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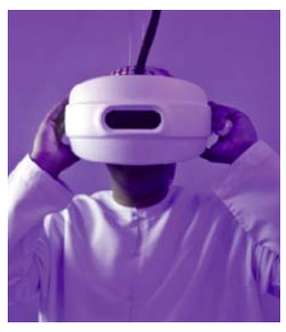

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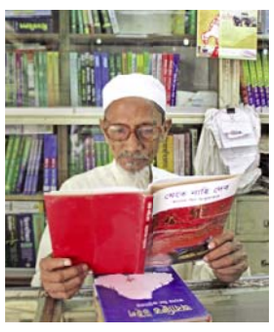

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MP Muwaizri files to grill Abul over housing woes

Lawmakers demand fundamental change in housing policy

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By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Opposition lawmaker Shuaib Al-Muwaizri yesterday filed to grill State Minister for Housing Yasser Abul for allegedly failing to implement the housing law and providing false information to the National Assembly. As the Assembly was about to end a special debate on how to resolve the housing problem that has left half of the citizens queuing for a house, Muwaizri told his colleagues he had filed to grill the minister.

During the debate, many MPs demanded a fundamental change in the government housing policy to resolve Kuwaitis' number one problem and drastically cut the waiting period, which now exceeds 15 years. In his grilling, Muwaizri, who himself was a housing

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KUWAIT: Housing Minister Yasser Abul speaks during a session on housing at the National Assembly yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Saudi fire stops 'boat bomb' from Yemen

'Nation-state' behind hackings

RIYADH: The Saudi coast guard fired on an unmanned boat rigged with explosives, thwarting an attack on one of the kingdom's oil terminals that authorities yesterday blamed on Yemeni Houthi rebels. The boat, sent from a small island off the Yemeni coast, was targeting a petroleum products distribution terminal run by Saudi oil giant Aramco when it was intercepted on Tuesday, the interior ministry said in a statement carried by the SPA state news agency.

"The boat was spotted when it departed from a small island in Yemeni waters and gained speed after entering Saudi waters," the ministry said. After determining that the boat was unmanned, a coast guard unit opened fire on its engine and stopped it 2.8 km from the terminal in the southern region of Jazan, the statement said. The boat was loaded with "strong explosive material", it said. The ministry vowed to foil all "terrorist attempts" against the kingdom and to "reach those behind them from the Houthi militias." It accused the rebels of "threatening the security of waterways and offshore installations with explosive-laden boats and naval mines". Saudi Arabia is leading an Arab coalition that in March 2015 launched a military campaign against Iran-backed Yemeni rebels in support of President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi.

Houthi rebels aided by renegade troops loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh repeatedly fire missiles across the borders with the kingdom, but this is the first attempt of kind to target an oil installation. In August, the rebels claimed to have hit an Aramco facility with a missile, but the oil company said all its installations were operating as normal. Two Saudi sailors were killed in a rebel "suicide" boat strike on a frigate patrolling off the Yemeni coast in January, the coalition said at the time. The rebels said they hit the ship with a guided missile.

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Suspect says IS planned attacks

KUWAIT: A suspected member of the Islamic State group has confessed to plotting attacks on targets in Kuwait including the US military and a Shiite religious hall, local media reported yesterday.

Judicial sources said Hussein Al-Dhafiri, arrested with his wife in the Philippines last month, confessed to planning suicide attacks on a US military convoy and a husseiniya, the Al-Rai daily reported. Kuwait's Arifjan base houses several thousand

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KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah poses with other top state and oil sector officials during the opening ceremony of Al-Ahmadi Hospital yesterday. — Amiri Diwan photos

Minister of Oil, Minister of Electricity and Water Essam Al-Marzouq presents a memento to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Amir attends opening of Al-Ahmadi Hospital

'Solar energy project helped to produce oil in Um Qudair field'

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah patronized and attended the opening ceremony of Al-Ahmadi Hospital yesterday. His Highness the Amir was received at the hospital by Minister of Oil, Minister of Electricity and Water Essam Al-Marzouq, CEO of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Nizar Al-Adsani, CEO of Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) Jamal Abdulaziz Jaafar, in addition to a score of senior oil officials in the country.

The new Al-Ahmadi Hospital's plaque.

The opening ceremony was attended by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem, Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Sheikh Faisal Al-Saud Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Amiri Diwan Minister Sheikh Ali Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Anas Al-Saleh, as well as senior officials of the state, the army, the police, Kuwait National Guard (KNG), and Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD).

During his speech to the event, Minister Marzouq thanked His Highness the Amir for his guidance and continuous support to the oil sector, saying that the opening of the new Al-Ahmadi Hospital also displayed the leadership's keenness on bolstering health services in the country.

The minister affirmed that Al-Ahmadi city was the location in which Kuwait began harnessing the power of petroleum, which contributed to the development of the country as a whole. The minister touched on recent achievements in Kuwait, revealing that under the orders and guidelines of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah, Kuwait began to look into ways to use renewable energy.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and top state officials attend the opening ceremony of Al-Ahmadi Hospital.

One of the chief achievements in this regard was the Sedra 500 solar energy project, which helped to produce oil in Um Qudair field west of Kuwait, said the Marzouq, adding that the Kuwaiti decision to seek alternative energy resources aimed at protecting the environment of the country. Efforts for environment protection led to the decrease of the burning of natural gas from 17 percent in 2005 to around one percent in 2017, said the state official.

Meanwhile, Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) CEO Jaafar also delivered a speech during the event, welcoming His Highness the Amir and the Kuwaiti leadership to the Hospital. Jaafar affirmed that the medical facility, owned by the KOC, would garner to the needs of some 120,000 employees of the company who are the backbone of the oil industry. He also stressed that the hospital was in line with the industry's 2030 development strategy. The new Al-Ahmadi Hospital is constructed on an area of 380,000 square meters with new facilities and areas costing around KD 94 million, said Jaafar.— KUNA

KUWAIT: His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah presents a memento to Pope Tawadros II. — KUNA photos

His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Pope Tawadros II are pictured with other senior guests.

Sheikh Nasser holds luncheon for Pope Tawadros II

KUWAIT: His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah held a luncheon in honor of Pope Tawadros II, the visiting Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St Mark at Shuwaikh Palace yesterday. His Highness Sheikh Nasser welcomed the Coptic Pope as a dear guest of the State of Kuwait and its people.

He said this celebration was a sign of warm welcome accorded to the holder of the spiritual authority, which takes care of millions of Copts in Egypt, Sudan, Libya and Abyssinia. "This welcome is a right that is compelled by Arab bonds which we (Kuwait) share with Egypt," he said.

However, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad emphasized that it is necessary for clergymen to play a role in restoring balance to this world where wars and violence are wreaking havoc on societies. He expressed belief that imbalances in modern life are mainly due to poverty, selfishness, greediness and lack of conscience. Therefore, groundwork of cooperation should be built on the basis of mutual confidence and respect, denunciation of social differences and safeguarding of human dignity and rights, he urged.

In this context, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad thanked Pope Tawadros II for his continuing efforts to establish such noble values not only in Egypt but in Arab and world arenas as well. He finally offered heartfelt condolences to the guest over the victims of recent attacks on Coptic churches in Egypt. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Chief of the National Security Bureau Sheikh Thamer Al-Ali Al-Sabah received yesterday the German Ambassador to Kuwait Karlfried Bergner and the charge d'affaires, discussing cooperation between the two countries. The bureau said in a statement that the talks between the two sides dealt with cementing cooperation in various sectors, major regional and international issues. — KUNA

Envoy, UN Chief meeting focused on Yemen, Syria

GENEVA: Kuwait's Amiri Diwan Advisor and UN Secretary General's Envoy for Humanitarian Affairs Dr Abdullah Al-Maatouq said yesterday that his meeting with the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres focused on the humanitarian situation in Yemen and Syria. Maatouq said that the gathering also touched on the recently held High-Level Pledging Event for the Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen, revealing that the UN and Kuwait shared similar views regarding how to tackle the humanitarian situation in the conflict-stricken Arab country.

During the UN-organized humanitarian meeting yesterday, Kuwait donated a sum of $100 million to aid relief aid efforts in Yemen. As for Syria, Maatouq said that it was important to intensify efforts to deal with the humanitarian crisis there, noting that both Kuwait and the UN will work together to support the Syrian people.

The International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO) had on Tuesday called on the international community to shoulder its responsibility and pressure Yemeni parties to reach a political settlement based on the Gulf Initiative and UN Security Council resolution 2216.

Abiding by outcomes of the intra-Yemeni dialogue must crown humanitarian efforts to rebuild what the war machine had destroyed "because carnage haven't and wouldn't solve the issue," said Maatouq, who is also the Chairman of the Kuwait-based IICO. The Organization spared no effort in carrying out many aid programs inside Yemen, as well as in neighboring refuge countries of Djibouti and Somalia, Maatouq noted. He voiced great concern over the continuation of the crisis, which turned into of the most grave humanitarian ones.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's permanent representative at the United Nations and international organizations headquarters in Geneva Ambassador Jamal Al-Ghunaim said that Kuwait's $100 million contribution to international relief aid efforts for the Yemeni people was widely praised by the global community. Ghunaim lauded Deputy Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Khaled Suleiman Al-Jarallah's speech at the pledging event, saying that it reflected Kuwait's strong commitment to the relief aid cause and peace in the fellow Arab country.

GENEVA: Kuwait's Amiri Diwan Advisor and UN Secretary General's Envoy for Humanitarian Affairs Dr Abdullah Al-Matouq (left) meets with the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres. —KUNA

(From left) Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah, Director-General of WHO Dr Margaret Chan and Ambassador Jamal Al-Ghunaim pose for a group photo.

Kuwait's contribution to Yemen is not new, the Gulf country had always been on the frontier of aiding the Yemeni people, affirmed Ghunaim. Jarallah during the meeting showcased Kuwait's eagerness to hold a conference for peace in Yemen if parties involved in the conflict were willing to meet for this purpose. — KUNA

Kuwait's top judge stresses GCC judicial cooperation

MANAMA: Chairman of Kuwait's Supreme Judicial Council, Chief Justice Yusuf Al-Mutaw'a said yesterday that Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) chief judges are eager to promote judicial cooperation and integration. Speaking following a meeting of chief Justices of GCC supreme courts and courts of cassation, Mutaw'a said the judges had agreed during the meeting to put in place an earlier strategy to promote programs of training and mutual visits by GCC judges.

The judges discussed a possible administrative development of courts, along with an electronic judicial research and study center, he added. He pointed to an Omani suggestion to hold a scientific forum on the sidelines of the meeting of Gulf court chiefs. He reminded that the first such meeting had been held in the State of Kuwait with the main goal of promoting and consolidating judicial relations among the GCC member states. —KUNA

Chief Justice Yusuf Al-Mutaw'a

ABK concludes sponsorship of Ministry of Education's special needs activities

KUWAIT: In line with its CSR focus, Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) successfully concluded its sponsorship of the Ministry of Education's special needs annual activities, which were held over the course of three days and concluded on April 19, 2017.

The three day activities included an exhibition for handy crafts made by special needs students, in addition to educational lectures. The highlight of the event was the Operetta, which held on the last day at the Department of Special Educational School theatre.

Ali Al Baghli, Senior Manager - Corporate Communications at ABK attended the Operetta, on behalf of the Bank. ABK has been very active in supporting the special needs segment in Kuwait, in line with its CSR strategy that focuses mainly on raising awareness of individuals with special needs, the challenges they face and the importance of creating an equally accommodating environment for them across Kuwait's communities. The Bank is committed to contributing its support wherever possible.

VIVA recognizes outstanding staff at branches during first quarter 2017

KUWAIT: VIVA, Kuwait's fastest-growing and most developed telecom operator, recognized its high achievers staff at branches during the first quarter 2017, in a ceremony at VIVA's Headquarters in Olympia Tower.

Commenting in this occasion, Saud Al-Motairan, Sales Director at VIVA said: "We are proud of those outstanding employees who marked significant performance during the first quarter this year at VIVA's branches spread throughout Kuwait, to meet the customers' expectations and aspirations. This ceremony comes to reward their continuous efforts and motivate them along with their peers in order to maintain VIVA's leadership in the Kuwaiti telecom market."

High achievers employees received certificates and gifts from Al-Motairan, in presence of Abdullah Ibrahim, Regional Sales Senior Manager at VIVA, Faisal Al-Enezi, Regional Sales Senior Manager at VIVA and Mohamed Al-Shemmari, Regional Sales Senior Manager at VIVA.

It is noteworthy that VIVA won recently the excellence award for "VIP Customer Service" in Kuwaiti telecommunications sector, as part of the second edition of the Kuwait Public Relations and Customer Service Award hosted by Kuwait's Public Relations Association under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, in recognition of VIVA's Al-Diwan Division efforts in serving the VIP customers round the clock with best offers and packages to make their life easier and more convenient.

