van der Meijden said. "All that was necessary to make them strike was touching their pincers with a thin piece of wire."

Next on the research agenda is to figure out the evolutionary forces which explain why the strike patterns are so varied. It could be "related to the kind of predators they need to defend themselves against," van der Meijden told AFP. The differences could also arise from the fact that some scorpions rely less on their tail stingers, and more on their pincers to ward off a threat. Scorpions use their defensive arsenal against bats, snakes, lizards and other predators.

They also use their stinger to catch prey, and during mating. A 2008 study in the journal Acta Tropica estimated that more than 3,000 people die every year from scorpion bites. Measuring up to 110 millimeters in length, death stalkers



PARIS: A handout photo shows a Deathstalker scorpion (*Leirus quinquistriatus*) in a defensive posture.—AFP

(*Leirus quinquistriatus*) are found in dry regions of North Africa and the Middle East, where they live under rocks. Their venom is highly dangerous for adults, and potentially lethal for children, but has been a valuable avenue for drug research.—AFP

INDIAN FARMERS BEEF UP BELOW SEA-LEVEL SYSTEM FOR CLIMATE FIGHT

KUTTANAD, India: Farmer Moncy Joseph, who grows rice on land below sea level in India's Kuttanad region, is determined not to be beaten by climate change. Last year, the 44-year-old bought two Kasaragod Dwarf cows, an endangered native breed that grows just 3 feet (91 cm) tall and whose dung makes extra-rich fertilizer. Last season's bitter gourd vines, now withered grey, hang from plastic nets above the grazing animals. It's been three years since Joseph diversified into two-storey vegetable farming, using overhead trellises.

"Plan B - in readiness," he said at his home in Champakulam village, making light of the uncertainty faced by farmers in the southwest coastal state of Kerala as temperatures and the ocean rise. Here in Kuttanad, scientists are working to adapt a 150-year-old Indian farming system used on land 2 meters (6.56 ft) below sea level that has withstood saltwater infiltration and monsoon floods, hoping it could help fight global warming, rising oceans and coastal storms.

As the only part of India where rice is farmed below sea level, it was designated in 2013 by the United Nations as a globally important agricultural heritage system. But since India's Green Revolution began in the 1960s, farmers came to rely on chemical fertilizers and pesticides to boost rice yields. That damaged fish populations and distorted the system - an effect that has worsened in recent years as they use more chemicals to keep up production in the face of climate change.

Now efforts are underway to rejuvenate the traditional model as a wider "ecosystem approach" that treats rice, fish, ducks, cattle, humans, houses, coconut and cash crops as part of a single system, said Leena Kumari S., a scientist who leads Kerala Agricultural University's Rice Research Station in Moncompu town. The aim is to make farmers self-sufficient, cutting the use of chemical inputs and costs, and providing an alternative income if crops fail due to weather or climate extremes, she explained.

Half of the Kuttanad region, a trough of 110,000 hectares covering 79 villages in three

districts, is under sea level, consisting of reclaimed delta swamps fenced by dykes, out of which water is pumped every few days, similar to the Dutch polder system. It supports 30,000 farming families. The rest consists of higher dry land where coconut trees are grown, as well as wetlands and a maze of water networks including canals and sea-water inlets.

Four rivers, fed by monsoon rainfall, drain into Kuttanad, bringing fresh water, fertile silt and flooding that can last for weeks between June and October. When the rivers' flow slows from December to May, the water level drops below that of the sea, enabling salt water to leach into the low rice lands.

"So adapted were traditional rice varieties to local deep water situations that they grew taller with the rising flood water, keeping their panicles (grain-producing tips) above water at all times," explained Leena Kumari. Farmers traditionally cultivated saline-tolerant rice varieties like this and bred fish on the same plot, together or alternately in two seasons per year, alongside coconut on the dykes, comprising their staple foods.

Fish fed off the rotting rice-harvest residue while rice was fertilized by fish excrement, making added nutrients unnecessary. "Cooked rice from these grains had a distinctive aroma and taste," said 81-year-old Thommy Thomas, a wiry man in a white wrap watching over the emerald green fields he has farmed for 54 years. But rice yields were low, at 2 tons per hectare, compared with 10 tons from today's high-yielding varieties, Leena Kumari said.

Drowning in chemicals

As farmers were encouraged to adopt chemical inputs and new varieties during the Green Revolution, Kuttanad became Kerala's rice bowl in the 1970s. One-third of the state's rice came from here, although it accounted for only 15 percent of Kerala's 875,000 hectares of paddies. That area has since reduced to 200,000 hectares, devoured by urban expansion. But Kuttanad has not let its rice fields shrink and is now seen as central to Kerala's future food security.

The Thanneermukkom barrage, built in 1975 to block seawater, and a spillway constructed in 1955 to drain off floodwater extended the rice season, also pushing up annual yields. But human intervention has harmed Kuttanad's ecology - particularly its fish stocks, which have dwindled due to the high level of chemicals in the water, said KG Padma Kumar, director of the International Research and Training Centre for Below Sea-level Farming, set up in 2016 to rejuvenate the heritage farming system.

Calls are now growing among Kerala's ecologists, scientists and fishing communities to change the way the dam is used and to cut the use of agricultural chemicals. Scientists estimate that reverting to the traditional system where rice and fish are co-produced organically could boost farmers' incomes by 40 percent, compared with today. For now, some farmers, like Joseph, are experimenting with new sources of income. Hundreds of ducks nest on water-logged farms, fertilizing them with their manure, which is supplemented by cattle and vermi-composted kitchen waste.

Others are planting vegetables on top of the thousands of kilometers of low earthen dykes, alongside the coconut trees whose roots have strengthened the banks against floods for decades. At the research station, traditional flood-tolerant rice germplasm cross-bred with high-yielding varieties is already surviving 15 days of submergence. The next goal is to breed rice that can withstand 30 days of water stress, as floods become more frequent.

Exporting knowledge

Meanwhile, as climate change brings higher temperatures, combined with up to 95 percent humidity due to the water all around, insects and disease vectors are rapidly multiplying. "Kuttanad is turning into a hot spot for plant pests and diseases during the November-to-April cropping season," Leena Kumari said. Minor pests are turning into major ones, increasing damage, and hitherto unknown crop diseases are emerging, she added. — Reuters

LONDON TO BRING FORWARD NEW LEVY ON MOST POLLUTING VEHICLES

LONDON: London Mayor Sadiq Khan plans to charge the most polluting cars and vans a daily fee of 12.50 pounds (\$16) to enter the city centre from 2019, the latest city to crack down on gas-guzzling cars. The asthma-sufferer, who was elected less than a year ago, has promised to make London one of the greenest cities in the world with more electric buses and charging points for cars. An Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ), in which cars must meet stringent emissions standards to enter or pay a charge, will now be rolled out from April 2019 instead of Sept 2020 as previously planned by his predecessor.

"The air in London is lethal and I will not stand by and do nothing," Khan said. The mayor will also launch a consultation to expand the zone to the whole of London from 2020 for buses, coaches and lorries and to an area spanning

London city airport in the east to Tottenham's White Hart Lane football stadium in the north, Kew Gardens in the west and Clapham Common in the south for cars from 2021. ULEZ will apply to all petrol vehicles which do not meet Euro 4 emissions standards and all diesel models which do not comply with Euro 6 standards.

Several cities such as Paris, Stuttgart, Athens, Brussels and Madrid are trying to crack down on polluting vehicles by proposing bans, fines and restrictions, partly in response to reports of poor air quality harming people's health. Public and political concern has also been heightened since the Volkswagen emissions scandal broke in September 2015 when the carmaker admitted to installing illicit software in as many as 11 million diesel vehicles sold worldwide and cheating US emissions tests.—Reuters

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FANTASY WORLD BRINGS SHOPKINS, GROSSERY GANG LINES TO KUWAIT

Fantasy World, Kuwait's favorite toy retailer is bringing in the hottest toys in the international markets, the adorable 'Shopkins' and 'Grossery Gang' lines. The latest in trend among kids, these two craze driven products are selling like hot cakes in Fantasy World, the store known to have latest, best and trendiest original toys. Shopkins is an adorable line of miniature

grocery-themed characters, often admired by girls that range from fruits and veggies, to sweet treats, and even stylish accessories with different series, such as sports, music, technology and charms. There are 36 unique charms for girls to collect, Apple Blossom, Cheeky Chocolate, and more to their charm bracelet. Grossery Gang, on the other hand, is the

gross side of Shopkins for boys with its four kinds of gross accessories: Vile vending machine, mushy slushie machine, yuck mart or the sticky soda. Vile is a vending machine that makes rotten raspberry, crimey lime, sour grapes, vile vanilla, slime apple, putrid peach and molar cola. Mushy slushie machine is to gross slush the machine makes. Sticky Soda, keep you wondering what is inside.

Yusef Anabtawi, Fantasy World's social media specialist, stated "we were getting constant request from kids asking for these toys on our various social media channels, adhering to their demands these collectable toys, we ensured to get them at the earliest to Kuwait, and now we see kids coming with their parents and buying them." "Fantasy World has yet again fulfilled its

commitment towards our little customers." Shopkins and Grossery Gang, is the latest craze amongst children, and they are now available in all Fantasy World stores. Customers are invited to visit any of Fantasy World's stores in Kuwait to explore and experience new toys, available at Al Rai, Bustan Mall, The Avenues, Souq Sharq, The Boulevard Mall.



TECHNOLOGY TEAM WINS OOREDOO CUP 2017

Ooredoo, Kuwait's fastest network concluded its third Ooredoo Cup football tournament on Sunday in Hassan Abul Sports Center in Dasma. The tournament, which started two weeks ago, saw with the victory of the Technology team against Sales 6 goals to 1. The competition brought all employees together in a friendly environment away from the office life. This comes in alignment with Ooredoo's core values of caring, connecting and challenging, and the company's philosophy of investing in its employees who are the cornerstone of the establishment. Aside from awarding the first two winning teams, the

company CEO and General Manager Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Thani awarded a number of the tournament's distinguished players: Samir Abdulraouf from Sales won the Top Scorer Award; Mohammed Al-Nuaimat from Technology won the Best Goalkeeper Award; Khaled Al-Sabaa from B2B Sales won the Best Player Award; and Issa Haidar from Technology won the Fair Play Award.