In Brief

Oil price down by 58 cents

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil was down by 58 cents to $48.17 per barrel Tuesday as oppose to $48.75 pb the day before, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. At the global level, the price of oil recovered after five sessions of losses. The price of the Brent crude was up by 50 cents to $52.10 per barrel, the same case with the US crude oil, which went up by 33 cents to $49.56 pb. — KUNA

US Dollar exchange rate stable

KUWAIT: The US Dollar's exchange rate was stable at KD 0.304 while the euro went up to KD 0.332, said the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) yesterday. The bank indicated that the Sterling Pound was up to KD 0.390, the same case with the Swiss Franc, which stood at KD 0.306. The Japanese Yen stood at KD 0.002. —KUNA

Amir shooting cup concludes

ROME: His Highness the Amir of Kuwait's International Shooting Cup concluded Tuesday three days of competitions, held at Umriaverde shooting range in Todi, central Italy. President of the Italian shooting federation Senator Luciano Rossi and Kuwait Charge d'Affairs Mohammad Al-Hajri handed over the medals and trophies for the winners, Kuwait embassy said in a statement. — KUNA

Photo of the day

KUWAIT: Camels ready for a race in the Kuwaiti desert. Camel racing is one of the most common sport activities in the Arabian Peninsula, and its history there dates back to the pre-Islamic era. A special breed of camels known locally as 'Hijn' is bred specially for camel races that are held every year in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and other Middle Eastern countries. — KUNA photos

Kuwait donates to children cancer center in Lebanon

BEIRUT: Kuwaiti Ambassador to Lebanon Abdulaal Al-Qenaei delivers a financial donation to the Children's Cancer Center of Lebanon's Chairwoman of the Board of Trustees Nora Jumblatt. — KUNA

BEIRUT: The Kuwaiti Ambassador to Lebanon Abdulaal Al-Qenaei delivered a financial donation to the Children's Cancer Center of Lebanon (CCCL). Qenaei met with a delegation of CCCL board of trustees, where he recognized the important role made by the center in presenting free treatment and saving children's lives, in addition to developing cancer treatment and increasing awareness toward it in the Arab region, a statement by Kuwait's Embassy in Beirut said yesterday.

The Kuwaiti Ambassador greeted the delegation on the center's 15th anniversary, and treating over 1,330 children from all over the Arab countries, relying only on donations. Meanwhile, CCCL Chairwoman of the Board of Trustees Nora Jumblatt thanked Kuwait for the ongoing support given to CCCL since years ago, asserting the strong Kuwaiti-Lebanese relation that combine the two countries together. Moreover, Jumblatt also thanked CCCL Board Member, Faisal Al-Mutawa, who is in charge of the center's activities in Kuwait on his efforts.

Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) donated $1 million to CCCL in December 2016 to assist in treating displaced Syrian children suffering from cancer. In 2002, CCCL was inaugurated with a mission to save children's lives, where an agreement was made among the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, the CCCL Foundation and the American University of Beirut Medical Center to do so. The center offers free treatment to hundreds of children with different nationalities, with a yearly budget over $12 million relying only on donations. — KUNA

ISTANBUL: A mobile clinic provided by Kuwait's Al-Rahma association in Aleppo. — KUNA

Kuwaiti charity provides medical aid in Aleppo

ISTANBUL: Kuwait's Al-Rahma (Mercy) International Association, affiliated to the Social Reform Society, has launched the second mobile clinic for treating the displaced Syrians in Aleppo. Head of Al-Rahma in Syria Waleed Al-Suwailem said yesterday that the clinic provides services for children, women and men, and conducts simple surgeries and presents preventive medical advice for displaced people at camps.

The lack of hospitals and medical services at these areas pushed the association to dispatch the clinic so as to alleviate suffering of the displaced people in that city, he noted. Furthermore, he said that many necessary medications are badly needed for many children, women and elderly people who are suffering from chronic diseases, referring to the spread of many epidemic and diseases at camps due to little awareness.— KUNA

Kuwaiti medical team arrives in Somalia to provide assistance

HARGESIA, Somalia: A Kuwaiti medical team arrived late Tuesday to Somalia on a trip to carry out several operations and provide treatment. Somali Presidential Affairs Minister Mahmoud Hashi lauded the Kuwaiti Shifaa (healing) team for this gesture aimed at providing humanitarian aid and assistance to the drought-stricken country. He thanked the Kuwaiti leadership and people for assisting Somalia, affirming that the Gulf country had left a positive impact on the needy in the country. The Kuwaiti team consists of 15 medical staff and administrators tasked with providing medical and humanitarian assistance to the Somali people. — KUNA

HARGESIA, Somalia: The Kuwaiti medical team pose for a group photo after their arrival. — KUNA

IOM distributes clothes funded by Kuwait

IRBIL: The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has distributed clothes funded by Kuwait to over 5,000 displaced Iraqi families south of Mosul. IOM media representative Sara Ali said yesterday that the distribution came within the Kuwaiti grant. Families from Mosul are in need for the aid, where they left all of their belongings in their homes, she said. She noted that the IOM has expanded the camps at Qyara, supported by Kuwait, by adding over 2,000 extra tents. Kuwait has donated more than $4 million for the IOM to support the displaced in Mosul, scene of current military operations to liberate it from so-called Islamic State (IS). — KUNA

13,217 Kuwaiti conscripts to begin military service May 10

KUWAIT: Chief of the National Service Authority Major General Ibrahim Salem Al-Omairi announced that Kuwait will start receiving 13,217 Kuwaiti conscripts who will reach the age of 18 effective on May 10, to conduct the mandatory military service during a period of 12 months divided in two phases - four months for training and eight months for military service.

Those who will be called for the mandatory military service are men born after May 10, 1999, Omairi said on Tuesday, adding that they could start to register as of next May 10. "After 20 years, the mandatory military service was halted to restart operating under a new law," he said in a statement carried by Kuwait News Agency (KUNA).

Advisor to the military National Service Authority Dr Falah Al-Enezi said that every would-be conscript has a deadline of 60 days to register, or he would be prosecuted. Enezi said that those who fail to register would be subject to a series of legal penalties, including an extension of the period of mandatory military service. He added that any concerned Kuwaiti man violating the law in case of war or a call for general mobilization would be imprisoned from three months to five years and should pay a fine of KD 10,000.

VIENNA: Kuwait participates in the first international governments' meetings for implementing the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and its protocols. —KUNA

Kuwait takes part in Int'l meeting on organized crime

VIENNA: The first international governments' meetings for implementing the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and its protocols concluded in Vienna yesterday. The conference, involving a Kuwaiti official delegation, addressed for three days a host of legal issues and States' implementation of the said convention.

Zakariya Al-Ansari, the head of the Kuwaiti delegation and the justice assistant undersecretary, said that Kuwait's participation in the meeting was in line with its commitment to follow up on tasks outlined in the international convention. The State of Kuwait had endorsed the convention and two affiliate protocols; banning and penalizing traders in people and combating immigrants' trafficking according to the Law 5/2006, as well as the protocol for banning making of firearms, as enforced in the Law 20/2007.

Ansari added that the participants in the meeting focused in their discussions on the Article 3 of the UN convention, recommending establishment of a conference for the signatory states to enhance their capacity to fight transnational organized crime. The Kuwaiti Ministry of Justice acts to back up cooperation among the concerned states in these realms, he said. —KUNA

Ex-wife's murderer sentenced to death

Children freed from kidnapper

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The court of appeal yesterday upheld the criminal court's verdict sentencing a citizen to death, after he was found guilty of murdering his ex-wife in Salwa by stabbing her in front of her son. In another case, the court also upheld a first instance verdict acquitting a female citizen and sentencing her son (Abu Turab) to five years in presence over charges of joining IS. Notably, the criminal court had sentenced Abu Turab (A Al-Ossaimi) to five years with labor after returning from Syria, where he fought with IS, sentenced his brother in absentia (who was already killed in Syria) to 10 years and acquitting their mother of all charges.

Kidnapper arrested

Jahra detectives managed to arrest a citizen in his forties shortly after he abducted two children from an open yard in Saad Al-Abdullah, said security sources. The sources said that a female citizen reported that an unidentified person had kidnapped her two children aged 10 and 12 while they were playing in an open yard in the area. A case was filed and further investigations are in progress to find the kidnapper's motives.

Smart meters

The Ministry of Electricity and Water's (MEW) Undersecretary Mohammed Boshehri explained that the State Audit Bureau is currently studying the smart power meters' tender and that it will be approved soon before the deal's contract is signed shortly afterwards. "Efforts are in progress to develop work at MEW departments pending the implementation of the new tariffs," he underlined, noting that preparations for the summer season are also in progress to avoid outages. The ministry looks to import smart meters to have them installed at apartment buildings and shops before the higher energy tariffs are implemented next month.

Commercial licenses

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MCI) is currently working on using online services to renew commercial licenses without having to check in at its offices. The system is expected to be operational within the coming few months.

Kuwait Bay

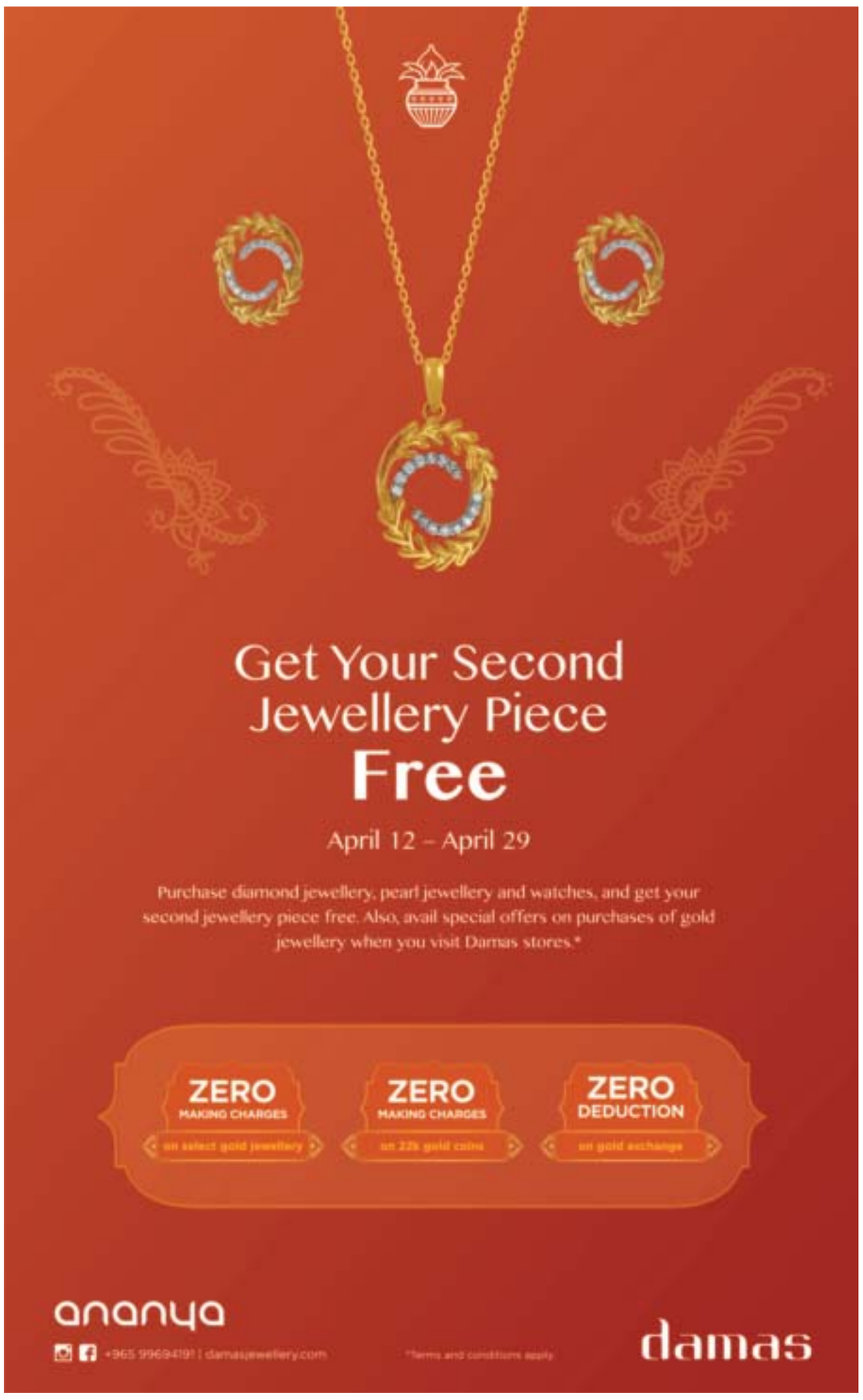
The Environment Public Authority (EPA) called for protecting Kuwait Bay as a natural habitat due to its marine life and as a source of desalinated water used in Kuwait. EPA pointed out that some relevant state bodies had not been doing their jobs to maintain marine life safety within the bay.