The tournament included 16 teams from the company's different departments, with players from across the organization including the company's CEO Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Thani, in addition to heads of other depart-

ments and units. The tournament also included players working in Ooredoo's head office from other organizations, such as Huawei, FAST telco, Phono, as well as the security officers in the building. During the halftime breaks throughout the tournament, Ooredoo held raffle draws for the audience, giving away prizes such as smartphones, smart watches and gaming consoles.

Commenting on this event, Ooredoo's Corporate Communications Director Mijbil Alayoub said: "We're happy to organize this event for the third consecutive year here in Ooredoo Kuwait. The tournament aims to fortify the broth-

erly relationship between Ooredoo staff across the organization, and is an embodiment of our core values of caring and connecting."

He added that the tournament is a great opportunity for employees to interact with the company's upper management in a friendly setting, and a chance for employees to enjoy a friendly atmosphere with their families. He noted that the games include a number of awards for best player voted by the audience, in addition to best supporter. The event comes as part of Ooredoo's year-long plan of internal activities, aiming to engage employees and entertain them.

HH SHEIKH HUMAID BIN RASHID AL-NUAIMI MEETS YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS OF ALP'S FINAL SESSION

The Abdulaziz Bin Humaid Leadership Program (ALP), a first-of-its-kind program that empowers young, talented individuals with essential leadership qualities, concluded its final session under the title 'My World' at Fairmont Ajman Hotel, Ajman. The session, which was held from March 12 to 16, focused on global trends, change leadership, business networking, as well as protocol and etiquette to be applied in their careers.

The conclusion of the final ALP session provided participants with the rare opportunity to visit Diwan on March 15, 2017 to meet and have an engaging conversation with His Highness Sheikh Humaid Bin Rashid Al-Nuaimi, Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Ajman. He personally examined the learning methodologies adopted at the session. His continuous support for the youth was evidenced in his speech which focused on the special role that young leaders play in shaping the future.

The participants also had the opportunity to meet HH Sheikh Ammar Bin Humaid Al-Nuaimi, Crown Prince and President of the Executive Board of Ajman and HH Sheikh Abdulaziz Bin Humaid Al-Nuaimi, Chairman of the Department of Culture and Information. After the Diwan visit, the participants presented their 'Innovation Challenge Projects' in a 30-second elevator pitch as well as a five-minute, PowerPoint presentation for the ALP jury committee. The presenters were then provided feedback and each Innovation Challenge Project was ranked.

Sheikh Ali Al-Nuaimi, Corporate Communication Manager, Abdulaziz Bin Humaid Foundation said, "It is incredibly satisfying to wit-



ness the growth of the young participants. Today, the importance of global trends, adaptive leadership, business networking and etiquette cannot be understated. In addition, protocol is an important part of diplomatic practice linked with history, royalty, religion, culture and language. It is particularly important because it outlines a set of established rules of courteousness that are to be respected and applied in business and society. Taking this as an opportunity, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to Fairmont Ajman

Hotel for hosting the final session."

The session started on March 12, 2017 with a key note speech from Abeer Mohammed Hussain Al-Shaali, Executive Management Officer at Gulf Craft. Gulf Craft was the official sponsor at the final ALP session titled 'My World'. Mrs Al-Shaali inspired the participants with her own colorful career, narrating specific incidents where she overcame obstacles that served as a personal benchmark for leadership and innovation. Commenting on the initiative, Mrs Al-Shaali said,

"It is a great pleasure to have the opportunity to share key insights and the best international practices with such a wonderful audience. As young entrepreneurs in the early stages of their career, it is crucial to pay attention to current trends for long-term success."

This was followed by a workshop on macro global trends, including: Innovation, emerging markets, clean technology and individual and collective empowerment. It highlighted the importance of automation (i.e. smart technologies)

where machines and robots are being deployed in the work sector at ever-increasing rates, and how global players are building trust with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategies.

The session on March 13, which focused on change leadership, detailed the driving forces, vision and processes of large-scale transformation. As change leadership has its own demands and requires a different mindset, this session highlighted the importance of a leader that can adapt an organization to changing times. The Business Networking workshop on the March 14, provided strategies for developing sales opportunities and contacts, based on referrals and introductions.

The workshop focused on the principles and techniques of business networking through various platforms. The day concluded with a field visit to the Gulf Craft Factory, witnessing the process of building luxury yachts. They also had the chance to ride them in the open sea and meet HE Mohammed Hussein Al-Shaali, Chairman of Gulf Craft. He took the participants through the journey of building each yacht, explaining the intricate process from its beginning to its luxurious conclusion. He also discussed the various challenges the company has overcome and the opportunities that can be found in difficult moments.

As the final session of the program, the workshop focused on specific protocol procedures, respect for precedence, behavioral etiquette, and the rules of courteousness in business. The workshops provided tactics for self-improvement, demonstrating the importance of punctuality, goal-setting and taking responsibility for mistakes.

ROYALE HAYAT HOSPITAL VISITS AMERICAN UNITED SCHOOL

Under the umbrella of Community Awareness Program at Royale Hayat Hospital, Dr. Ahmed Al-Mulla, Head of Surgery Department and Consultant General, Laparoscopic, Bariatric and Oncology Surgery and a team of experts visited the American United School on March 28, 2017 to raise awareness on health related issues among students and teachers.

Experts from Royale Hayat Hospital discussed medical topics such as the risks of obesity, medical treatments and methods of prevention, such as having a healthy balanced diet that is low in carbohydrates and free of sugar to maintain a healthy body. Students and teachers at AUS were interactive and had the chance to ask questions and get expert answers regarding various health issues and preventative medicine including personal and hands hygiene to fight infectious diseases.

During the visit, Dr. Ahmed Al-Mulla highlighted the importance of Royale Hayat Community Awareness Program and the role it plays in educating and encouraging the community to adopt a healthy lifestyle.

In addition to awareness programs, the Department of General Surgery and Obesity Surgery, Endoscopy and Oncology at RHH provides advanced services to treat any related disease, such as stomach stenosis, gastric bypass, gastric balloon, stomach ring, stomach capsule, restoration of obesity and cosmetic reconstructive surgery after obesity, in addition to many diseases related to the gastrointestinal system, such as gallstones, abdominal hernia, diaphragm, esophageal reflux, diaphragm, tumors, gastroenteritis, intestine and colon, tummy tracts, anal surgery, breast surgery and surgery, and thyroid and endocrine surgery.



ZAIN HOLDS FIRST INTERNAL BLOOD DRIVE CAMPAIGN OF THE YEAR

Zain, the leading telecommunications company in Kuwait, recently held the first internal Blood Drive campaign for its employees of the year. The campaign, held at the company's main headquarters in Shuwaikh, came in partnership with the Central Blood Bank of Kuwait. Zain organizes this initiative several times a year as part of its corporate sustainability and social responsibility strategy towards the health sector. The campaign also aims at encouraging employees to donate blood and save lives.

The blood drive campaign witnessed positive feedback and participation from Zain employees, further reinforcing the company's keenness in having a productive role in social and health activities, especially those that contribute with saving people that are in urgent need of blood like people

with rare blood types. Zain strives to contribute to its community through its numerous corporate social responsibility initiatives and is pleased with the success this particular activity has achieved.

The company is keen to organize internal blood drive campaigns for employees in collaboration with the Central Blood Bank to encourage employees to donate blood and save lives. Zain affirmed that its contribution to organizing internal blood drives falls under its CSSR strategies.

Zain's solid corporate sustainability and social responsibility strategy primarily focuses on the well being of the entire nation. For this reason, the company has maintained its support of numerous initiatives that spread awareness and help make a difference to people's everyday lives.



TARABBAND ENCHANTS AUDIENCE WITH ARAB MUSIC FROM SWEDEN

Within the activities of the spring festival held at Al-Shaheed Park, Nadin Al-Khalidi; a Swedish artist of Iraqi origin, recently led her music band, Tarabband's performance were warmly received by the audience and played several songs she had composed herself inspired by stories about

war, refugees sufferings and passions. The band also played a piece called Sakkara expressing Al-Khalidi's love for Egypt.

In addition, the band performed a Dabka dance and a song about a Libyan girl who died off Libyan shores while attempting to flee the war. The concert

concluded with a piece played by Gabriel Hermansson, Fredrik Gille, Dan Svensson, Filip Runesson and Romain Gabourg. Al-Khalidi had to flee Iraq over 18 years ago and live as a refugee in various countries until she settled in Sweden where she met her band members.

KUWAIT HOSTS RED BULL BC ONE CYPHER

Once again, Kuwait is about to host one of the world's most fabulous one-on-one breakdance competition for the 7th time. Like every year, 16 B-Boys will compete in thrilling head-to-head battles, this time in the heart of Salmiya, Al Arjan Square (facing AUK) on April 28. This year, Amsterdam Westergasfabriek will provide the stage for the world's best B-Boys to battle it out one-on-one again at the 14th edition World Final of Red Bull BC One on November 4.

Netherlands is home to celebrated crews such as HustleKidz and the Ruggeds as well as 2014 BC One winner Menno - a member of the Red Bull BC One All Stars who will join Poe One and C-Sick in supervising and judging the B-Boys' performance during Kuwait's BC One Cypher this year.

B-Boy Menno to Judge B-Boys' performance Menno Van Gorp represents the new generation of Dutch B-Boys. He is a dancer with heart, explosive energy and plenty of surprises. He is a master of smooth blow-ups, the mind-boggling moves that whip the audience into frenzy. His signature moves are baby-freeze transitions, slides and rolls.

B-Boy Menno started breaking around 2001. The first time he saw breaking was in the Run DMC video clip "It's Like That." He learned his first moves from his cousins and has been dancing ever since. Menno is an all-around B-Boy, making a living through working in shows, judging battles and teaching workshops. He has also delved into different aspects of dance, having created a solo show for theaters across his native The Netherlands. He is well respected for his painting and graphic design work, which he creates under the moniker Mennopoly. He hopes that Hip Hop will always be a part of his

life and that he will be able to give back to the scene by teaching and organizing events.

Last year, B-Boy C-Sick's head-spinning antics and power moves won him the Red Bull BC One Cypher Kuwait for the third consecutive year with a performance that left 15 of the top-level B-Boys in town behind. The stage was set on fire with Kuwait's best 16 B-Boys jumping and spinning for the coveted prize. The event, which took place at Radisson Blu was judged by breaking legends B-Boy Cico (Italy), B-Boy Roxrite (Mexico) and B-Boy Nabil (France).