EPA said that its inspection teams had recently surveyed all beaches to detect environmental violations. It had already detected a growing number of pollutants coming out of rain drainage pipes under the responsibility of the Ministry of Public Works (MPW), which increased the number of harmful algae. Inspection teams also found high rates of pollution resulting from MEW's desalination plant, overfishing and violations of the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR) laws concerning banning fishing within Kuwait Bay.

Kuwait trains Guards on rapid deployment

KUWAIT: Commander of Protection and Beef-up at Kuwait National Guard Major General Faleh Shujaa affirmed yesterday the command keenness on enhancing combat capacities of the personnel particularly in rapid deployment, enforcing security and securing key targets. Major General Shujaa made the statement following conclusion of the first session for training on clamping down on riots, deploying tear gas in addition to other security tasks. He affirmed the approach to stay abreast of latest innovations in the military and security domains. —KUNA

KUWAIT: A Kuwait National Guard officer is honored after the training session. —KUNA



Al-Anbaa

Democracy as an excuse

By Saad Al-Mo'tesh

We used to brag amongst our neighbors that we started building human beings before constructions, and that we have unrivalled democracy and parliament in Kuwait. Unfortunately, this source of pride has turned into a source for mockery because of our disgraceful democratic situations. Democracy was not a Kuwaiti invention. Nations have known it for hundreds of years before us and used it as a system approved by the people. We took it after them and both our rulers and people approved it.

Just like any other system, the concept of democracy has been subject to change according to personal interests and needs. The same has been done to the world's best system represented in Islam and the Holy Quran. So many people have changed its interpretations to match their personal interests. The best proof for this religious misinterpretation is the presence of different Islamic doctrines who have gone as far as fighting each other. As far as our democracy is concerned, some people have criticized the government's rejection of grilling motions and argue that countries with older democracies have more than a grilling motion every day and that this does not create as much tension as that created in Kuwait. Gentlemen, the case is completely different. Kuwaiti grilling motions are pre-fabricated and seem like someone is preparing medicine before injury. In parliamentary norms, lawmakers should discuss the points mentioned in their grilling motions and listen to responses before they can decide what the next move would be.

Is this the kind of democracy we want and have been bragging to have compared to others?

Things are different in Kuwait. A number of lawmakers have already threatened that a no-cooperation motion was already signed, even before His Highness the Prime Minister responds to the issues mentioned in the grilling motion filed against him. Is this the kind of democracy we want and have been bragging to have compared to others?

The problem does not only lie in this threat. What is even worse is that ten MPs have already signed the motion without listening to the responses. So, stop saying that the executives do not want democracy because it is clear that some lawmakers only want the kind of democracy that matches their fancies and wishes.—Translated by Kuwait Times

Al-Anbaa

Pearl merchants' crisis

By Dr Saleh Al-Ojairi

It was a great economic crisis in Kuwait and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states when cultured pearls appeared in markets in 1928. This was shocking for pearl merchants because the new commodity started competing with natural pearls in terms, perfectness, shape, color and brightness, all while being available for cheaper prices. In addition, there was an oversupply of natural pearls that was offered for sale on markets at the time, which had already caused its prices to fall because merchants did not agree on set prices.

All this happened during or just prior to the global depression of 1929 when people had stopped purchasing luxurious goods, preferring to save whatever wealth they possessed. Many of them worked in the pearling industry starting from divers all the way to iconic pearl merchants. Markets were already dying out, depression was prevailing and other jobs were already scarce.

Many of them worked in the pearling industry starting from divers all the way to iconic pearl merchants

Accordingly, benevolent merchants stopped paying usual aid they used to pay to support education and culture. Aiding the poor was also affected when many of the rich became poor themselves, or even broke. The Japanese were the ones who invented artificial pearls when they realized that pearls were formed when foreign objects enter pearl oyster shells, and the living shelled mollusk starts to cover it with calcium carbonate to protect its soft tissues. Thus, they started injecting glass powder into shells to form those artificial cultured pearls, killing the industry of the natural pearls in the process.

—Translated by Kuwait Times

Gulf Bank closed during Israa wal Meraj holiday

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank announces that its branches and the Head Office will be closed on Thursday, 27 April 2017 to commemorate the Israa wal Meraj (Prophet's Ascension Day). The Bank will resume its regular working hours on Sunday, April 30, 2017.

Gulf Bank's dedicated Customer Contact Center will be operating and can be reached at 1805805. Customers can also use www.e-gulfbank.com to find out more about the latest products and services; and download the Mobile Banking App's (App store and Android Play store) to conduct self-service banking transactions. On this blessed occasion, Gulf bank would like to convey its sincere congratulations and best wishes to the Amir of the State of Kuwait, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah; His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah; and to everyone.

Al-Jarida

Ahli United Bank participated in job fair at American University of the Middle East

KUWAIT: In line with its long-term strategy to support young talent in Kuwait, Ahli United Bank participated in the American University of the Middle East Job Fair, which was held between 17th and 18th April 2017, at the university campus in Egailah.

Through this participation, the bank seeks to connect with students and graduates of different business majors with the aim of attracting and recruiting young talent, including Kuwaiti nationals, by discussing internship opportunities and sharing with them the available vacancies across the Bank's divisions.

Naqeeb Amin, Ahli United Bank's Human Resource General Manager, underlined the bank's firm belief in the new generation, saying: "Today's youth has great potential and innovative ideas that could substantially help any company to grow faster and better compete in a globalized environment."

Amin added: "Ahli United Bank has previously participated in several other job fairs organized by different private and public universities in Kuwait in line with their growing role in the country's socio-economic welfare. The Bank has also launched a professional development program whereby graduates are selected to intern across the Bank's departments."

Ahli United Bank's booth at the American University of the Middle East job fair.

Crime Report

Wasta allowed prisoner's escape?

KUWAIT: A security source said a citizen in his 30s was arrested on several felony charges, and instead of being taken to the central prison to serve his sentences, a former MP intervened and asked that he be sent to the sentences implementation department in Sulaibiya until investigations are over, with the hope he may be released on bail. The suspect used the ex-MP's wasta (intervention) and the officer's laxity and escaped. He then left the country through a land border outlet. Investigations are underway to find out who is involved in the suspect's escape for further action.

Policeman insulted

A citizen in his 70s was sent to the state security when he insulted a traffic policeman with takfeeri (accusation of apostasy) words. He also insulted certain government departments. Police received a call about a person distributing leaflets in Mubarak Al-Kabeer, so a patrol was sent there. Policemen found the elderly man distributing the leaflets, who was accusing anyone who refused to take the leaflet of being an infidel. The title of the leaflets he was distributing was 'Searching for Eternal Happiness.' The man was found to have a long record of harming the state's reputation abroad, possession of unlicensed weapons and military training. He is being interrogated.

Arsonist caught

Jahra police arrested a bedoon (stateless) man who was involved with a Gulf national in torching garbage containers. The Gulf national led police to his bedoon accomplice, who told police their action came after the use of using a mixture of shabu and chemical called "zombie". Both are detained on arson charges and will be sent to the prosecution.

'Forbidden acts'

Electronic crimes detectives are looking for a woman whose immoral audio clips went viral on social media. She claimed a man named Abu Radhi incited her to commit forbidden acts after paying her KD 15.

Smuggling

A Yemeni national was arrested after entering the country hidden in a truck with the help of a Pakistani man, who charged a large sum of money. The suspect believed he could recover it by begging. Jahra police arrested him while begging near a mosque.

Bag stolen

An unidentified person stole personal belongings at Sabahiya police station. A man went to lodge a complaint, then went to the toilet, leaving his bag in the hallway. When he returned, he discovered his belongings were missing. He accused his adversary of the theft. Detectives are investigating.

—Translated from the Arabic press

KIB gives lectures at Sabah Al-Ahmad Center

KUWAIT: In line with its ongoing efforts to spread financial literacy amongst the younger generations, a team from the Corporate Communications Unit at Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently visited the Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity (SACGC), to present a lecture on the principles of saving and spending to students.

This latest visit comes as part of KIB's financial literacy program, the first of its kind in Kuwait which seeks to promote better economic awareness across the community. The program focuses particularly on the younger segments of the population, seeking to encourage children and youth to learn about money, saving, and proper financial management. Throughout the year, the Bank organizes visits to schools across Kuwait, working to foster a more financially savvy and economically aware future generation.

Within in this context, Fahad Al-Sarhan, Team Leader in the Corporate Communications Unit at KIB, stated: "These schools visits are the perfect opportunity for us to engage with students and introduce them to the importance of savings and various saving methods from a young age. We believe that introducing these valuable skills to children will help equip them with the necessary tools to actively and positively contribute to our country's economic development in the future."

As a core part of its social responsibility program, KIB believes in the importance of engaging and inspiring young, talented minds, given that this segment constitutes one of the main pillars of society. Accordingly, KIB continuously seeks opportunities to support various activities and initiatives aimed at nurturing the potential of students by enriching their minds and expanding their horizons.

NBK announces 10 winners for Zeina Save and Win

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) announced the winners of the Zeina Save and Win Campaign, in collaboration with KidZania, on Saturday April 22, 2017. Every quarter 10 lucky young winners receive a cash prize of KD 250. NBK organizes the campaign to help youth in Kuwait appreciate the importance and value of saving.

Winners for the first quarter draw are Hessah Ramadan, Fatemah Al-Saffar, Fouz Al-Huzami, Retaj Al-Azmi, Fatma Al-Naser, Aya Al-Rashed, Basel Buhaimed, Ibraheem Al-Bader, Khalid Al-Aamer and Fatemah Jassim. The prize was deposited into their Zeina savings accounts.

"NBK believes it is important to teach children about saving money from an early age," Consumer Banking Group - Youth Segment Manager Muna Al-Fahad explained "We encourage children to save for the future through campaigns like the Zeina Save and Win."

"KidZania encourages children to learn important life skills including money management through role playing," said Fernando Medroa, Vice President of Leisure and Entertainment at M H Alshaya Company. "By partnering with the National Bank of Kuwait and rewarding children with fun performances during the awards ceremony, we hope to help them learn the importance of saving and financial management."

Children under 15 years of age will receive one entry into the draw for every KD 10 that is deposited into their NBK Zeina Savings Account. Parents can double their children's chances by setting up a 'standing order' into their children's account. Ten winners are chosen each quarter, for a total of 40 winners throughout the year. Campaign ends 31 December 2017.

National Bank of Kuwait, a leading Kuwaiti bank, has been listed among the World's Safest Banks 12 consecutive times by Global Finance magazine. NBK enjoys the highest credit ratings by international credit rating agencies, Standard and Poor's, Moody's and Fitch Ratings.

Kuwait Times 55 Years

International

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In Kashmir, brutality of videos deepens anger

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German-Israel relationship: No longer so special?

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SEONGJU, South Korea: Protesters and police stand by as trailers carrying US THAAD missile defense equipment enter a deployment site early yesterday. — AFP (See Page 10)

Refugees must buy travel papers - from Assad

Documents are difficult to obtain

LUXEMBOURG: When Mohamed Al-Khalaf escaped from Syria and won asylum in Luxembourg last year, his wife and children stayed behind in Raqqa, the hub of Islamic State's so-called caliphate. Khalaf applied for his family to join him, exercising a right to family life under European law. But first, Luxembourg officials said, they must see the family's passports and a document, certified by President Bashar al-Assad's administration, to prove Khalaf's wife Ghufran did not have a criminal record.

For Khalaf, it was a Catch-22. "They need paperwork from the regime which is a party in the problematic situation which we, in the first place, are fleeing from," he said. Such requirements are increasingly common. Six years into Syria's war, tens of thousands of Syrian families trying to be reunited in Europe have seen requests stalled for want of documents that European governments need from the Assad government.

Several families Reuters spoke to, including the Khalafs, said that to get the paperwork required, they resorted to chains of bribery culminating in Damascus. Under normal circumstances, every country requires those who seek entry to produce documents proving their identity. European officials today say they need the papers for security, and to curb people-smuggling. But refugees, especially those trapped in zones controlled by Islamic State, cannot always obtain government papers.

In 2014, a report from the Red Cross and the European Council on Refugees and Exiles found that most European states require documentation that is hard for people from countries such as Syria to obtain. Since then, many countries have required more, not less, paperwork. States variously call for passports, birth and marriage certificates, proofs of guardianship, documents to prove people lived together, or fresh medical records. Some also expect legally certified translations.

In Germany, which has received more Syrian asylum-seekers than any other European country, around 26,000 Syrian applications for family reunifications are not ready for a decision because of missing documents, Berlin says. A German court in December said Assad's cash-strapped government is probably benefiting from the documentary requirements. "Family reunification is a human right," said Ska Keller, Co-President of the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament. "It pushes refugees into the hands of smugglers and on dangerous routes if member states curb their possibility to join their parents or children."