The 2016 final battle was a repeat of the 2015 final between B-Boy Primo and winner, B-Boy C-Sick and was as intense. However, C-Sick's non-stop moves seemed in control and within the rhythm, taming down his opponent and achieving well-deserved win. More interestingly and after achieving 3 consecutive

wins in Kuwait's Red Bull BC One battles, B-Boy C-Sick is going to be part of this year's cypher in Kuwait as a judge for the very first time.

Issei Hori was the surprise winner of the Red Bull BC One World Final in Nagoya, in his native Japan, following a pulsating battle with two-time winner Hong 10. Crowned the champion, the 19-year-old's high-energy performances were enough for the judges to give him the honors by three votes to two despite his relative inexperience on the global stage. "It's been amazing," says Issei in fast paced Japanese. "People were so supportive, and this is by far the biggest show I've ever taken part in. I'm very, very happy." After the amazing routines displayed in Japan, 2017 Red Bull BC One promises to be the best yet with the planet's most talented B-Boys feeding off the passionate Dutch crowd to discover the next champion.

concluded with a piece played by Gabriel Hermansson, Fredrik Gille, Dan Svensson, Filip Runesson and Romain Gabourg. Al-Khalidi had to flee Iraq over 18 years ago and live as a refugee in various countries until she settled in Sweden where she met her band members.



AL TIJARIA LAUNCHES 'PLANT A TREE IN MY COUNTRY' INITIATIVE

"Plant A Tree in My Country" is the latest initiative launched by the Commercial Real Estate Company "Al Tijaria" as part of their 'We care'-Corporate Social Responsibility program. This initiative is the brainchild of Al Tijaria's Chairman Abdulfatah M R Marafie. The event focuses on increasing awareness on planting more trees and to further plant as many seedlings as possible in Boulevard and across Kuwait. On April 1, 2017, the first inaugural initiative of this campaign was successfully held in Boulevard.

Adwan Al Adwani, Chairman of Al Salmiya Group for

Enterprise Development has stated that this fruitful cooperation between Al Tijaria Real Estate Company, Al Salmiya Group and Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research is a result of our care in providing a healthy environment and safe outdoor area for families to enjoy their best moments. Adwani added that more than 500 seedlings were planted in different areas in Boulevard in less than an hour.

He further appreciated the efforts of all the volunteers in accomplishing this achievement which includes the staff of Al Tijaria Real Estate Company, affiliated compa-

ny's staff, tenants such as Costa Café, volunteer groups such as: Loyac, Date Palm Friends Society and Ataa Hub Society, Accounting Club at GUST University and Rotana Hotel staff. Adwani also thanked Symphony Style Hotel Kuwait for their valuable participation in this event by offering the volunteers light snacks and drinks and distributing giveaways which can be recycled and used as seedlings once consumed.

Rawan Adnan, Marketing and Leasing Dept. Manager stated that Al Tijaria aims to encourage citizens and residents to preserve the environment and initiate similar

campaigns, through this initiative. We look forward to being a role model for neighboring countries and the rest of the world in the long run. "We Care" is the title chosen by the Commercial Real Estate Company to highlight its corporate social responsibility initiatives in alliance with applying corporate governance principles and as part of our responsibility in saving the environment and towards a greener future. Al Tijaria Real Estate Company thanked all the volunteers and employees for their valuable participation in planting the trees and making this initiative a success.

KKMA, IDF KUWAIT ORGANIZES MEDICAL SCREENING CAMP

The Kuwait Kerala Muslim Association (KKMA), the leading social welfare organization of Indians in Kuwait along with Indian Doctors Forum (IDF) Kuwait celebrates the World Health Day on April 7 by organizing a large scale medical screening and consultation camp for Indians in Kuwait. The medical camp is being supported by Bader Al Sama Medical Center Kuwait.

Institutions such Kuwait Medical Association, Kuwait Herat Foundation, Dasman Diabetic Center, Al Rahma Medical Services, Association of Indian Ophthalmologists, Indian Dentists Alliance, Saudi Kuwait Pharmaceutical Co., Indian Optician Co., Ashraf and Ashraf Co. are a part

of this mass medical camp by providing their technical and facilities support. Medical wing of Kuwait National Guard join hands with KKMA last few years by providing their services. Kuwait National Guard officer will have a courtesy visit at the camp.

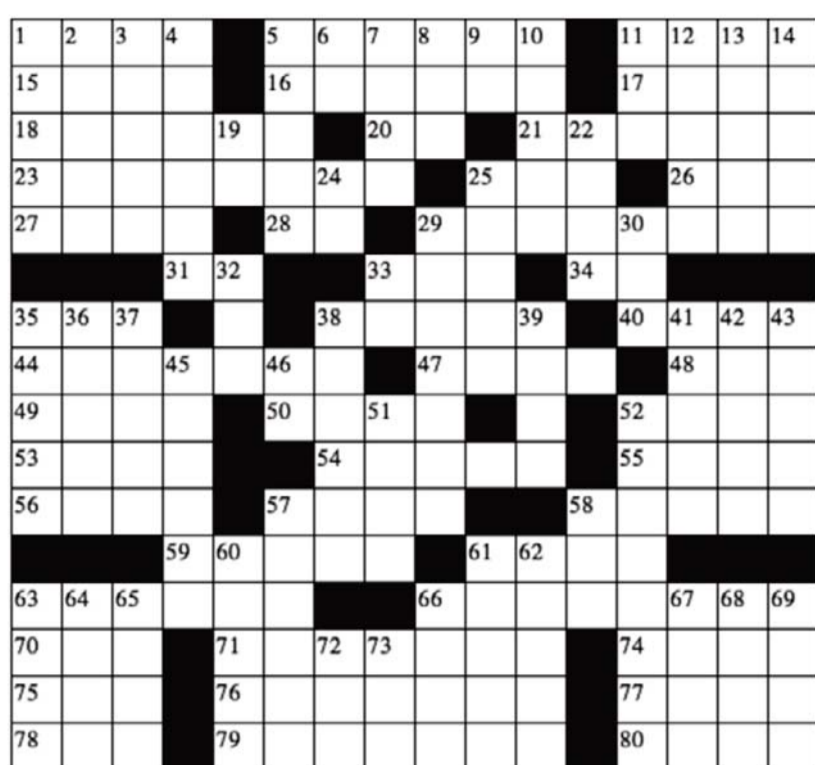
Sunil Jain, the Ambassador of India to Kuwait will inaugurate the camp at 8.30 am. He will also release a health directory which is published on this occasion. In addition to the medical screening camp, variety of health oriented classes, exhibitions, and seminar also arranged during the medical camp. More than 50 doctors from various medical departments and above of 150 paramedical and technical staffs serves the patients. Medical tests such as

sugar, blood pressure, height and weight will be provided to all. ECG, Cholesterol test and free medicines will also be provided upon doctors' note with no cost to beneficiaries.

KKMA has been organizing the medical camp in association with Indian Doctors Forum in Kuwait for seven years now, helping thousands of needy people. Sageer Trakaripur, N A Muneer, Ibrahim Kunnil, Ali Matra, Abdul Fattah Thayyil, Hamsa Payanoor, B M Iqbal, C Firose, A P Abdul Salam, K Bashier, K C Rafeek, K C Gafoor from KKMA and Ashraf Ayoor Managing Director Bader Al Sama Medical Center, Nithin Menon Marketing Manager attended the press conference to explain the details of the medical camp.



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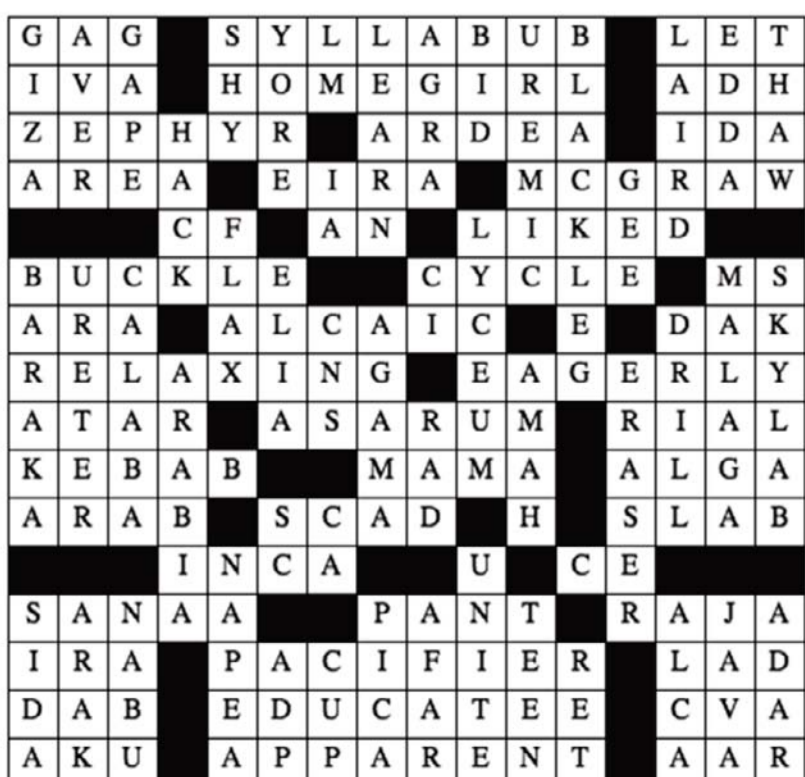
ACROSS

- A narcotic that is considered a hard drug.
- A Japanese martial art employing principles similar to judo.
- Open-heart surgery in which the rib cage is opened and a section of a blood vessel is grafted from the aorta to the coronary artery to bypass the blocked section of the coronary artery and improve the blood supply to the heart.
- The basic unit of money in Bangladesh.
- A high-crowned black cap (usually made of felt or sheepskin) worn by men in Turkey and Iran and the Caucasus.
- Any culture medium that uses agar as the gelling agent.
- A port city in southwestern Iran.
- A unit of energy equal to the work done by an electron accelerated through a potential difference of 1 volt.
- Valuable timber tree of New Zealand yielding hard reddish wood used for furniture and bridges and wharves.
- A large family of trees, shrubs, vines, and herbs bearing bean pods.
- A solution containing a phosphate buffer.
- Loose or flaccid body fat.
- A logarithmic unit of sound intensity.
- A public promotion of some product or service.
- (Akkadian) God of wisdom.
- A guided missile fired from shipboard against an airborne target.
- Distinctive and stylish elegance.
- A member of an Indian people formerly living along the Gulf coast of Louisiana and Texas.
- (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
- (formerly) A title of respect for a man in Turkey or Egypt.
- Primitive chlorophyll-containing mainly aquatic eukaryotic organisms lacking true stems and roots and leaves.
- Welsh industrialist and social reformer who founded cooperative communities (1771-1858).
- An artificial source of visible illumination.
- (Jungian psychology) The inner self (not the external persona) that is in touch with the unconscious.
- (old-fashioned) At or from or to a great distance.
- (Old Testament) The eldest son of Isaac who would have inherited the Covenant that God made with Abraham and that Abraham passed on to Isaac.
- A family of Sino-Tibetan languages spoken in southeastern Asia.
- West Indian tree having racemes of fragrant white flowers and yielding a durable timber and resinous juice.
- A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
- One of the three prairie provinces in western Canada.
- Formerly a large constellation in the southern hemisphere between Canis Major and the Southern Cross.
- A widely distributed system consisting of all the cells able to ingest bacteria or colloidal particles etc, except for certain white blood cells.
- French writer (born in Belgium) best known for his detective novels featuring Inspector Maigret (1903-1989).
- The basic unit of money in Western Samoa.
- A doctor's degree in dental surgery.
- Lacking external ears.
- Having an eye or eyes or eyelike feature especially as specified.