'Human Factors'

Since the start of 2015, at least 89,000 Syrian family members have reached Germany, Sweden, Austria, Luxembourg and Belgium under rules that allow someone who has been given asylum to bring in spouses and young children. There is no solid data on how many asylum-seekers still want to be reunified in Europe, but increasingly, Syrians are given "subsidiary protection" rather than refugee status. This often limits or eliminates their right to bring in family.

Even those who are eligible often have problems getting papers. This is what Kalaf found. Luxembourg asked for the Khalafs' exact family link to be proven, and a certified copy of a travel document, as well as a criminal record excerpt for Mohamed's wife. A spokesman for Luxembourg's Foreign Ministry said it accepts alternative solutions if documents are not available and takes "into account the human factors while still respecting the relevant pieces of legislation."

Arnaud Ranzenberger, a Luxembourg lawyer who represented the Khalafs and dozens of family reunification cases, says he has seen systematic delays in every such case he has handled. "They ask for documents that are very difficult to provide and the file stays blocked as long as we don't provide the documentation," he said. While Khalaf was trying to get his wife out of Raqqa, jihadist officials there arrested her for lifting the hem of her dress on a wet sidewalk. Then they beat her for wearing perfume. He managed to get the family smuggled out through Turkey.

The Khalafs were lucky. A Syrian friend in Amsterdam put Mohamed in touch with someone in Damascus - a so-called 'simsar' or fixer. For $90 sent by Western Union, he provided proof Mohamed's wife was not a criminal, and the family joined him in December.

Supply and Demand

Syrians escaping Raqqa have another way out: They can head to Damascus, in the hope of obtaining passports quickly enough to present at a Western embassy. In peacetime it was a six-hour drive from Raqqa to Damascus. By last year, the journey took five days, through land controlled by warring factions, bribing officials at checkpoints along the way. Another Syrian mother and her baby daughter who escaped Raqqa said this seemed their only option.

Houriya Al-Ahmad wanted to join her husband Younes in Austria, and was determined to travel legally. Officials in Vienna said the 22-year-old needed to prove her identity at the embassy in Beirut. But she did not have a passport. Austrian officials tried to help, offering the family DNA tests, an option the Red Cross says is used by about one in 10 applicants in Austria. The tests cost 200 euros each, which is repaid if the results are positive. The total cost for the Ahmads would be 600 euros.

That was too much for the Ahmads, who did not know it could be refunded and decided Houriya's only chance was to go to Damascus. "Bullets flew over our heads," Houriya recalled of the stretch of road outside Aleppo. "I tried to avoid danger by running quickly, with Reem in my arms."

The family applied for passports with the help of an old school friend. A normal Syrian passport cost 4,800 Syrian pounds ($9), said the friend, lawyer Malek al Wardi. Last year he charged the Ahmads the equivalent of $300 for two, he said, adding fees had gone up sharply. The government in Damascus did not respond to requests for comment, but its website now shows the fee for a passport issued at a consulate abroad has jumped to around $400.

Austria's federal asylum office, which declined comment on specific cases, said it has no exact rules about which documents it requires. "We have to be able to check what kind of family ties we're dealing with and identity papers are an advantage in this," a spokeswoman said. Austria said its rules are in line with EU law. The Ahmads learned last month their application had been granted.

The European Court of Human Rights has recommended states use "flexibility and humanity" when dealing with family reunification. Official guidelines say asylum applicants should be allowed to prove their identity in other ways including interviews, family photos and videos. "Applications from refugees cannot be rejected, or refused to be received or examined, for the sole reason of missing evidence," said Thomas Huddleston of the Migration Policy Group, a think tank funded mainly by EU. — Reuters

Turkey detains 1,000 in anti-Gulen crackdown

ISTANBUL: Turkey yesterday detained more than 1,000 people in a huge new crackdown against alleged supporters of a cleric accused of orchestrating the coup bid against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The dawn raids across the country - seeking more than 3,000 suspects - come just over a week after Erdogan narrowly won a controversial referendum on ramping up his powers. They are the latest indication Turkey intends no let-up in the fight against its perceived enemies after the vote, with fighter jets Tuesday pounding Kurdish militant targets in Iraq and northern Syria.

A total of 1,120 suspects have so far been detained, the official Anadolu news agency said. Anadolu said 4,672 suspects were sought - of whom 1,448 are already in jail - meaning that a total of 3,224 arrest warrants were issued. About 8,500 police officers were involved in the nationwide operation, Anadolu reported, adding that arrest warrants had been issued for 390 suspects in Istanbul alone.

Turkish authorities blame US-based Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen for masterminding the July 2016 failed military coup that aimed to oust Erdogan from power but he denies the charges. Ankara accuses the Hizmet (Service) movement Gulen leads of being a "terror organization", although the group insists it is a peaceful organization promoting moderate Islam. The government has repeatedly asked the United States to extradite Gulen, who has been living in exile there since 1999.

About 47,000 people have already been arrested in Turkey under a nine-month state of emergency in place since the coup bid, a crackdown whose magnitude has raised alarm in the West.

The Turkish parliament just ahead of the referendum extended the state of emergency by another three months to July 19. After the latest sweep, German foreign ministry spokesman Sebastian Fischer said Berlin "has taken note of the mass detentions with concern", urging respect for rule of law.

'7,000 suspects wanted'

The Hurriyet newspaper reported that arrest warrants had been issued against a total of 7,000 suspects across Turkey, citing unidentified sources. The suspects are so-called "secret imams" of Gulen suspected of infiltrating themselves into the police or other state institutions, it reported. Erdogan has repeatedly said he will wipe out the "virus" of Gulen from state institutions after the failed coup. The vast operation targeted big cities such as Istanbul as well as Izmir in western Turkey and Konya in the Anatolian heartland.

KAYSERI, Turkey: Turkish police officers escort people after their arrest for alleged links with US-based Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen yesterday in this central city. — AFP

Prime Minister Binali Yildirim had hinted in a television interview this month that a new anti-Gulen crackdown had been in the pipeline. The 'Yes' camp won 51.41 percent of the vote in the April 16 referendum on creating a presidential system in Turkey but opponents claim the result would have been reversed in a fair poll. The main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) said yesterday it would challenge last-minute changes to voting rules in the referendum at the Strasbourg-based European Court of Human Rights.

Analysts have said Erdogan, after his poll win, can choose between new confrontation or reconciliation with the West but in recent days tensions have risen further. Turkish warplanes killed more than two dozen Kurdish fighters Tuesday in strikes in Syria and Iraq, angering the United States.

Ankara said it had carried out the strikes against "terrorist havens", vowing to continue acting against groups it links to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). In northeast Syria, strikes targeted the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) - who are leading the offensive against the Islamic State stronghold Raqqa. — AFP

US Navy fires flare at Iran vessel in Gulf

DUBAI: A US Navy guided-missile destroyer fired a warning flare toward an Iranian Revolutionary Guard vessel coming near it in the Arabian Gulf, an American official said on Wednesday, the latest tense naval encounter between the two countries. The incident happened Monday as the vessel attempted to draw closer to the USS Mahan despite the destroyer trying to turn away from it, said Lt. Ian McConnaughey, a spokesman for the Bahrain-based 5th Fleet.

The "Mahan made several attempts to contact the Iranian vessel by bridge-to-bridge radio, issuing warning messages and twice sounding the internationally recognized danger signal of five short blasts with the ship's whistle, as well as deploying a flare to determine the Iranian vessel's intentions," McConnaughey said in a statement to The Associated Press.

The Iranian vessel came within 1,000 m of the Mahan during the incident, the lieutenant said. The vessel later turned and sailed away. Iranian authorities did not immediately report the incident yesterday. The US and Iran routinely have tense encounters in the Arabian Gulf and the nearby Strait of Hormuz, through which a third of all oil traded by sea passes. Iran views the American presence as a provocation and its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard shadows US Navy ships in the Gulf, occasionally firing missiles or rockets nearby.

Since the nuclear deal with world powers, the hard-line Revolutionary Guard has stepped up its encounters with the Americans. The Navy recorded 35 instances of what it describes as "unsafe and/or unprofessional" interactions with Iranians forces in 2016, compared to 23 in 2015. With Monday's event, there have been seven so far in 2017, McConnaughey said. Of the incidents last year, the worst involved Iranian forces capturing 10 US sailors and holding them overnight. — AP

Mourning, joy for Egypt Christians as Pope visits

CAIRO: Egypt's Christians are still mourning fellow members of the Coptic Orthodox community murdered this month by jihadists, but there is also joy ahead of Pope Francis's visit this weekend. In a Cairo Church amid wafting incense, strident percussion and prayers, worshippers are looking forward to the Roman Catholic pope's arrival on Friday, seeing his two-day trip as one of support for their minority community. It will be the Argentine pontiff's first visit to the Arab world's most populous nation where the population is 90 percent Muslim.

His already arranged trip rapidly assumed a highly symbolic tone after two suicide bombers on April 9 targeted Coptic churches in the northern cities of Alexandria and Tanta. The Islamic State group said it was behind the attacks which killed 45 people. "Obviously everyone is worried after what happened," said 23-year-old student Karim Saber after Sunday night mass at the Virgin Mary Catholic Coptic Cathedral in northern Cairo. "But by coming to Egypt, the pope is showing us that nothing can prevent us from praying, including terrorism."

The threat remains ever-present, however, as the militants have threatened further attacks against the Copts who make up some 10 percent of Egypt's population of more than 90 million. On April 18, IS gunmen attacked a police checkpoint near the famed St Catherine's monastery at the foot of Mount Sinai, killing one officer and wounding three. But at Sunday night's mass in Cairo there was optimism.

'A blessing for us'

"After each painful moment, there is always something beautiful which brings joy," said 25-year-old graphic designer Dina Fahmi. "The pope, the head of the church in the world, is coming to give us support and this is a blessing for us," she said. While the overwhelming majority of Egypt's Christians are Coptic Orthodox, Roman Catholics have also lived in the country since the fifth century. Egypt's small Catholic community - some 272,000 faithful, according to Holy See estimates - also wants a lavish welcome for its spiritual leader.

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, Catholic orders in Egypt - Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits - developed a network of schools, hospitals and charitable activities. The papacy formally and legally established the Coptic Catholic Patriarchate in the 19th century. On Saturday, Pope Francis will lead a mass at a Cairo sports stadium bringing together all of the Catholic churches: the Catholic Coptic church, the Armenian, Maronite and Greek Catholic churches.

Ahead of this weekend's celebrations, one choir is rehearsing in a hall beside Saint Joseph's church of the Franciscan fathers in central Cairo. Soprano, tenor, and bass voices rise in Arabic, Italian and French, accompanied by piano, flute and saxophone and led by head chorister Magdeline Michel. "On the uniform, we have agreed on white shirts and black trousers," she told the choir, speaking in Arabic interspersed with some French. "Of course his visit at this time makes us proud," Michel told AFP.

'Moral and spiritual support'

"At the same time, his visit makes us feel safe - his insistence on coming despite the circumstances is something that reassures us," she said. "He's coming to support us, and that allows us to feel safe." Ibrahim Isaac, the Catholic Coptic patriarch in Egypt, echoed the same sentiments. He said the papal visit represents "moral and spiritual support" at a time when "the succession of incidents is causing a form of frustration among the people, and sometimes anger". — AFP

CAIRO: Ibrahim Isaac, the Catholic Coptic patriarch in Egypt, speaks during an interview on April 24, 2017. — AFP

DAMASCUS: Syrian mourners attend a funeral ceremony in the Sayyida Zeinab Mosque on the outskirts of Damascus yesterday for the victims of a bombing that targeted buses carrying evacuees from the besieged government-held towns of Fuaa and Kafraya. — AFP

Mass funeral for scores slain in attack on Syria evacuees

Security tight at Shiite pilgrimage site

SAYYIDA ZEINAB, Syria: Hundreds of tearful mourners attended a mass funeral yesterday for loved ones killed in a suicide bombing on a convoy of evacuees, in one of the Syrian war's most gruesome attacks. At least 150 people, including 72 children, were killed on April 15 in an explosion targeting evacuees from Fuaa and Kafraya, two Shiite-majority villages under siege in northwestern Syria. Fifty-two of the dead were to be buried yesterday near the Sayyida Zeinab mausoleum, Syria's most visited Shiite pilgrimage site south of Damascus, one of the funeral organizers told AFP.

Women, children, and men - some of them in military uniform - from Fuaa and Kafraya began gathering at the mosque from the morning to take part in the funeral procession. Security was tight, with Syrian army soldiers and allied forces carefully searching every person entering the shrine's perimeter, AFP's correspondent said. "There's no worse feeling than this, than burying your sister without being able to see her," said 19-year-old Abdelsalam Remman, his voice breaking.

He was carrying a poster of his six-year-old sister Tuqa, who was killed in the attack after being evacuated with their mother, who was wounded. "Our heart melted until we identified her" among those of the dead several days later, said Remman. The suicide car bombing in Rashidin, west of Syria's second city Aleppo, was one of the most devastating attacks of the six-year war that has killed at least 320,000.