DOWN

- Personnel who assist their superior in carrying out an assigned task.
- A clique that seeks power usually through intrigue.
- Jordan's port.
- A member of an agricultural people in southeastern India.
- (of complexion) Blemished by imperfections of the skin.
- A state in midwestern United States.
- Swiss painter influenced by Kandinsky (1879-1940).
- A poliovirus vaccine consisting of inactivated polio virus that is injected subcutaneously to provide immunity to poliomyelitis.
- An official prosecutor for a judicial district.
- The cardinal number that is the sum of seven and one.
- Feline mammal usually having thick soft fur and being unable to roar.
- With the mouth wide open as in wonder or awe.
- Found along western Atlantic coast.
- Narrow-leaved green herbage.
- A radioactive element of the actinide series.
- A slender double-reed instrument.
- The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
- A rechargeable battery with a nickel cathode and a cadmium anode.
- A republic in southeastern Europe on the Adriatic coast of the Balkan Peninsula.
- A coenzyme derived from the B vitamin nicotinic acid.
- A nucleic acid consisting of large molecules shaped like a double helix.
- A brittle silver-white metalloid element that is related to selenium and sulfur.
- (Greek mythology) A Titan who was forced by Zeus to bear the sky on his shoulders.
- Molten rock in the earth's crust.
- New Zealand timber tree resembling the cypress.
- A small cake leavened with yeast.
- At or near or toward the stern of a ship or tail of an airplane.
- Big-eyed scad.
- (Greek mythology) Monster with nine heads.
- Small New Zealand broadleaf evergreen tree often cultivated in warm regions as an ornamental.
- A radioactive metallic element that is similar to tellurium and bismuth.
- (Sumerian) Water god and god of wisdom.
- A person whose head is bald.
- A port city in southwestern Turkey on the Gulf of Antalya.
- North American republic containing 50 states - 48 conterminous states in North America plus Alaska in northwest North America and the Hawaiian Islands in the Pacific Ocean.
- Lower in esteem.
- A genus of Procyonidae.
- (prefix) Across or crossing or on the opposite side.
- In bed.
- A girl or young woman who is unmarried.
- Bulky grayish-brown eagle with a short wedge-shaped white tail.
- An open receptacle for holding or displaying or serving articles or food.
- Look at with amorous intentions.
- Taking place over public roads.
- The rate at which heat is produced by an individual in a resting state.
- The fatty flesh of eel.

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Some form of education is in the wind and you may be the instructor. There is also the opportunity to be taught. Also, a new discovery brightens your day. It may spur you into writing a bit of poetry. Whatever the case, you will want to share the discoveries of this time. Charity work is something you enjoy doing but this birth year you may branch out into multiple causes. Not only will you become focused within this realm of activity but you will make a positive difference in whatever you choose to support. Because of your ability to be creative and expressive, you may find that working with charities to organize drives is just what makes you happy. You enjoy celebrating tonight! Take lots of pictures.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Careful attention to details may keep you busy most of this workday. Taking care of business is a major theme where your mental orientation is concerned. You love that feeling of being organized and find yourself getting much accomplished. Health goals also take on importance. You may find that you enjoy walks after the noon meal or during breaks. You may find yourself becoming intensely personal and passionate in the way you appear to others. You will develop a more direct method of communication, getting to the very heart of things. You show your appreciation toward your friends later this day, as you join in a social event or participate in some joint activity. You could be inspired to stay awhile. You are a positive influence.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

You are quick to act and can save the day on more than one occasion. There is good communication among authority figures as well as your peers. Believing in yourself is very important to your wellbeing. Expand your vision and do not give into any negative thinking that could suppress your progress. You may enjoy discussing your educational background with a co-worker today. You find yourself remembering the fun times as well as the struggles that you have worked through. You feel value in your life and it is admirable to express your appreciation for your own hard work as well as for those that helped you. Your creativity is strong. Opportunities exist to gain in recognition, applause and attention from wherever you navigate.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

You may find yourself analyzing situations, perhaps even people, in order to come up with solutions to problems. Someone could be hard to get along with and an underlying truth will help guide him or her through a misunderstanding. You crave organization and practicality and you want to get things accomplished. This person or situation could slow your progress-be prepared. Categorizing your steps today will help anyone sitting in for you while you might be on vacation will help eliminate a lot of questions. Your earning power seems to be in a holding pattern and a loved one may be more important to you at this time. Plan some fun as well as relaxing times around your family for tonight. Your earnings will pick up in due time.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You may decide to pitch the idea of where you wanted your present profession to take you. Working for a charity organization or a religious group may be exactly where you want to be at this time, and besides, there may be a very important person of dating possibilities, just waiting for you to join in the group. If you create a plan for yourself that includes helping others, you tend to excel. However, if you wait until you are much older before deciding to work with charities, there will be fewer opportunities for you to be expressive and helpful to others. You have a great awareness of others that have not progressed in life and may find yourself analyzing and aiding in their future goals. Planning for the future is always good.



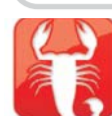
Virgo (August 23-September 22)

You crave organization and practicality and you want to get things accomplished. You aim to have a place for everything and everything in its place. It may be time soon to make your progress report to higher ups. Health and work goals take on greater importance now. Secrets, conspiracies and the hidden links that unite all things take on a great deal of mystery. Digging into the past for hints about the present and future uncovers a lot of answers to the questions that are finally fading away. When an elderly person is responsible for an animal or has friends, he or she usually remains more alert and invested in their own daily living. Consider buying a houseplant or a few fish for a special elder; check back occasionally.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

You would do well to play it low key this day. A friend has something to talk about and you could schedule in some visiting time for after work, or perhaps the noon break. You may be asked to listen to a customer's complaint. There are opportunities to make your thoughts known in positive ways. You know how to make fussy customers happy in an instant. This day brings some opportunities for financial gain. There are, however, the usual difficulties in the workplace, but nothing you cannot handle. Your concentration is enhanced and you could discover mistakes or improve on steps to a quick resolution to whatever you are concentrating on now. If you want to begin a diet, today and tomorrow will be a time of productive beginnings.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Your judgment could be temporarily out of order. Perhaps you have other things on your mind. To head off any real problems with your work, check and recheck your progress. Your judgment of people and products is usually accurate but today's planetary energies may help to create a few distractions. There are impressive moments today and you could regret your decisions, particularly based on someone else's influence-take your time. You may experience a heightened artistic inspiration that manifests itself in creative work or just the urge to experience the beauty of nature. Work in the yard or with plants can be quite calming later today and will help you to gain a focus on the more positive parts of your life. Balance is returning.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You might like to ignore responsibilities and do some socializing today but you know that is impossible for now. You drag your mind back into the business world and make your intentions to create some plans this evening to enjoy the company of your friends. . . . Perhaps a dinner party this coming weekend. You aim to complete your tasks-goals and work are soon accomplished. There is stability in your movements with the objective to see end results. There will be an urge to communicate. Also, perhaps a short trip or a special phone call is in order. Later this afternoon you will find you have a lot of energy and drive to be with your friends. This is a very physical time in which exercise is fun and invigorating. Romance is possible this evening.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Put your mind to work and take care of any details that you may need to pull things into a completion. There are improvements scheduled now. Anything you do in groups or as teamwork will be successful. Throw away anything that does not serve you and set aside those things that are in need of updating or correction. You underestimate your creative skills and may need some positive feedback today in order to continue with some particular project. Guard against any misunderstandings with a parent or older family member this afternoon. You have been on such a roll lately-it seems only right that you provide time for rest. This evening, rest is everybody's attitude-perhaps a movie or a good book would help. Protect your love interests.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

In-depth discussions and probing conversations find you at your mental best. Your analytical abilities are at a high. At one point today, you may feel that it is important to prove your ideas. Back up and take the whole situation into consideration. It certainly does not hurt to express your view and give some short demonstration; keep it simple and keep your audience watching more. Your creative spirit is on automatic drive, making you very expressive-give people time to digest your presentation. The drive for interactions with loved ones is strong. There is a desire for physical intimacy tonight with your loved one. Feed the spirit through some form of art, music or dance. This is a wonderful time to do something special for your loved one.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Your work is successful. If a little attention goes a long way, think of what a dedication to your work would bring about. You could be making new discoveries-it is important not to become distracted. An older person in the family may need help later this day and you are ready to comply. See if there is some way you could enlarge the circle of caretakers so that you are not alone in this endeavor. This afternoon you will find yourself visiting and communicating with your many friends. Perhaps a hobby has your attention. Your attitude is good and you are in a mood to communicate with everyone you see. You are having fun at this time as you become more involved with your family members. This is also a beneficial time to look for new ventures.

WORD SEARCH

Summer Olympics

Find and circle all of the Summer Olympic events that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a secret message.