It hit a convoy of evacuees from Fuaa and Kafraya, who had been bussed out of their besieged government-held villages as part of an evacuation deal that also included two rebel-controlled towns surrounded by the regime. The attacker appeared to lure children to his vehicle with bags of crisps, according to witnesses.

'Shattered my family'

Dozens of unidentified bodies remain at Aleppo's government hospital, and many survivors at Sayyida Zeinab yesterday said they had relatives who were still missing. Inside the courtyard, which was covered with a red carpet, dozens of women in black stood in one corner of the shrine, tearfully repeating the names of their lost relatives. Young men were calling out religious chants as the coffins, draped in Syrian government flags, were carried in under the watchful eyes of police officers and unarmed security forces.

A pained expression on her face, Wafaa Homsi looked at the rows of coffins, one of which held her 13-year-old daughter Raghd. "I hope she's in heaven, and I hope God takes revenge on them (the attackers) because they shattered my family," she said, sobbing. "My daughter is being buried here. My husband and two of my sons are still missing. We're waiting to hear something, anything, about them," Homsi told AFP.

Some mourners tossed flowers over the coffins, and others carried red and black posters bearing photographs of the attack, including wreckage of the bus carrying evacuees and plumes of smoke. "Victory blooms from your blood," read one poster. Hayfaa, dressed in black, cried as she described losing her six-year-old son Ali. "I wish I could turn back time and Ali could come back to me," she told AFP. Two of her six children were also wounded in the blast and were still receiving treatment in the hospital. Sayyida Zeinab has been hit by several deadly bombings since the start of Syria's war in 2011, including twin attacks in March that killed 74 people. — AFP

France says has proof Syria launched 'chemical attack'

PARIS: French intelligence services have scientific proof that the Syrian regime was responsible for a suspected chemical attack that killed 88 people, France's foreign minister said yesterday. Jean-Marc Ayrault said analysis of samples taken at the scene of the April 4 attack in rebel-held Khan Sheikhun, in which 31 children were among the dead, showed "there is no doubt that sarin gas was used" and that it was produced by Syrian laboratories.

"There is no doubt about the responsibility of the Syrian regime given the way that the sarin used was produced," Ayrault told journalists after the report was presented at a meeting of French defence chiefs. He said the substance France believes was used in the attack contains hexamine, a component that was also found in a gas attack in Saraqib, northwest Syria, in 2013. "We are able to confirm that the sarin used on April 4 is the same sarin that was used in an attack in Saraqib on April 29, 2013," he said.

Ayrault said the chemical fingerprint is "typical of the method developed in Syrian laboratories". "This (production) method bears the regime's hallmarks and allows us to determine its responsibility for this attack," he said. The report added that "the presence of hexamine indicates that this manufacturing process is that developed by the Scientific Studies and Research Centre for the Syrian regime". The report said the analysis was carried out by comparing "environmental samples" found at Khan Sheikhun with unexploded ordnance found at the site of the 2013 attack.

Washington convinced

Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, backed by his ally Russia, has strongly denied allegations that his forces used chemical weapons against the town, describing it as a "100 percent fabrication". He has said repeatedly that his forces turned over all chemical weapons stockpiles in 2013, under a deal brokered by Russia to avoid threatened US military action. That agreement was later enshrined in a UN Security Council resolution. In a policy U-turn, US President Donald Trump ordered air strikes on the Syrian airbase from which Washington believes the attack was launched.

US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis said on Friday there was "no doubt" Syria has retained some chemical weapons and warned Assad's regime not to use them. "There can be no doubt in the international community's mind that Syria has retained chemical weapons in violation of its agreement and its statement that it had removed them all," Mattis said during a visit to Israel. Mattis added that the Damascus regime would be "ill-advised to try to use any again", adding: "We've made that very clear with our strike." — AFP

UN eyeing new Yemen peace talks by May end

GENEVA: A new round of peace talks between Yemen's warring sides should begin by the end of May, the UN mediator said yesterday, as alarm grows over the country's humanitarian crisis. UN special envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed told AFP that negotiations were underway to stave off a feared military attack on the vital Red Sea port of Hodeida, in what he hoped would be a first step towards a ceasefire. Averting an attack on Hodeida - the main entry point for desperately needed aid to Yemen - could allow "a real cessation of hostilities and to go back to the talks," he said.

"We are at the preliminary stage, but time is also a real constraint for us, because my aim is to finish all of this before Ramadan," he said, adding that he hoped "to enter into a new round of talks before Ramadan." The Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan is set to begin around May 27 this year. Even if Ould Cheikh Ahmed manages to get the parties to the table, any success will be hard-won: since Yemen's conflict escalated two years ago, all UN mediation attempts and seven declared ceasefires have failed.

Yemen's war has pitted pro-government forces against Iran-backed Houthi rebels and their allies, renegade troops loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh. A Saudi-led coalition intervened in Yemen in March 2015 to help the government retake the capital Sanaa and swathes of the country's north and west. More than 7,700 people have been killed in the past two years of fighting, while the country has plunged into a deep humanitarian crisis and faces the imminent risk of famine.

'Major humanitarian consequences'

Hodeida is currently controlled by the Huthis, but fears are mounting over a potential coalition offensive. The UN and other organizations have urged the Saudi-led coalition not to bomb Hodeida, Yemen's fourth most populated city, and a "major lifeline for a country on the verge of starvation". "We believe that any military operation on Hodeida will have major humanitarian consequences and could lead to a very high level of civilian casualties," Ould Cheikh Ahmed said yesterday. — AFP

UN vote to re-launch Western Sahara talks

UNITED NATIONS: The UN Security Council is expected to vote today on a draft resolution backing a UN bid to re-start talks on settling the decades-old Western Sahara conflict, diplomats said. The draft resolution would also put pressure on the Polisario Front independence movement to immediately withdraw fighters from a tense buffer zone after Morocco pulled back its forces in February, according to the text seen by AFP.

The United States circulated the proposed resolution to the Security Council on Monday after consulting with France, Russia and Britain on the measure that would also extend the mandate of the UN peacekeeping mission in Western Sahara for a year. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres told the council in a report this month that he planned to re-start negotiations "with a new spirit" to try to end one of the world's most intractable conflicts.

"It is indeed time to look ahead and to re-launch negotiations, that is what we want," French Ambassador Francois Delattre told reporters as the council met Tuesday to discuss the draft text. Morocco and the Polisario fought for control of Western Sahara from 1974 to 1991, with Rabat taking over the desert territory before a UN-brokered ceasefire in the former Spanish colony. Rabat considers Western Sahara an integral part of Morocco and proposes autonomy for the resource-rich territory, but the Algerian-backed Polisario Front insists on a UN referendum on independence.

Welcoming what he described as a "new momentum" for talks, Delattre said the issue of the Polisario's withdrawal from the Guerguerat post near the Mauritanian border had to be addressed first. "There is one issue we need to solve and that is Guerguerat," he said. Uruguay and Russia however said the draft resolution lacked balance. "It's very unbalanced in the way it handles the Polisario," said Uruguay's Ambassador Elbio Rosselli, adding that the text failed to mention the broader context of "how we go to where we are". — AFP

Iraqi forces seize Hatra from IS

HATRA, Iraq: Iraqi pro-government forces said Wednesday they had seized the UNESCO-listed ancient site of Hatra from the Islamic State group, the latest archaeological jewel to be wrested from the militants' grip. Hashed al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilisation) paramilitary forces fighting IS around Iraq's second city Mosul said they had "liberated the ancient city of Hatra... after fierce clashes with the enemy".

The Hashed forces launched their offensive at dawn on Tuesday and swiftly retook villages in nearby desert areas and the Hatra archaeological site. They had advanced to the edge of the adjacent town of Hatra itself. An AFP reporter with the forces said the advance was quick, supported by army helicopters and met by limited resistance from the militants. Lying 120 km southwest of Mosul, the militants' last urban Iraqi stronghold, Hatra is one of a string of archaeological sites recaptured from IS in recent months.

Known as Al-Hadhr in Arabic, it was established in the 3rd or 2nd century BC and became a religious and trading center under the Parthian empire. Its imposing fortifications helped it withstand sieges by the forces of two Roman emperors. Although Hatra finally succumbed to Ardashir I, founder of the Sassanid dynasty, it was well-preserved over the centuries that followed. But after IS militants seized swathes of Iraq and Syria in a lightning 2014 offensive, they vandalized sculptures there as part of a campaign of destruction against archaeological sites they had captured. The jihadists see such destruction as a religiously mandated elimination of idols - but they have no qualms about selling smaller artefacts to fund their operations.

Damage unclear

The full extent of the damage to Hatra remains unclear. IS has lost much of the territory it once controlled amid twin offensives in Syria and Iraq, including several ancient sites. In November, less than a month into a vast operation to oust the jihadists from Mosul, Iraq said it had recaptured Nimrud, a jewel of the Assyrian empire founded in the 13th century BC. Journalists who visited immediately afterwards found shattered statues, wrecked ancient palaces and bulldozed structures in one of the region's most important archaeological sites. IS had smashed stone carvings and detonated explosives at the site. — AFP

An Iraqi-modified T-72M tank belonging to the pro-government Hashed al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilization) paramilitary forces advances towards the UNESCO-listed ancient city of Hatra, southwest of the northern city of Mosul, during an offensive to retake the area from Islamic State (IS) group fighters yesterday. — AFP

Judges, mayors, actors: 100 days of Trump resistance

NEW YORK: Judges, mayors, comedians and activists mobilized through social media - the first 100 days of Donald Trump's presidency has spawned a multi-faceted resistance hindering the Republican's efforts to enact election promises. Widespread liberal outrage at the billionaire's election spilled over into the Women's March, which set the tone the day after his inauguration when millions of people poured onto streets across the United States.

The first head-on collision came a week later on Jan 27 when the White House issued its first travel ban, suspending visa-holders from seven Muslim majority countries and Syrian refugees indefinitely. That weekend, hundreds of travelers were blocked at airports around the world as US lawyers and the powerful American Civil Liberties Union immediately contested the legality of the order.

That scored an early victory for the opposition movement, a nebulous raft of groups largely watched rather than led by the Democratic Party. The travel ban was suspended by a George W Bush-nominated judge in Seattle, James Robart. The Trump administration returned with a modified ban on March 15, reducing to six the number of implicated countries and excluding those with valid visas.

Another federal judge, Derrick Watson in Hawaii, blocked it again on the grounds that it was reasonable to conclude it was intended to "disfavor a particular religion, in spite of its stated, religiously-neutral purpose". Yet the battle against restricting immigration goes on. Thousands of people demonstrated on behalf of immigrants in February and March on a near daily basis.

'Iconic'

On the campaign trail, Trump promised to expel millions of illegal immigrants. Shortly after he took power, his team ordered federal agents to crack down on undocumented migrants with a criminal record. The Democratic mayors of the country's three largest cities, New York, Los Angeles and Chicago - Bill de Blasio, Eric Garcetti and Rahm Emanuel respectively - immediately moved to shore up their status as "sanctuary" cities for migrants.

With police chiefs by their side, they vowed to protect migrants who had not committed violent crimes while detentions of illegal immigrants sowed panic among undocumented communities. Sam Abrams, who teaches political science at Sarah Lawrence College, said the mayors acted "in ways that they have never acted before". But perhaps the toughest critics are on television, late-night comedians blurring the lines between politics and entertainment, the most widely watched of which is long-running NBC weekly show "Saturday Night Live".

Alec Baldwin's caricature of Trump, Melissa McCarthy's of White House spokesman Sean Spicer and the lampooning of the week's events make regular news headlines. "It is hard to say just how important it is, but SNL, when they pick on someone, it becomes iconic," said Abrams. Their portrayal of one time Republican vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin had a disastrous impact on the 2008 race, he said.

Republican rebels

Influential TV satirists such as Stephen Colbert, John Oliver or Samantha Bee take delight in picking over the shortcomings of an administration led by a former reality TV star who owes much of his success to "The Apprentice". The entertainment world in general, stuffed with vocal Hillary Clinton supporters, has seen myriad celebrities willing to attack Trump in public from Meryl Streep to Michael Moore, from Bruce Springsteen to Snoop Dogg.

Then there are thousands of anonymous people taking part in the resistance, those in the "Indivisible" movement who turn up at Congressional constituency meetings to heckle lawmakers and condemn the most controversial policies. "Many were to be expected," says Robert Shapiro, political science professor at Columbia University. "The country has been polarized for years."

But Democrats are not automatically picking up the mantel as defenders of the common man. According to a Washington Post-ABC News poll, Americans think the Democrats are more out of touch than either Trump or the Republicans. And if the Democrat-leaning opposition irritates the president, a bigger threat comes from dissonant voices within Trump's own party, namely Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham, particularly vocal on Russian interference in the election.