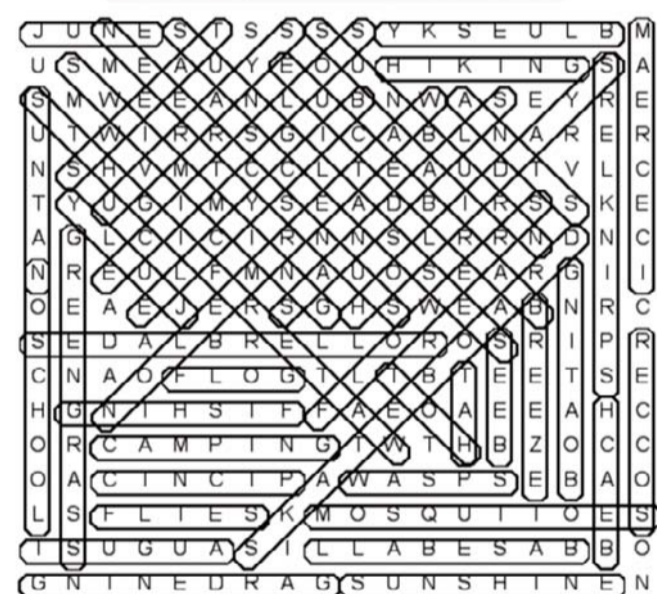
Note: Similarly named events are hidden separately. For example, SWIMMING and SYNCHRONIZED SWIMMING do not overlap.



- | | | |
|------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| ARCHERY | FOOTBALL | TABLE TENNIS |
| ATHLETICS | GYMNASTICS | TAEKWONDO |
| BADMINTON | HANDBALL | TENNIS |
| BASEBALL | HOCKEY | TRAMPOLINING |
| BASKETBALL | JUDO | TRIATHLON |
| BEACH VOLLEYBALL | MODERN PENTATHLON | VOLLEYBALL |
| BOXING | RHYTHMIC GYMNASTICS | WATER POLO |
| CANOEING | ROWING | WEIGHTLIFTING |
| CYCLING | SHOOTING | WRESTLING |
| DIVING | SOFTBALL | YACHTING |
| EQUESTRIANISM | SWIMMING | |
| FENCING | SYNCHRONIZED SWIMMING | |

Yesterday's Solution

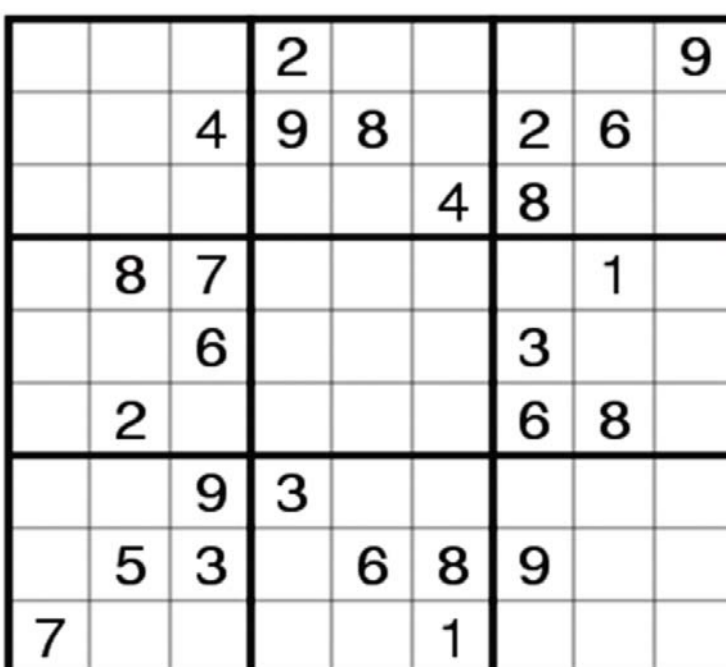
Summer



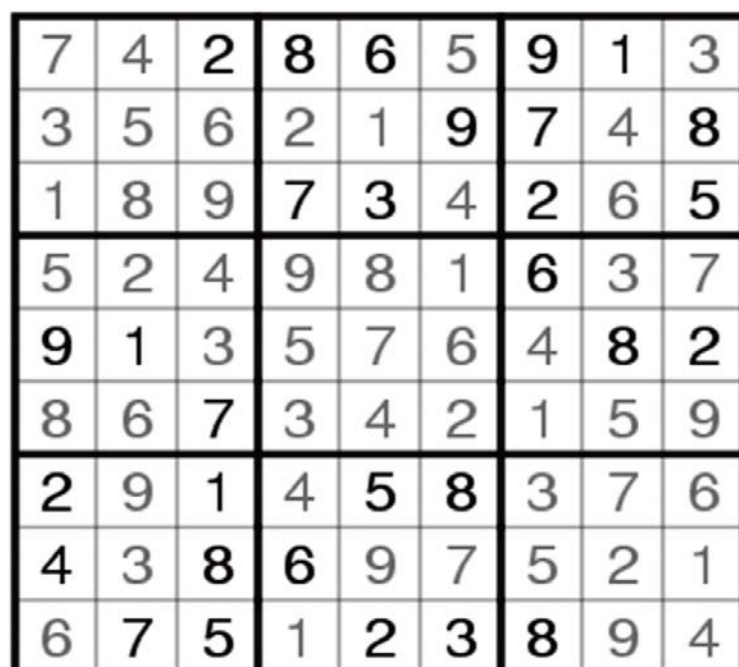
- | | | | |
|----------|-------------|---------------|--------------|
| ANTS | FISHING | JULY | SUNBURN |
| AUGUST | FLIES | JUNE | SUNGLASSES |
| BARBECUE | FLOWERS | MOSQUITOES | SUNSCREEN |
| BASEBALL | GARDENING | NO SCHOOL | SUNSHINE |
| BEACH | GOLF | PICNIC | SUNTAN |
| BEES | GREEN GRASS | ROLLER BLADES | SWEAT |
| BICYCLE | HAT | SANDALS | SWIMMING |
| BLUE SKY | HIKING | SKATEBOARD | U V RAYS |
| BOATING | HOLIDAYS | SOCCER | WASPS |
| BREEZE | HOT | SOLSTICE | WATER FIGHTS |
| CAMPING | ICE CREAM | SPRINKLERS | WATERMELON |

The hidden message is: SUMMER VACATION

Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution



After dating show boom, TV helps you get a divorce

The dating show boom that has swept the world's television screens since the success of "Married at First Sight" may be coming to an end, experts predict. Now it is time to get divorced. Producers are falling over themselves to make new shows about warring couples where everything has gone wrong. Analyst Virginia Mouseler said at the world's top TV gathering MIPTV in the French resort of Cannes on Monday that the tsunami of classic dating shows that followed the US blockbuster had run its course.

"In the three years since 'Married at First Sight' the tide seems to have turned," she said. Instead a host of new shows are coming with couples making dramatic last-ditch attempts to save their relationships-or deciding to split. The Latvian hit "Mirror of Truth" puts unhappy couples through intense therapy and then asks them to choose whether they should stay together. The cathartic "One Night with My Ex" from Britain's Channel 5 locks both partners from a failed relationship in an apartment "for the most intense night of their lives".

The idea is that they either salvage something from the wreckage or get the answers they need to move on, said Mouseler, who heads The Wit, an influential trends newsletter. Couples go on a nostalgic journey to see if they can rekindle the spark in Finland's "Rewind Love", while across the Baltic Sea in Denmark they take a more ruggedly radical approach.

Sexual healing

In "Wild Therapy" bickering couples are dropped into the wilderness with a special forces veteran and life coach who tests them to breaking point to see where the problem in their relationship lies. The new Dutch show "A Whole New Beginning" takes the idea to another level by getting families to sell-up and move to a South American jungle to begin again from scratch. Each family is given 75,000 euros (\$80,000) to build a new home and life, while their assets at home are frozen.

Naturally, sex is the root of much of the discord. The upcoming Israeli show "Sex Tape" takes the bull by the horns in a new form of public sex therapy where couples are encouraged to film their lovemaking. They then must share their experiences with other couples in a similar situation in group therapy sessions, where each watches and comments on the other's sex tapes. The Dutch show "On Top with Goedele" takes a slightly less outrageous approach to tackling simmering frustrations under the sheets. The host encourages couples to talk about their real sexual needs and uses facial mapping and eye tracking technology to better identify their hidden desires.

Of course if people were more careful before they rushed up the aisle they would save themselves a lot of misery. Which is why Latin American producers have come up with two shows to test love to the limits first.

Five-month stag party

Chile's "Double Temptation" puts soon-to-be-married couples in adjoining Big Brother-style houses to see if they can resist the blandishments of "14 attractive singletons" bent on seducing them. "Marry If You Can" from neighboring Argentina subjects couples to a five-month stag party replete with multiple temptations. "Only true love can pass the test", the producers claim, with the winning couple getting a house, a paid-for paradise wedding and a honeymoon. British channel E4 uses a more scientific approach. Its "Game of Clones" gives contestants the choice of eight identically dressed possible partners who exactly meet the physical criteria demanded. "It all comes down to personality when they all look the same," the creators declared. And the US show "The Game of Dating" lets viewers at home pitch in on whether a date is really boyfriend or girlfriend material. Sweden's TV3, however, knows that the real way to a woman's heart is a man's toolbox. In "Handyman Wanted" it tries to pair "three strong, independent women who want to build their dream home" with the most qualified men.—AFP



Palestinian female football players (in red) are seen during a qualifying match against Thailand for the Asian Women football Cup in the West Bank town of Al-Ram.— AFP photos

For Palestinian women, football not just about winning

'Playing football for girls is not something to be ashamed of or a sin'

The Palestinian women's football team saw a crushing defeat in their first match in Asian Cup qualifiers—a 6-0 loss to Thailand—but for captain Claudie Salameh, the score means little. "Playing football for girls in Palestine is an enormous challenge," she said after the match. "We face world football but also (challenges) in our country where an outdated vision of girls playing football exists." Palestinian women football players have sought to overcome traditional attitudes and the difficulties imposed by Israel's occupation to build a team now competing in Asian Cup qualifiers. The other teams in the Asian Cup qualifying group—Thailand and China—have been training together for a long time.

But the members of the Palestinian team were only together for 20 days before their match on Monday in Al-Ram, the Palestinian city cut off from Jerusalem by Israel's separation wall. "We have to prove to our own people that girls can and know how to play football," said Salameh while waving her hands expressively, her fingernails painted with flamboyant red polish—the same color as the Palestinian jerseys. Tomorrow, they will play their second cup qualifier against China as part of their aim to reach the 2018 tournament to be held in neighboring Jordan. The two other coun-

tries meant to be in the group—Lebanon and Guam—have withdrawn. Palestinian women's football has existed in organized form for less than 10 years. The first team was formed in 2009 with little financial support and controversy over women playing what is seen by some as a man's game in shorts. There are now four teams playing outdoors and about a dozen indoors. About 400 girls over 14 are registered as players. The players face both "cultural obstacles" and, like all Palestinians, those imposed by the Israeli army due to the 50-year occupation of the West Bank, said Hanadi Nasser Eldin, head of women's football for the Palestinian federation. Receiving permission from the Israeli authorities for players to travel as well as for equipment to be transported are issues that have been looked at by FIFA.

'Not a sin'

But on a more personal level, due to traditional attitudes, the players are subjected to debates over their clothes and the pursuit of sporting activity past the age when some believe they should be married. The subject has come up at sermons in some mosques. In the Gaza Strip, the other Palestinian territory separated from the West Bank by Israel and run by

Islamist movement Hamas, only a small number of girls play indoor football. Members of the Palestinian national team come from the West Bank or Arab Israeli communities.

Beyond trying to win, a major challenge for the players is building a program and making their presence known. Riham Al-Moghrabi, around 20, was one of the rare fans taking in Monday's game at the Faisal Al-Husseini stadium—the only international Palestinian football venue.

Having travelled from the West Bank city of Jericho, she said she felt the players had "a strength, a will and a gift that can both serve them and the whole country". "Playing football for girls is not something to be ashamed of or a sin," she said. Jibril Rajoub, head of the Palestinian Football Federation, has been working to bring Palestinian teams—as well as the flag, anthem and cause—to all international sporting events. The federation works not only on training players and coaches, but "also for rules guaranteeing the place of women-half of society—in this sporting revolution," he said.—AFP



Palestinian female football players (in red) are seen during a qualifying match against Thailand for the Asian Women football Cup in the West Bank town of Al-Ram.



Palestinian female football players (in red) are seen during a qualifying match.

Wahran Trading Company introduces 'The Fragrance Collection' by Boucheron

Since it became the first jewellery house to move to Place Vendôme in 1893, Boucheron has ceaselessly elevated its creations across the world, renewing and drawing its inspiration from the journeys and discoveries of its gem hunters in return. Crossing seas and deserts in search of mineral perfection, these explorers tirelessly roam the five continents to unearth and select the most precious gemstones. From the steep shores of Sicily to the sands of Egypt, the oases of the Persian Plateau to the luxuriant tropical vegetation of the Indian Ocean islands, they have brought back much more than exceptional stones from their distant expeditions: memories brimming with emotions, lights and scents.

Marked by the soul of these legendary lands, their minds have gradually helped to form the Boucheron spirit itself, feeding it with colours and scents that quiver at the heart of the Maison's collections, in both its jewellery and fragrance creations. An expression of the perfect harmony between these two arts, the new collection of six fragrances with their captivating exotic resonances continues the extraordinary tradition of the Boucheron gem hunters. A showcase exalts and elevates each one of these fragrant treasures, with bottles featuring simple, elegant lines that carefully hold their precious contents. These perfectly proportioned glass columns are set with a golden metal neck that reinterprets the emblematic Maison Boucheron double gadroons. The bottles are topped with a solid white cap which echoes the elegance of marble. Adorned with a metal plaque bearing the name of each fragrance, the heavy, transparent glass showcases the colourful, radiant juices: the blue-violet of Iris de Syracuse, the pastel yellow of Tubereuse de Madras, the sea-green of Neroli d'Isphahan, the orange-yellow of Vanille de Zanzibar, the caramel shades of Ambre D'Alexandrie, and the candied chestnut tones of Oud De Carthage.

Each perfume in the collection is presented in a luxurious box covered with pure white heavy paper and embellished with golden double gadroons and with the name inscribed on a golden rectangle. A discreet loop of grosgrain ribbon, iconic motif of Maison Boucheron, in the fragrance's colour reveals a single hint of the bottle within.

Iris De Syracuse

The top note is a subtle vibration. Enhanced with the sparkling freshness of tanga Mandarin, juicy and crunchy Pear is elegantly contrasted with a spicy touch of Black Pepper. The middle note is a powdery balm. Almost tangible, Iris Concrete evokes a rich and comfortable powder.

Like a daydream, Jasmine Petals undulate, free and ethereal, in a sweet illusion of almond blossom embodied by Heliotrope. The base note evokes mystical sensuality. Enveloped in a mysterious Patchouli veil, Vanilla is both sensual and carnal. White Musks bring infinite softness to this base, like the caress of a feather on the skin.



Neroli D'Isphahan

The brilliant combination in the top notes of Green Cardamom and Ginger brings an elegant, bursting depth, accentuated by the fresh and peppery facets of Elemi. A powerful trio that reveals the ardent character of the spices.

Infused with the sunny intensity of Neroli, the fragrance reveals a heart of Cistus whose amber and resinous softness is sculpted by the effervescent vigor of Pink Peppercorn. Lulled by the delicate sensuality of White Musks, this authentic base brings the amber minerality of Ambrox together with the profoundly woody and warm character of Patchouli Essence.

Tubereuse De Madras

In the top notes, the rich and delicate petals of Orange Blossom illuminate Violet Leaf, revealing lush nature through its vegetal and fresh facets. Succulent and tanga Passion Fruit completes this olfactory treasure with its glowing colors.

The exoticism of YlangYlang and the almond sweetness of Frangipani Flower gives this floral middle a sunny intensity that enhances the spellbinding majesty of a Tuberose Infusion.

The voluptuous fragrance of Vanilla brings comforting fluidity to the base, accentuated by the sensual and addictive trail of Tuberose Absolute. Smooth and comfortable, Sandalwood takes on the bewitching scents of this sacred flower.

Vanille De Zanzibar

With the zesty burst of Mandarin, Jasmine Petals shake elegantly and release a sheer and ethereal floral charm.

Gentle luminosity with a hint of juicy Pear brings modernity and color to the top notes. Unsettling and fascinating, the middle notes surrender to the richness of Bourbon Vanilla. The Oriental sensuality of its black pods is combined with the amber and coppery character of Balsam of Peru to enhance its natural power. The creamy floral tones of Heliotrope soften this addictive duo. The generous trail of White Musks passionately envelops this exotic beauty with an irresistible powdery veil. A carnal intensity, tactile and irrepressible, is supported from below by the woods. Smooth Sandalwood and warm Patchouli wrap up the fragrance with charisma.

Oud De Carthage

An extremely rich accord offering three facets as distinct as they are complementary.

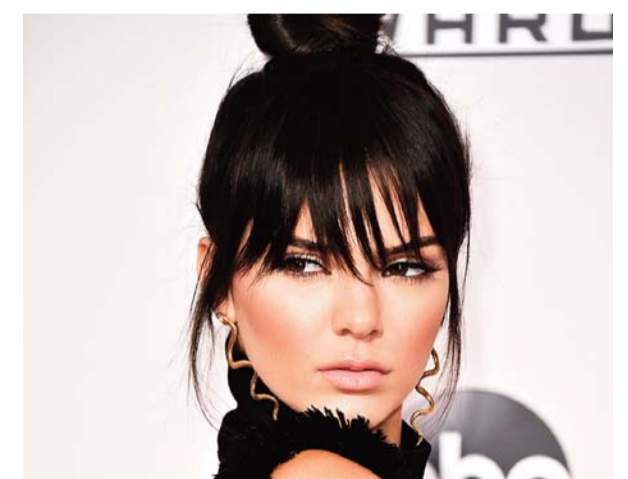
The strength of an oriental note with a touch of mystery brought by Incense and Honey.

Magneticism triggered by a blend of Labdanum Absolute and Tonka Bean with sensual and comfortable notes.

The base offers a touch of imposing distinction with two accords: Oud and Leather.

Ambre D'Alexandrie

Both sweet and voluptuous, notes of Creamy Vanilla and Benzoin have been coated with a Spirit of Narguile accord, in a surprising, mystical and hypnotizing blend. Cistus resin enhances the Amber accord with its leathery oriental facets. For more complexity with an animal touch, the base was created around a bed of Ambergris and carnal Musk, and leaves a remarkable trail.



In this file photo, Kendall Jenner arrives at the American Music Awards in Los Angeles.— AP

Kardashian clan member Kendall Jenner says, 'I'm a big kid'

When Kendall Jenner isn't strutting down a runway in wings, cheesing as Marilyn Monroe on video or flea market shopping with Paris Jackson, you might look for her outside. Whether it's next to a pool or on a motorbike, enjoying the great outdoors is one of those things the 21-year-old does just for herself. "I'm born and raised in LA. Even as a kid I was always outside with my little sister. We were in the mud being stupid," the Kardashian clan member told The Associated Press with a laugh in a recent telephone interview from her hometown.

Since, with her on-fire modeling career taking her all over the world, she's had to grab Kendall time when she can. "I've had those moments where you kind of need to just take care of yourself and say no to a certain thing," Jenner said. "I think that's key." Also key when life gets too hectic: stepping away from her phone, even deleting the apps for Instagram or Twitter - for a time. "I love setting my phone down and really trying to enjoy something that's right in front of me," she said.

Jenner is the latest celebrity to star in a Pepsi "Live for Now Moments" video and responded this way when asked if she misses those childhood times with sis Kylie: "Of course I do. I'm a big kid. I still love being outside and, like, in the dirt." Is stepping back and saying "no" when she feels life spinning too fast something that comes easy? "I've never been a yes person," Jenner said. "If I don't want to do something I probably am not going to do it." — AP

FEATURES



In this photo a premium Japanese Pearl White strawberry (left) and Kotoka strawberry (right) from Nara, Japan, each costing 21.60 USD (168 HKD), are displayed at high-end supermarket City Super in Hong Kong. — AFP photos



A premium Japanese melon is displayed at the Yau Ma Tei fruit market in the Kowloon district of Hong Kong.



A customer (second right) smells a box of Japanese premium strawberries at the Yau Ma Tei fruit market in the Kowloon district of Hong Kong.



Customers (back center) taste premium Japanese fruits at the Yau Ma Tei fruit market in the Kowloon district of Hong Kong.

A slice of luxury: Hong Kong's high-end fruit fad

It might be a healthy food choice, but Hong Kong's latest fruit fad is doing serious damage to shoppers' wallets. From luxury supermarkets to outdoor stalls, expensive premium produce is increasingly on show and sought after by customers. At Hong Kong's vibrant Yau Ma Tei fruit market, a Malaysian durian goes for HK\$600 (\$77) and Tasmanian cherries for HK\$550. On the shelves of high-end supermarket City Super, a single Japanese strawberry recently fetched a whopping HK\$168. Each strawberry nestled on a paper pillow, encased in a glossy cardboard box.