"That's very significant," said Shapiro. So too was the failure in late March to even table a vote on repealing the Obamacare health care law in the Republican majority House - which risks eroding his support base. "Supporters for the most part have not abandoned him, but their enthusiasm has tempered off," said Shapiro. — AFP

Trump and the media: A win-win reality show?

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump and the US media may still be at war after the president's first 100 days but both sides are also reaping benefits from the hostilities between the former reality TV star and what he calls the "fake news" industry. Trump's decision to snub this weekend's White House Correspondents' Dinner has underlined how little love is lost between the president and "the opposition" - as his top advisor Steve Bannon has dubbed the media. But analysts say that while Trump uses the press as a foil to deflect bad news, media outlets are getting a lift from consumers looking for credible information about his administration - or simply tuning in for a dose of the daily Trump show.

"Trump has been gold for the mainstream media," says Tobe Berkovitz, a former political consultant who is now a communications professor at Boston University. Berkovitz says Trump has "a handy devil he can blame for all his stumbles," and as a result, "both sides are pretty happy with each other." Newspapers such as the New York Times have seen a significant bounce in circulation since Trump's victory last November and cable news networks have also enjoyed a ratings rise.

"You can attribute a lot of that to Donald Trump," said Dan Kennedy, a Northeastern University journalism professor, said there is more interest in news because it is a time of "great anxiety". A key question for the media is whether the bump in ratings and subscriptions is temporary or indicative of a trend. "It may end up being more sustainable than we might think even if Trump goes away," said Kennedy. "There is so much concern over fake news, and the garbage that is shared on Facebook," he added. "We are seeing a flight to quality."

'A bit of a show'

The apparent bad blood between Trump and the Washington press corps stands in stark contrast with relations under his predecessor Barack Obama who was a regular turn at the annual correspondents' dinner. Trump regularly refers to the New York Times as a "failing" newspaper and often has digs at traditional cable networks. But he has nevertheless granted interviews to nearly all the mainstream media and some pundits say the seeming animosity is not all that it appears. "It's more than a little bit of a show," says Kennedy. Trump, he said, "turns around and calls a lot of the reporters that he excoriates publicly."

Politico reporters Ben Schreckinger and Hadas Gold, who interviewed more than three dozen members of the White House press corps, wrote that Trump is engaged in a "fake war" on the press, that the president's staff works to maintain relationships with journalists. Former White House press secretary Ari Fleischer, who worked for president George W Bush, says Trump appears to help himself politically by vilifying the media, in which trust is at historic lows.

"Donald Trump strikes a chord when he takes the press on," Fleischer told a recent symposium at the Newseum in Washington. Charlie Spiering, a reporter at the pro-Trump Breitbart News, told the same forum that the mainstream press is an easy target. Spiering said Trump's bashing of news outlets isn't "to denigrate the press," but because "it was popular among his base - his base loves those taglines."

Deeper problems

Nevertheless, the short-term lift from Trump may be the harbinger of longer problems, says Jeff Jarvis, a City University of New York journalism professor. "If it's bad for democracy, it's bad for the press," Jarvis said. "He's attacking our credibility, attacking our trust." Reporter Jim Acosta of CNN - whom Trump singled out as "fake news" in his first press conference after his election - has similar worries. "When he leaves office, we need Republicans to believe what is being said in the mainstream press just as much as we need Democrats to," Acosta told the Newseum event.

A Pew Research Center survey released this month found 83 percent of respondents said the relationship between Trump and the media is "unhealthy" and 73 percent said the tensions hinder public access to important political news. A separate Gallup survey found 37 percent of Americans felt the news media was "not tough enough" on Trump while 32 percent said it was "too tough." Only one in four said the press had struck a good balance. —AFP

US judge blocks Trump order on sanctuary cities

White House slams 'erroneous' ruling

LOS ANGELES: A US judge on Tuesday blocked an executive order by President Donald Trump that could deny billions of dollars to so-called sanctuary cities as punishment for harboring illegal immigrants. Dealing a fresh setback to Trump's pledged crackdown on undocumented residents, Judge William Orrick of San Francisco's federal court issued a preliminary injunction barring any attempt to implement the Jan 25 executive order.

"Federal funding that bears no meaningful relationship to immigration enforcement cannot be threatened merely because a jurisdiction chooses an immigration enforcement strategy of which the president disapproves," Orrick said. The decision - which could impact more than 300 cities and counties that have denounced Trump's order - is another blow to the White House following successful court challenges to its two travel bans targeting Muslim-majority countries.

Trump's order threatened the transfer of some $1.7 billion to Santa Clara County and $1.2 billion for San Francisco. The White House issued a scathing statement claiming that "the rule of law suffered another blow, as an unelected judge unilaterally rewrote immigration policy". The judge's "erroneous ruling is a gift to the criminal gang and cartel element in our country," and is "one more example of egregious overreach" by a single judge that "undermines faith in our legal system". Nevertheless "we are confident we will ultimately prevail in the Supreme Court," the statement read.

'Historic affirmation'

Santa Clara counsel James R Williams described it as "a historic affirmation" of the constitutional principle that Washington cannot "coerce local governments into becoming federal immigration enforcers". Orrick noted that the government's lawyers had sought to avoid arguing the issue of whether the Trump administration had the right to take such steps. Instead, they weakly challenged the right of San Francisco and Santa Clara County to fight the order because neither had been formally declared "sanctuary jurisdictions" - a phrase that remains vague in the law.

The judge said the key issue remained Trump's repeated statements that funding is a "weapon" to use against cities that resist his policies. That demonstrates the government's intent, he said, and is unconstitutional. "The Constitution vests the spending powers in Congress, not the president, so the order cannot constitutionally place new conditions on federal funds," he said. Dave Cortese, president of the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors, said the decision had dealt a "major setback" to the politics of fear. "Millions of people across the country can continue to receive essential medical care, go to school and remain active members of their communities without fear that their local governments are being forced to work against them, rather than for them," he added.

SAN FRANCISCO: City Attorney Dennis Herrera talks about a federal judge's order blocking any attempt by the Trump administration to withhold money from "sanctuary cities" during a news conference at City Hall on Tuesday. —,AP

The decision was being closely watched in Seattle, which filed its own lawsuit against the order in March. Ed Murray, mayor of the northwestern city of almost 700,000, issued a statement welcoming the ruling as "yet another rebuke" of Trump's "dangerous overreach". New York mayor Bill de Blasio denounced Trump's "illogical and unconstitutional desire to scapegoat immigrants" while Chicago's Rahm Emanuel vowed his administration would not "sit idly by while President Trump threatens American cities because he doesn't share our values."

Reform 'long overdue'

California attorney general Xavier Becerra said the president was trying to "hijack crucial resources, sow fear among California families and make our communities less safe". Attorney General Jeff Sessions lashed out at sanctuary cities on Friday last week accusing them of allowing illegal immigrants who are violent criminals to go free. Orrick's ruling however still allows the Department of Justice to follow through with threats made to nine cities last week - including Chicago, New Orleans and Philadelphia - to cut specific program grants if the cities did not adequately cooperate with federal immigration officers.

The order "does not purport to enjoin the Department's independent legal authority to enforce the requirements of federal law applicable to communities that violate federal immigration law or federal grant conditions," Justice spokesman Ian Prior said. A meeting in Washington on Tuesday between a group of major-city mayors and Sessions demonstrated that the two sides remain at odds over Trump's election promise to expel some 11.3 million immigrants without legal residency. — AFP

Expert: Human trafficking to skyrocket under Trump

WASHINGTON: Under tougher anti-immigration policies in the United States under President Donald Trump, human trafficking will "skyrocket", a top expert warned at a conference on Tuesday. Fear of being deported by US authorities stops people from speaking up about their own or other trafficking cases, said Denise Brennan, professor and chair of the Department of Anthropology at Georgetown University.

"Policies that push migrants to live and work in the shadows make the perfect prey for abusive employers," said Brennan, a keynote speaker at the Trust Conference/America Forum, a one-day Thomson Reuters Foundation event on the fight against slavery and trafficking. "We cannot effectively fight trafficking when migrants fear reporting exploitation and abuse."

Anti-immigrant rhetoric, violence and policies are on the rise around the world, in particular in the United States under Trump, who has vowed to fight illegal immigration and build a wall along the US-Mexico border, she said. "Trafficking will skyrocket under President Trump," she said. "Anti-immigrant policies make trafficking possible." Since becoming president, Trump has issued a temporary visa ban against seven Muslim-majority countries that was later blocked by federal courts, suspended a refugee program and initiated tougher deportation procedures.

Little Political Will

Up to 12 million people are estimated to be living illegally without documents in the United States. While there are no official law enforcement statistics, in the United States nearly 32,000 cases of human trafficking have been reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline in the last decade. "These individuals have no place to turn," said Brennan, author of "Life Interrupted: Trafficking into Forced Labor in the United States." "Isolation and threat of deportation are just as powerful as locking someone behind closed doors," she said.

Globally, nearly 21 million people are victims of forced labor, made to work for free after falling into debt or forced to work due to deception, coercion or threat of violence, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO). Brennan said there is little genuine political effort made in the United States to find and aid labor trafficking victims. "The dirty little secret about trafficking in this environment of 2.5 million deportations under President Obama and now President Trump's obvious anti-migrant stance is there has not been a political will to really find people," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in an interview before the forum.

Under a law passed in 2000, 5,000 visas are available each year to trafficking victims, Brennan said. But only between 7,000 to 9,000 such visas have been issued in the past 17 years when the number could have been 85,000, she said. "I just don't think we've been looking for trafficked people," said Brennan, who is currently writing a book, "Life without Papers," about how undocumented people navigate threats of detention and deportation.

She said the fear of deportation extended further than those without legal papers. Last week Trump ordered a review of a US visa program for bringing high-skilled foreign workers into the country with a view to potentially modifying the system. "Under President Trump, we have so many people who have various forms of temporary protective status," she said. "If we start deporting people with green cards, we're looking at millions of people who don't have full US citizenship." — Reuters

Defiant Venezuelans stage new march

CARACAS: Venezuelan protesters planned a new march yesterday against President Nicolas Maduro, defying his government despite the deaths of more than 25 people in an increasingly violent political crisis. The opposition called on protesters to march on central Caracas, a pro-Maduro bastion where the seat of government is located. Previous attempts to reach the city center have degenerated into clashes between riot police and stone-throwing protesters.

Twenty-six people have died so far this month in violence around the protests, including four minors, according to Attorney General Luisa Ortega. Maduro put the figure at 29 deaths in a speech Tuesday evening, without giving details. "Twenty-nine of our countrymen have been murdered, and the right-wingers are to blame. The people are demanding justice," he said. The center-right opposition blames Maduro for severe shortages of food, medicine and other essentials in the oil-rich country.

Maduro, the heir of the leftist "Bolivarian revolution" launched by the late Hugo Chavez in 1999, says the shortages and the protests are part of a US-backed plot to topple him. The crisis deepened late last month when the Supreme Court moved to seize power from the National Assembly, the only lever of state authority Maduro and his allies do not control. The court partly backtracked after an international outcry. But the opposition was further galvanized when authorities banned senior opposition leader Henrique Capriles from politics. In just under a month of unrest, more than 400 people have been injured, and nearly 1,300 arrested, the attorney general said.

SAN CRISTOBAL, Venezuela: Venezuelan opposition activists set up barricades during a demonstration against President Nicolas Maduro on April 24, 2017. — AFP

Journalists face 'alarming' threats

That includes 14 arrested journalists, their union said Tuesday, condemning the figure as "alarming". More than 100 journalists have been assaulted while covering the protests, it added, accusing the national guard of "harassing, beating and intimidating" reporters. The opposition accuses the government of using the security forces to repress peaceful protests, and of sending armed thugs to attack them. The government in turn accuses the opposition of paying armed agitators to stir up violence.

Maduro has resisted more than a year of efforts to force him from office, though he said over the weekend that he was willing to hold regional elections that have been postponed indefinitely. With few options left to get rid of him before the end of his term in 2019, the opposition is urging all-out street rallies to push for elections. "We cannot give up. If we manage to keep up this pressure we will achieve change," said senior opposition lawmaker Freddy Guevara, rallying support for Wednesday's protests.

The opposition said it would try to march on the offices of the national ombudsman, Tarek William Saab, whom it accuses of betraying his duty to defend Venezuelans' human rights. The Organization of American States meanwhile called an extraordinary meeting on the Venezuelan crisis yesterday. Falling prices for Venezuela's crucial oil exports have slashed its revenues, leading to critical shortages and looting. But while Maduro's camp lost its majority in the National Assembly when the opposition won a landslide in legislative elections in 2015, it retains a firm grip on the courts, electoral authorities and - crucially - the military. — AFP

French frontrunner Macron heads to Le Pen stronghold

AMIENS, France: French presidential frontrunner Emmanuel Macron headed to rival Marine Le Pen's stronghold yesterday to try to win over voters after facing criticism he was not taking the fight to the far-right leader. Le Pen, 48, was first out of the blocks after the first round of voting on Sunday, hitting the campaign trail and accusing the pro-EU centrist Macron of representing "runaway globalization" and lacking love for his country.