The appetite for pricey fruit from far afield reflects a quest for what punters see as clean, fresh produce, even if it has travelled thousands of miles. Fruit shoppers told AFP they did not consider produce from mainland China the source of much of Hong Kong's food-as-healthy. "I used to buy mainland fruit, but now I could never go back. It is not as safe and fresh," said Peter Wong, 48, an accountant who says he spends around HK \$2,000 on imported fruit each month for himself, his wife and their two children.

"The fruit is fresher if it comes from overseas, like the USA or South Africa or Japan," he said as he browsed the Yau Ma Tei stalls. Reports of farmers using excessive pesticides, fertilizers and preservatives in China have damaged the reputation of its produce, and food grown locally in Hong Kong is very limited.

The trend partly reflects a growing desire for a healthier diet, in a city where traditional dishes can be heavy on salt and fat. But it is also about status-expensive fruit has become a popular gift to impress loved ones and colleagues, tapping in to an established Chinese tradition of giving fruit to bring good luck and prosperity.

Keeping face

Daniel Chan, 42, a vendor at Yau Ma Tei whose family has been running the business for 70 years, said the gifting of expensive fruit was largely related to "face", an important element in Chinese culture to show wealth and generosity. The family used to sell only to wholesalers, but has branched out into retail in the past two years thanks to the demand for premium fruit from wealthy customers.



Premium Japanese melons, each costing 15 USD (120 HKD), are displayed.

"Professional, high-class people come here on Saturdays and Sundays, with their Maseratis and Ferraris and Benzs parked outside," Chan told AFP. Shoppers liked to see themselves as "professional" fruit buyers, able to sniff out the best produce, he added.

The trend is not limited to Hong Kong. Japanese families and businesses routinely offer expensive fruits as presents to express gratitude. Specialized luxury fruit parlors, often located inside high-end department stores, boast a wide selection of spotless cherries, mangoes and melons, set neatly inside cushion-lined wooden boxes. Top of the line fruits can command sky-high prices at the first auction of the season, from "Ruby Roman" grapes attracting bids going up to \$4,000 for a bunch, to a pair of cantaloupe melons sold for more than \$9,000.

In South Korea, fruit has long been a popular gift option during the Lunar New Year holiday and Chuseok, a harvest festival often described as a Korean equivalent of Thanksgiving. Elaborately packaged imported fruits became especially popular in some quarters in recent years, but after a new anti-graft law took effect last year, putting a limit of around \$50 on the value of business gifts, sales of such items have declined.

'Nothing local'

In Hong Kong, prices are driven by demand, but are also pushed up by new techniques that enhance sweetness. Japanese products are the most popular at Yau Ma Tei, according to vendor Chan, but fruits from further afield, including figs from South Africa, also find favor with customers. The \$77 Malaysian durian at Chan's stall was carefully grown, picked ripe, then frozen and flown to Hong Kong, he said, making it more expensive than fruit shipped by sea which ripens during the journey. As Hong Kong battles to contain food waste, critics say high-end fruit is an environmental hazard due to its overpackaging. But for some, that is part of the appeal. Christopher Gallaga, a former food and drink manager at City Super, said heavily wrapped fruit was seen as a sign of "standard and class" and sold better than loose produce.

"The trend is just towards nothing local, everything imported," Gallaga said, adding that it reflected a "distrust" of mainland produce. Shopper Wong said his fruit-buying habit is about a sense of the exotic and proof of his quality know-how. He said: "I can now buy the best fruits to share with my friends and family." — AFP



A wholesale fruit vendor minds his shop at the wholesale Yau Ma Tei fruit market in the Kowloon district of Hong Kong.



Vendors work at the wholesale Yau Ma Tei fruit market in the Kowloon district of Hong Kong.



In this file photo, the "Pink Star" diamond, the most valuable cut diamond ever offered at auction, is displayed by a model at a Sotheby's auction room in Hong Kong. — AP

'Pink Star' diamond fetches record \$71.2 million in Hong Kong

A giant diamond named the "Pink Star" broke the world record for a gemstone sold at auction when it fetched \$71.2 million in Hong Kong yesterday. The 59.60-carat "Pink Star" is the largest in its class ever graded by the Gemological Institute of America. "Sotheby's Hong Kong is very proud to have this record," its Asia chairman Patti Wong told AFP, adding this was a new world auction record for any type of jewel. Sotheby's worldwide chairman for international jewelry David

Bennet, who presided over the auction, called it a "historic sale".

Bidding started at around \$56 million. The sale lasted for five minutes before the winning offer came from a phone bidder and prompted a round of applause. The sparkling oval-cut rock measures 2.69 by 2.06 centimeters (1.06 by 0.81 inches) and weighs 11.92 grams (0.026 pounds). It was discovered in a mine in Africa by De Beers in 1999. At a previous auction, in Geneva in 2013, the stone

fetched \$83 million. But Sotheby's was forced to take back the flawless diamond after that buyer, a New York-based diamond cutter, defaulted on the sale. The previous record for a jewel successfully sold at auction was \$57.54 million in May 2016 for the 14.62-carat "Oppenheimer Blue" sold by Christie's in Geneva. — AFP



A mural of a mosque appears at an exhibit called "America to Zanzibar: Muslim Cultures Near and Far," at the Children's Museum of Manhattan in New York. — AP photos



Alison Pilgrim, from Melbourne, Australia, right, makes a photo of her daughter Eve Pilgrim, 2, left, seated on a replica of a Sahara camel at a show called "America to Zanzibar: Muslim Cultures Near and Far," at the Children's Museum of Manhattan in New York.



Muslim artifacts are encased for display, during the exhibition "America to Zanzibar: Muslim Cultures Near and Far," at Children's Museum of Manhattan in New York.

Muslim culture show a hit at Children's Museum of Manhattan



A youngster interacts with a display on musical instruments while, Lizzy Martin, right, Director of Exhibit Development and Museum Planning at the Children's Museum of Manhattan, is interviewed at the exhibition "America to Zanzibar: Muslim Cultures Near and Far," in New York.

An exhibition about Muslim cultures around the world is proving popular at the Children's Museum of Manhattan. The museum has seen an increase in visitors since the show opened, with a third of those visitors from outside the New York area. The show, called "America to Zanzibar: Muslim Cultures Near and Far," runs through December and will open in February 2018 at the Creative Discovery Museum in Chattanooga, Tennessee, followed by a run in 2019 at the Please Touch Museum in Philadelphia.

"As a first-of-its-kind exhibition, the content of 'America to Zanzibar' is new for most visitors," said Andrew Ackerman, the museum's executive director. "Many parents are eager for their children to experience a broad range of cultures in a deeper way than what they encounter in the media. Our exhibition helps address this need." The exhibition includes interactive features like a global marketplace where children can pretend to buy spices from

Egypt, ceramics from Turkey and rugs from Morocco. They can also weigh their catch at the Zanzibar fish market, smell Indonesian fruits, serve Tajik tea and design outfits inspired by West African tailors who work in New York. And they can explore ancient trade routes on a camel or an Indian Ocean boat called a dhow.

The exhibit is decorated with geometric tile designs, patterned rugs, ceramics and other works of art. A 3-D installation shows mosque architecture from the Maldives to China. The exhibit is designed for children aged 2 to 10 and their families. — AP



Youngsters interact with a display of musical instruments at Children's Museum of Manhattan, during the exhibition "America to Zanzibar: Muslim Cultures Near and Far," in New York.

CENTENNIAL OF US ENTRANCE INTO WWI LURES VISITORS TO MUSEUM

Crossing a glass walkway that spans a field of 9,000 poppies, visitors to the official US memorial to World War I are transported to a time when tanks and air warfare were new and the hopeful flowers sprang up on the barren, trench-dotted battlefields where hundreds of thousands of soldiers died. The museum, which is housed under a tower that rises 217 feet (66 meters) into the Kansas City skyline and is topped by a giant flame, will be the site of a remembrance Thursday to mark the 100-year anniversary of the United States entering the war.

The poppies that visitors pass while entering the museum represent the 9 million combat deaths of the Great War, about 116,000 of them Americans. "In Flanders fields the poppies blow. Between the crosses, row on row," goes a famous poem about the Belgian battlefields where hundreds of thousands of soldiers died on the war's Western Front. With the centennial of the fighting drawing more attention to the war, more than 200,000 visited the museum last year, an increase of about 50 percent from three years earlier. They included visitors from more than 70 countries.

Collecting money

The site's Egyptian Revival-style monument was erected in a burst of postwar patriotism after \$2.5 million was raised in less than two weeks in 1919, an amount that would be equal to about \$35 million today. Children helped, going door to door collecting money in what was "an early 20th century story of crowdsourcing," according to museum spokesman Mike

Vietti. So noteworthy was the achievement that Allied commanders from Belgium, Great Britain, Italy, France and the US gathered in 1921 to dedicate the site. It's located across the street from the Kansas City train station that more than half of US troops passed through before being shipped overseas. When the monument was completed five years later, a crowd of more than 150,000 turned out to hear President Calvin Coolidge speak at the dedication.

But years of deferred maintenance led the site to be closed in 1994. A massive \$102 million transformation followed, funded by a sales tax, bond issue and private donations. The exterior was repaired, and the design firm behind attractions such as Washington's Holocaust Memorial Museum was tapped to create a new museum that would tell World War I's story of assassination, empires swept away and new nations born. The site, now known as the National World War I Museum and Memorial, was made official in legislation that President Barack Obama signed in 2014.