The 39-year-old ex-banker met with representatives of workers from a Whirlpool domestic appliance factory in Amiens, northwest of Paris that is threatened with outsourcing to Poland. He is to hold a rally in Arras, a city in the northern rustbelt where Le Pen topped the first round of voting. Macron's visit to Amiens, his hometown, comes as a Harris Interactive poll showed 52 percent of the French believe the pro-EU Macron botched the start of campaigning for the May 7 run-off in France's presidential vote.

After winning Sunday's contest with 24.1 percent to Le Pen's 21.3 percent, he gave an exuberant victory speech followed by a high-profile celebration at Paris bistro La Rotonde bistro, drawing criticism even from his own side. Socialist Party boss Jean-Christophe Cambadelis told French radio: "He was smug. He wrongly thought that it was a done deal. It's not a done deal."President Francois Hollande appeared on Tuesday to admonish his former economy minister for not taking the fight to Le Pen immediately after the first round. Macron shot back Tuesday, saying: "I will continue to fight for two weeks... I will defend the progressive camp to the end."

Not a single vote

Since securing her berth in the run-off, Le Pen has turbo-charged her campaign with a string of appearances and statements, leaving her opponent on the back foot. At the crack of dawn on Tuesday she was at the sprawling Rungis food market outside Paris, taking aim at what she said was Macron's desire for "total deregulation, total opening up, total free trade". In contrast, her opponent has huddled in strategy meetings over June legislative elections that would determine the shape of a future Macron government.

Le Pen will hold a rally in the Riviera city of Nice on Wednesday, a bastion of France's right that was targeted by a jihadist-inspired truck attack that killed 86 people in July. Le Pen has called for France to take back control of its borders from the European Union and deport all foreigners on a terror watchlist, accusing Macron of being soft on terrorism. Still, polls suggest that Macron will trounce Le Pen in the run-off with a margin of some 20 points.

But after the political shocks of Britain's vote to leave the European Union and Donald Trump's unlikely ascent to the White House, analysts say a late surge by Le Pen is still possible.

A key factor in the race is which candidate the supporters of Communist-backed Jean-Luc Melenchon, who finished in fourth place with 19.58 percent on Sunday, will back in the run-off.

Melenchon faced criticism after he failed to urge people who voted for him to get behind Macron in the run-off as part of the so-called "republican front", the decades-old French tactic of closing ranks to block the far-right. Melenchon's France Insoumise (Unbowed France) movement is holding a consultation on which candidate to back in the second round, but his spokesman Alexis Corbiere said the eliminated candidate would not express his own preference.

Corbiere however told French TV channel LCI earlier Wednesday that "for us the National Front is a danger" and urged viewers to not give "a single vote to the National Front." Le Pen said Monday she was quitting temporarily as head of her National Front (FN) in order to concentrate on the campaign. The move was seen as largely symbolic but one that would loosen her association with the FN, the party founded by Le Pen's father, Jean-Marie, notorious for anti-Semitic and xenophobic remarks. —AFP

DAMASAK: A boy sells boiled eggs on the outskirt of the town of Damasak in North East Nigeria as thousands of Nigerians, who were freed in 2016 by the Nigerian army from Boko Haram insurgents, are returning to their homes in Damasak. — AFP

Peace reigns in Damasak but children still missing

DAMASAK, Nigeria: Yagana Bukar's younger brothers Mohammed and Sadiq were among about 300 children kidnapped by Boko Haram from the town of Damasak in remote northeastern Nigeria nearly three years ago. But unlike the global outrage and social media campaign that followed the abduction of 219 schoolgirls from Chibok, there were no protests for the children of Damasak. Most of those rounded up in Damasak on November 24, 2014 were boys aged about 10. They were taken deep into the bush. Most have not been seen since.

The mass kidnapping was denied by the government at the time and even by locals, who said they feared incurring the wrath of politicians already grappling with the fallout from Chibok. Damasak is now one of the many neglected tragedies of the bloody eight-year insurgency that has killed at least 20,000 people, left millions homeless and caused a severe food shortage. "When Boko Haram arrived they gathered all of the kids, they took them to one compound," said 20-year-old Bukar, wearing a blue gingham print hijab.

"Boko Haram was ruling the town then, they didn't burn yet, they didn't kill," she told AFP, sitting on a green plastic prayer mat outside the mud house from where her brothers were snatched. After a week under Boko Haram occupation, her family decided to follow many of those in the town who had fled into neighboring Niger. She hasn't seen her two brothers since. "I hope they come back safe," she said. Lost in a memory, her voice suddenly trailed off and she started to cry. "I miss them seriously. They are always with me."

Return to normal

Nigerian forces say they have no new information on the location of the kidnapped children of Damasak. "If we have any information regarding that, we will work towards it," said Major Muhammed Kaigama, of 145 Battalion Nigerian Army stationed in the town. Despite its unhappy past, Damasak, which was recaptured by Nigerian troops and regional allies in July last year, is being seen as a beacon of hope for the conflict-scarred northeast.

The road to the Borno state capital, Maiduguri, nearly 200 kilometers away was reopened in December last year after years of fierce battles with the jihadists. One of the first aid helicopters arrived a month later. Now the government is leading a reconstruction effort and aid agencies are distributing food and ramping up health services, including vaccinations against polio.

Signs of the conflict are everywhere: Boko Haram's black insignia is still visible, daubed on the walls of destroyed buildings lining the main street. Yet, in many ways, life is returning to normal. A market has reopened where traders sell onions, pepper and baobab leaves for soup. Children play with tires in the streets. The first school is set to reopen next month. In a house opposite the market, the family of Modu Mandama, a 50-year-old tailor who recently returned from Niger, celebrates the marriage of their daughter.

Factional fighting

Nigerian forces say the rift in Boko Haram between its long-time leader Abubakar Shekau and the Islamic State group-backed Abu Musab al-Barnawi could be why Damasak is enjoying peace. "Predominantly it's the Al-Barnawi faction that is here," said Major Kaigama about Boko Haram's presence in the border region. "Going by their ideology they believe in attacking the military but they have never been here," he added. The heavy military presence and frequent patrols in a 30-kilometre radius around Damasak was a deterrent to attacks, he maintained.

Members of the civilian militia force helping with security share the same view. "Those for Shekau, they kill and collect properties but for Barnawi they only kill soldiers," said Gudusu Kyari, 39, wearing a knife on his belt and carrying a metal whip in his right hand. Whatever the reason for the peace, the people of Damasak say they are thankful they can now return to their homes-or at least try to rebuild what's left of them.

Goni Modu Aji, a 50-year-old farmer, is back in the fields after spending two years in Niger. His friend's adopted son, Baba Kaka, was seized when Boko Haram claimed the town in 2014 but managed to escape. Now 14, the boy is one of the few children of Damasak to return home. Aji believes the focus on Chibok has been unfair. "They only talked about Chibok," he said, looking across the river which separates Nigeria from Niger. "They didn't talk about other places."—AFP

German-Israel relationship: No longer so special?

Berlin troubled by Israel's settlement building program

BERLIN: After simmering for months, a crisis between Israel and Germany has erupted into the open, putting serious strain on a special relationship painstakingly built up after the Holocaust. First, Chancellor Angela Merkel in February postponed an annual government meeting with Israel, then this week, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu refused to meet Germany's foreign minister in Jerusalem. What was once "unthinkable" has become real-the gild on the ties between Germany and Israel may be fading.

Due to its historical responsibility as the perpetrator of the Holocaust that killed six million Jews, Germany has not only been Israel's staunch ally but has also shied away from openly criticizing the Jewish state. But Netanyahu-Israel's most right-wing leader to date-has irked Berlin by pressing on with settlement building in the Palestinian territories despite repeated warnings from world powers that it would harm any prospects of peace. On Tuesday, the tensions ratcheted up a notch with Netanyahu scrapping at the last minute a planned meeting with Sigmar Gabriel because the German foreign minister refused to cancel talks with Israeli rights groups. Gabriel had sought to minimize the damage, saying it was "not a catastrophe". But he also stressed that he wanted "to say openly that I think we should not become the pawn of Israel's domestic politics."

Public opinion in Germany was firmly on the foreign minister's side, with Spiegel weekly noting that "Netanyahu's government has pushed the historically imperative special treatment to its limits." "Certainly, Israel can never be just another country for Germany. Special consideration for the past is required, and, until today, also special diplomatic sensitivity. "But historical guilt cannot lead Germany to accept an Israeli government moving away from certain values that we have always shared."

Treated as a joke

Berlin has been troubled for months by Israel's settlement building program and attempts to crack down on critical NGOs. Rather than air its unhappiness in the open, Merkel's government had sought previously to express concerns behind the scenes. "Merkel has often repeated during bilateral government consultations and during interviews with Netanyahu that despite the solidarity and friendship between the two countries, there is discontent about the decisions concerning new settlements in Palestinian territories," said Volker Beck, a Greens party lawmaker who heads the Germany-Israel friendship group.

JERUSALEM: Israeli President Reuven Rivlin, right, meets with German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel at the presidential compound in Jerusalem. — AFP

But right after the Knesset approved a new law legalizing dozens of Jewish settler outposts in the occupied West Bank, the German foreign ministry openly voiced doubts for the first time in January about whether Netanyahu intended to respect his pledge for a two-state solution. A month later, Merkel's government cancelled an annual consultation with Israel which had been planned for May in Jerusalem. Ostensibly, the reason was a diary problem yet the message was clear. "Merkel has now changed her tone because the Israeli government has taken the reservations expressed by Germany as a joke," said Moshe Zimmermann, a geopolitical analyst at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Serious differences

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the young Jewish state had boycotted then West Germany, until a deal in 1952 offering reparations to Israel. Both sides-and subsequently a reunified Germany-have since built up a close relationship. In a sign of their special ties, the two governments had met annually for bilateral talks. And Merkel has repeatedly said that "the security and right of the state of Israel to exist is a fundamental tenet for Germany".

Their security and economic relations are healthy, borne out most recently by the signing of a military deal for Israel's purchase of three German submarines-with a substantial discount of one-third of the price. But politically, the differences between the allies are widening. Norbert Roettgen, who heads the German parliament's foreign affairs committee, said it plainly: "The differences are serious, everyone who holds Israel close to their hearts cannot help but be sad and depressed by this blockade of (peace talks)."

For analyst Eldad Beck, an Israeli journalist and writer of the book "Merkel, Israel and the Jews", the friction may have also arisen as Germany has simply begun moving away from treating Israel with kid gloves. "Over the last 20 years, Germany has been normalizing its relationship with Israel. 'Normalizing' often has a positive connotation, but here it's the reverse, it's about ending a unique status accorded to the relationship with Israel."— AFP

President Kenyatta, Saifuddin inaugurate campus in Nairobi

The President of the Republic of Kenya Uhuru Kenyatta CGH and Dr Syedna Mufaddal Saifuddin, the 53rd al-Dai al-Mutlaq and head of the Dawoodi Bohra Community inaugurated the new campus of Aljamea-tus-Saifiyah, Arabic Academy in Langata, Nairobi. The inaugural ceremony was attended by almost 200 national and international dignitaries and guests, as well as over 10,000 members of the community who had travelled from around the world to witness the historic event.

The Dawoodi Bohra community was lauded for building the expansive institution that demonstrated their level of commitment and seriousness for the cause of education. His Holiness thanked the President for accepting his invitation to officiate the campus inauguration. Your presence amongst us signifies the warm and brotherly relations between us, He prayed for the Presidents success and prosperity and educational progress of Kenya and its people.

President Kenyatta commended the Dawoodi Bohra Community for promoting tolerance and peace, and stated, You are a true representation of what Islam stands for, adding, we must work together to show that Islam is not a religion of violence but a religion of peace.

The values in this institution, which I have had the privilege of touring, attest to your rich and diverse culture, said the President. Aljamea-tus-Saifiyah, Arabic Academy is the principal educational institute of the Dawoodi Bohra community. Syedna Mufaddal Saifuddin TUS, the 53rd al-Dai al-Mutlaq and head of the community, is the institute's benefactor, and gives it its direction and its inspiration.

Spread over 14 acres, the total area of the newly built campus of Aljamea-tus-Saifiyah in Langata equals nearly 1,000,000 square feet and includes a masjid, Quranic institute, large ceremonial hall, a four-storey library with a capacity of 90,000 books, a state-of-the-art auditorium, one of the finest in East Africa that can accommodate over 700 occupants. The academy will admit students from East African countries, Egypt, USA, England, Germany and Egypt, among others.