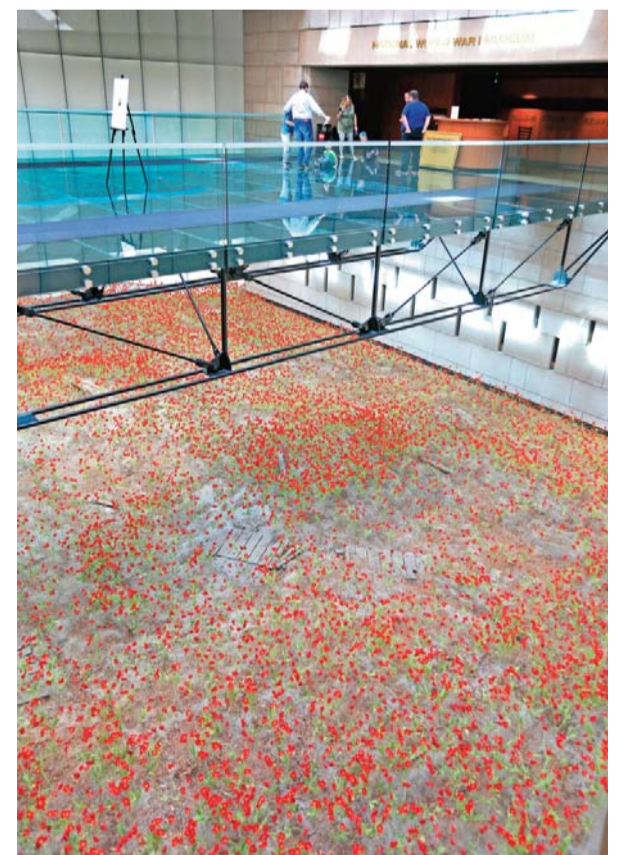
Propaganda posters

The museum's collection of documents and artifacts has a global breadth, covering the period both before and after the US entered the war. The conflict ended in 1918 with the Treaty of Versailles, though many historians believe the treaty's terms helped set the stage for World War II a generation later. Among the items used to tell the complex story of the connection between the two wars is the tunic and cape of Paul von

Hindenburg, a German commander and national hero who later became Germany's president and in 1933 appointed Adolf Hitler chancellor.

Visitors can also see the rapidly evolving weaponry that led to widespread casualties as commanders struggled to adapt. There's a British torpedo, a US-made Naval mine, a life-size replica of a British biplane known as the Aircro DH.2 and a French Renault tank that Vietti described as a weapon of "terror as well as a weapon of war."

One exhibit highlights the damage an artillery shell would have done to a house in the French countryside, while another allows visitors to glimpse inside replicas of the trenches where doughboys fought and often died. In the Horizon Theater, World War I film footage plays on a 100-foot (30-meter) screen above a full-scale tableau of no man's land. The site's original museum now hosts rotating exhibitions, with the latest highlighting propaganda posters. Matthew Naylor, the president and CEO of the museum, keeps his grandfather's wartime shaving kit on display in his office. While issued by the British, it was made in Germany. He noted that the two countries were trading partners before the war. The "fragility" of world relations at the time, Naylor said, has parallels to today that "some would say are ominous." — AP



Visitors stand on a glass walkway over 9,000 poppies inside the entrance of the National World War I Museum.



A visitor leaves the National World War I Museum in Kansas City, Mo.



Uniforms hang on display at the National World War I Museum in Kansas City, Mo.



A docent walks past a French artillery piece at the National World War I Museum in Kansas City, Mo. — AP photos]

Lifestyle

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Uwe Gerstenberg decorates a robinia tree with nearly 10,000 painted Easter eggs in Saalfeld, central Germany, Sunday. — AP

Dutch clog-makers hoping to put a stamp on the future

Just decades ago there were thousands. Now only about 30 Dutch clog-makers remain, fighting to save a dying craft with the wooden shoes more often found today as fridge-magnets rather than footwear. Expertly wielding a long metal spoon-like tool, Nicole van Aarle rhythmically hewed away at a piece of willow, the shavings falling at her feet, the walls of her workshop in the southern Dutch town of Aarle-Rixtel adorned with clogs of all shapes and sizes. "I work when I can. In the evenings, or after dropping the kids off at school, at weekends. But I can't make a living just from making clogs," said this former soldier, who is proud of being a fifth-generation clog-maker.

At 40, she is one of the country's youngest clog-makers and represents the future of a trade in which most craftsmen are already reaching retirement age. It's a "very worrying situation," said Pieter van Rooij, from the Dutch Heritage Centre. "Preserving this craft is long overdue, to ensure that it is handed down to future generations. Otherwise we will lose the know-how of how to make this Dutch icon."



This file photo shows Harrie van Aarle arranging a display of wooden shoes in Aarle-Rixtel, southern Netherlands.



Shoemaker Nicole van Aarle boring a hole out of a wooden shoe in Aarle-Rixtel, southern Netherlands.



Aarle-Rixtel, southern Netherlands, shows a pair of wooden shoes, or clogs. — AFP photos

A shoe for all seasons
Even though clogs have been made for centuries across many countries such as in France and Britain, they have become as synonymous with this lowlands country of 17 million people as tulips and windmills. Up until World War II, clogs were the footwear of choice for most Dutch people. Made from a single piece of wood, they are "warm, dry and not very expensive," said Jack van der Voort, president of the Dutch Clog Monument association. "And you can adapt the shape of the shoe to your job, to the ground on which you work, to the region." But the tradition "is almost dead," he told AFP, calculating that only about 40 clog-makers remain in Europe, of which 30 live in The Netherlands.

"It's like chips in Belgium or German sausage, we have to preserve it," said Van Aarle. "Of course everyone wants to eat chips. But clogs are difficult to walk in, so it's more complicated." Since the end of the war, the Dutch have increasingly donned rubber or leather footwear and clogs have become a sign of a rural past. Van der Voort and Van Aarle have started to organise markets, festivals and even a national clog-making championship in their passion to keep their handicraft alive.

"The interest is there. People are beginning to become interested in their traditions again," said Van der Voort. And new uses are coming to the fore. "Young people going to music festivals are sometimes wearing clogs. They protect them from the mud, they're easy to take off outside a tent and no-one steps on your toes," laughed Van Aarle.

Modern stamp
For her and her father, Harrie, clogs are an essential part of Dutch identity. "From my first steps until I was about 15 years ago, I wore clogs," she said. "I grew up watching my father making clogs and I wanted to learn when I was about 18 or 19." At first her dad refused, seeing no point in teaching his daughter a craft with no future. But he eventually gave in, in face of her persistence. Now, the 66-year-old visits his daughter's workshop daily, as she tries to give a modern facelift to a craft seen by most Dutch as old-fashioned.

"We try to be creative with our designs, by adding heels, or engravings, creating clogs for occasions like births or birthdays... there's a lot that can be done" to boost the hand-made market. Out of the 300,000 clogs made in the country every year either by machine or hand, about a third are bought by tourists, said Van der Voort. Some end up as garden decorations, others as fridge magnets. Van Aarle hopes her two sons may one day take over the family business. "That would obviously make me very proud. But it's a difficult job and I would never force them." — AFP



Shoemaker carving a wooden shoe in Aarle-Rixtel.

Empire Cinemas will celebrate Ben and Jerry's Annual Free Cone Day today

Empire Cinemas are set to take part in the Ben and Jerry's Annual Free Cone Day this week. The film screening chain will mark the yearly celebration for the 13th year in a row yesterday by giving out free ice creams at nationwide centers from midday to 8 pm, and all donations will be passed on to a local charity of the cinema's choice. The annual day started in 1979 in a bid to thank loyal customers for indulging in their cold tasty treats during their first year of business. Speaking about the campaign the Retail Manager for Empire Cinemas, Gordon MacDonald, said: "Ben & Jerry's are a key part of our cinema experience and we're delighted to welcome Free Cone Day again to our cinemas. This is a fantastic way to raise money for charity and we are honored to support so many great causes and give back to our amazing customers." To show your support you can donate and tweet @EmpireCinemas with the hashtag #freeconeday.



Man carves slab of cheese into The Hulk

A food stylist has carved a large slab of cheese into Superhero 'the In-Ched-ible Hulk'. David Bradley had a "grate" time hand sculpting the masterpiece of the Marvel superhero at the East Village Cheese Carving Championships on Saturday. The cheesy work took a total of seven hours, 10 kg of Cheddar, 3 barbecue skewers and a cheese grater to complete. Judge and East Village Retail and Events Manager, Richard Lewis, said: "The East Village Cheese & Wine Festival has been a resounding success, bringing people in from all over London and even the country. The Cheese Carving Championships were one of the biggest attractions with everyone marveling at the dedication and skill of all our sculptors - watching them transform simple blocks of cheese in to recognizable celebrities was so impressive. "Although all of the entries were brilliant, we were particularly blown away by David's creation, which not only created a fantastic likeness to the Hulk, but also really showcased his personality."



Artist creates portraits from ashes

An artist has been making portraits of people using their ashes. Heide Hatry, who lives in New York, has been creating the art pieces since 2008 after suffering the loss of a "close friend"

and having the "flash" idea of immortalizing them in a picture created from their ashes. The German-born artist, 51, told the Metro newspaper: "I was in a terrible state of grief because a close friend, who I had no idea was in such distress, had just committed suicide. "It not only devastated me but also brought back all the unresolved pain I had felt over my father's death fifteen years earlier. By chance, I had recently seen cremated ashes for the first time and I had been deeply moved by the experience. "Probably as a result I had the idea, which did come as a kind of flash, of making portraits of my father and my friend out of their ashes." The art pieces - which are created by adding the ashes to layers of wax piece by piece - are "extremely painstaking" to make, but Heide believes she feels a "deep communication" with the deceased person. She added: "For me the portraits were life-changing since I had to perfect the technique while I worked, but at the end I felt a sense of solace that was astonishing. "At first I thought that it must have had to do with the process itself, which is extremely painstaking and highly meditative, and during which I was in deep communion with their images, often talking or arguing out loud with them as if they were there." And Heide has had mixed responses from those who know of her trade. She said: "Most people see the loving approach and are touched by it, though others find it unpleasant to think about."



Woman claims seatbelts are 'racist to fat people'

A woman has claimed seatbelts are "racist to fat people". The anonymous woman from New Zealand was filmed driving without wearing her seatbelt because she "can't fit it", and has said the police are "racist" toward overweight people if they give her a fine for not wearing the legally required safety strap. She said in a video filmed by a passenger in the car: "I can't fit it, so what's the point in wearing it if I can't fit it. If they're going to give me a fine for not fitting my seatbelt, that's just being racist, to the fat people." "They're just being racist, like what do they think the whole world is skinny or something? What about the big people?" When one passenger points out seatbelt sizing isn't racist as overweight people aren't a race, the woman insisted she would "sue" if anything happened to her. She continued: "I could actually sue, like what if I crash, and something happens to me because the seatbelt couldn't go around me." The video has been viewed half a million times since it surfaced on the internet, and many people commenting on the clip have noted that seatbelt extenders are available so car users of all sizes can uphold the law. — Bang Showbiz



Bizarre News