US moving THAAD anti-missile to S Korea site sparks protests

SEOUL: The US military started moving parts of an anti-missile defense system to a deployment site in South Korea yesterday, triggering protests from villagers and criticism from China, amid tension over North Korea's weapons development. The earlier-than-expected steps to deploy the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system was also denounced by the frontrunner in South Korea's presidential election on May 9. South Korea's defense ministry said elements of THAAD were moved to the deployment site, on what had been a golf course, about 250 km (155 miles) south of the capital, Seoul.

"South Korea and the United States have been working to secure an early operational capability of the THAAD system in response to North Korea's advancing nuclear and missile threat," the ministry said in a statement. The battery was expected to be operational by the end of the year, it said. The United States and South Korea agreed last year to deploy the THAAD to counter the threat of missile launches by North Korea. They say it is solely aimed at defending against North Korea. But China says the system's advanced radar can penetrate deep into its territory and undermine its security, while it will do little to deter the North, and is adamant in its opposition. "China strongly urges the United States and South Korea to stop actions that worsen regional tensions and harm China's strategic security interests and cancel the deployment of the THAAD system and withdraw the equipment," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told a briefing. "China will resolutely take necessary steps to defend its interests," Geng said, without elaborating. China is North Korea's sole major ally and is seen as crucial to U.S.-led efforts to rein in its bellicose, isolated neighbor.

The United States began moving the first elements of the system to South Korea in March after the North tested four ballistic missiles. South Korea has accused China of discriminating against some South Korean companies operating in China because of the deployment. The liberal politician expected to win South Korea's election, Moon Jae-in, has called for a delay in the deployment, saying the new administration should make a decision after gathering public opinion and more talks with Washington. — Reuters

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Bangladesh to build hundreds of mosques with Saudi cash

DHAKA: Bangladesh has approved a project to build hundreds of mosques with almost $1 billion from Saudi Arabia, official said yesterday, worrying minorities who fear they could be used to spread fundamentalist Islam. The government plans to construct 560 mosques-one in every town in Bangladesh-as the secular administration woos Islamist groups before elections. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina sought the funds from Saudi Arabia, which will provide the lion's share of the $1.07 billion cost, during a visit to the oil-rich state last year, said planning minister Mustofa Kamal.

The centers of worship-equipped with research facilities, libraries and cultural centers-would be a "model" for worshippers in the Muslim-majority country, said Shamim Afzal, head of the state-run Islamic Foundation. "It is a perfect idea of spreading the true knowledge of Islam," he told AFP. But minority groups are less certain, concerned the proliferation of Saudi-backed mosques could spread the ultra-conservative Sunni doctrine of Wahhabism practiced in the Gulf kingdom.

Bangladesh has suffered from a rise in extremism in recent years as the moderate Islam worshipped for generations has given way to a more conservative interpretation of the scriptures. The government has ordered a crackdown on home-grown extremist outfits after a series of bloody attacks on secular activists, foreigners and religious minorities. Rezaul Haq Chandpuri, from a federation representing Sufi Muslims who have been targeted for violence, said there was no justification for these new mosques.

"Saudi finance is a concern. They may use their money to promote Wahabism through these mosques," he told AFP, adding minorities would feel "helpless and insecure". But the scheme could also "help the government monitor hateful sermons", a tough task in Bangladesh where it controls few of the 300,000 existing mosques, said leading secular activist Shahriar Kabir. "I think the government should take control of all mosques across the country. That way, it can easily identify where extremism are being promoted," he told AFP.

In a major concession to Islamist groups ahead of polls, Hasina this month announced her government would recognize degrees from hardline madrassas, paving the way for religious scholars to qualify for public service jobs. She also supported conservative protesters railing against a symbolic statue of justice outside the Supreme Court which they deemed un-Islamic. —AFP

BALKH, Afghanistan: A damaged mosque is seen on the grounds of an army compound in Dihdadi District of Balkh province yesterday, following the deadly assault by Taliban militants. — AFP

Traces of death at Afghan base attacked by Taleban

Bullet holes reveal horror of deadly attacks

MAZAR-I-SHARIF: The green mosque in the Afghan military compound attacked by Taliban militants is scarred-disfigured by bullet holes, blast marks and with blood splattered across the ceiling-telltale signs of the deaths of at least 144 young Afghan recruits. Images filmed by an AFP journalist reveal some of the horror of one of the deadliest attacks ever perpetrated in Afghanistan. The images and testimony collected there have helped piece together the unbridled brutality that ripped through the base, home to the 209th Army Corps, about 15 kilometers from the city of Mazar-i-Sharif.

Early on Friday afternoon, at the time of prayer, at least 10 men armed with guns and suicide vests travelling in Humvees and military trucks arrived at the first checkpoint leading to the base. They were dressed in Afghan army uniforms, multiple sources have told AFP, fuelling suspicions of complicity on the 30,000-strong base, where Western instructors are sometimes called on as part of NATO's training, assist and advise mission.

The militants passed the checkpoint, a huge portico, by persuading guards that they were rushing a seriously wounded colleague to hospital, a high-ranking security source with access to the base and to witnesses told AFP. At the second checkpoint one officer became suspicious, the source said-only to have two of the militants trigger their suicide vests, as the rest hurtled past at full speed towards the mosque, roughly a kilometer from the entrance.

They knew the base, the source said, stressing the meticulous preparation involved-four of them had trained there in the past, and all carried valid passes. They knew that in the part of the base they were headed no soldier was allowed to carry a weapon. Afghan authorities have been elusive on a death toll, but late Tuesday a senior US defense official told AFP that at least 144 recruits were killed, with more than 60 wounded. Military sources on the base have put the death toll as high as 160.

Blood on the ceiling

When the first fighting broke out, one of the assailants dressed in a special forces uniform rushed into the mosque, the security source said. He herded the panicked recruits to take cover together in a room. "And there he blew himself up," the source said. Any survivors were gunned down by the remaining militants, he added. The pitted cement of the mosque's facade bears the marks of the ferocious assault. At the door, a suicide bomber detonated his vest, leaving black scorch marks up the wall and splashes of blood on the ceiling.

One 19-year-old survivor, Mohammad Qurban, previously said many victims were shot at close range. "Their leader was telling them 'aim for their heads'," he said from a hospital in Mazar. "They killed a lot of my friends, I jumped out of a window to survive." A little further, the mess hall has collapsed under the onslaught from the machine guns, the metallic structure twisted and the roof ripped open. Zabiullah, 22, told AFP he was eating lunch in the hall at the time. "An army truck pulled over near us with four men who looked like our soldiers," Zabiullah, who was wounded in the shoot-out, said.

"Two of them with suicide vests jumped out of the car, entered the dining room and started shooting. The other two started shooting with a heavy machine gun on top of the truck," he told AFP. The US defense official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, noted that weapons are not allowed in the dining hall or mosque. He echoed the security source in stressing the well-planned nature of the assault, targeting areas hosting large numbers of unarmed people in a confined space.

He also said some 30 coalition forces-likely German or American-were at a different part of the base in their training capacity at the time, but were not involved in repelling the assault. The commander of the 209th Army Corps, Mohmand Katawazi, said he hoped those responsible for the horror would be held to account. President Ashraf Ghani transferred him on Monday following accusations of complicity.

The defense minister and army chief also resigned, leaving embattled security forces facing disarray as the Taliban gear up for the spring fighting season. "I am leaving this position but I should be punished. I myself asked to be suspended in the wake of the attack that took place here," Katawazi insisted. "Everyone has their own responsibilities in a military base. I am not a gatekeeper and I have nine provinces under my responsibility. But someone must be accountable for this horrible incident." —AFP

Thailand media slammed for baby murder coverage

BANGKOK: Thai media came under fire yesterday for publishing images of a man killing his infant daughter in a Facebook Live video, a grim case that sparked outrage and raised fears of copycat killings. The video, filmed Monday on the southern resort island of Phuket, showed Wuttisan Wongtalay hang his 11-month daughter, Natalie, from an abandoned building before taking his own life, according to police in charge of the case.

The footage was online for around 24 hours before it was removed on Tuesday, prompting cries for Facebook to move more swiftly to take down clips of grisly crimes and killings. A Thai media body also slammed news outlets that showed graphic images of the crime. At least one major Thai daily printed an image of the murder-suicide on its front page Tuesday, while several TV channels also aired segments of the video.

"The News Broadcasting Council of Thailand received complaints about reporting on a man who killed his child and himself via Facebook Live," the organization said in a statement. "Those reports were inappropriate," it added, warning channels and newspapers against giving graphic coverage to similar crimes because they "may lead to copycats with the understanding that those actions will draw attention." Thai newspaper front pages are often splashed with bloody, lurid imagery.

But netizens expressed horror over the killing and said this time the coverage had gone too far. "It was a news story, not a horror movie. Was it really necessary to release the soundbite?" one commentator wrote in the online forum Pantip, referring to audio played by some media from the Facebook Live stream.

Police said they believe the killing was motivated by jealousy from Wuttisan, 20, who feared his 22-year-old partner was poised to leave him for a man she had another child with. Funeral rites for the baby began late Tuesday and she is expected to be cremated later this week.

A lot of work to do

In a statement late Tuesday Facebook described the incident as "appalling". "There is absolutely no place for content of this kind on Facebook and it has now been removed," the social network told AFP. The killing was only the latest grisly crime to be published on Facebook, reviving questions about if and how such videos can be monitored. Last week Facebook chief Mark Zuckerberg vowed to address the issue after a man in the US state of Ohio broadcast footage of himself shooting a stranger dead.

The killer went on to fatally shoot himself after a massive manhunt and police chase. Zuckerberg conceded that Facebook had "a lot of work" to do on the issue. Facebook already has a 24-hour team of moderators who decide whether to remove content that is reported to them. Suicides and crimes are prioritized. But the network says they are limited by the sheer volume of content posted online each day. A Thai police spokesman said officers moved quickly to alert the kingdom's digital ministry about the video, which contacted Facebook about taking it down.

"We have only a handful of police officers on duty (to monitor the web) so we have to rely heavily on the public to keep us informed," deputy national police spokesman Colonel Krissana Pattanacharoen told AFP. —AFP

PHUKET: This picture shows Jiranuch Trirat, center, touching the face of her 11-month-old daughter, who was killed by Trirat's husband, after picking her body at the morgue in Phuket. — AFP

In Kashmir, brutality of videos deepens anger against India

SRINAGAR: One video showed a young Kashmiri man strapped to a patrolling Indian army jeep as a human shield against stone-throwing protesters. Others showed soldiers beating local men with sticks as other troops stood by with guns drawn. As Shabir Ahmed watched the crude clips, captured on cellphone cameras and uploaded to Facebook, he felt terrified. They reminded him of his own 2001 detention by Indian army soldiers who suspected him of being a rebel sympathizer; he said they subjected him to beatings, waterboarding and drinking water mixed with chili powder.

"For two nights I couldn't sleep. I was not shocked but exhausted" after watching the recent videos, said 38-year-old Ahmed. "I have suffered a great deal in torture by soldiers. Suddenly, I felt as if demons reopened my old wounds and started haunting me." Rights groups have long accused Indian forces of using systematic abuse and unjustified arrests in Indian-controlled Kashmir. The Indian government has acknowledged the problem exists, but denies it is part of a wide strategy to intimidate residents.

Kashmiris have been uploading videos and photos of alleged abuse for some years, but several recently posted clips, captured in the days surrounding a violence-plagued local election April 9, have proven to be especially powerful and have helped to intensify anti-India protests."Welcome to the world of social media," said Siddiq Wahid, historian and former vice chancellor of a Kashmir university. "You don't need verification and you don't need proof. The optics are so clear."One video shows a stone-throwing teenage boy being shot by a soldier from a few meters away.

Another shows soldiers making a group of young men, held inside an armored vehicle, shout profanities against Pakistan while a soldier kicks and slaps them with a stick. The video pans to a young boy's bleeding face as he cries. Yet another clip shows three soldiers holding a teenage boy down with their boots and beating him on his back. The video that drew the most outrage was of young shawl weaver Farooq Ahmed Dar tied to the bonnet of an army jeep as it patrolled villages on voting day. A soldier can be heard saying in Hindi over a loudspeaker, "Stone throwers will meet a similar fate," as residents look on aghast.

"When they were driving me around, they were saying, 'We will shoot (you),' and were throwing stones at my head," Dar told The Associated Press. "I was told not to talk. In one of the villages, an elderly man begged for my release but they didn't listen to him." Police have since registered a criminal case against unnamed Indian soldiers in that case, for the first time citing a video as evidence. In addition, the army's "own internal inquiry has been initiated into the jeep video," according to spokesman Col. Rajesh Kalia. —AP

SRINAGAR: In this photo, Kashmiri man Farooq Ahmed Dar, right, sits as his mother displays a muddy and torn out robe that Dar was wearing on the day of his alleged abuse at his residence in Chill village, about 60 kilometers southwest of Srinagar, Kashmir. — AP

HK police charge pro-independence activists with unlawful assembly

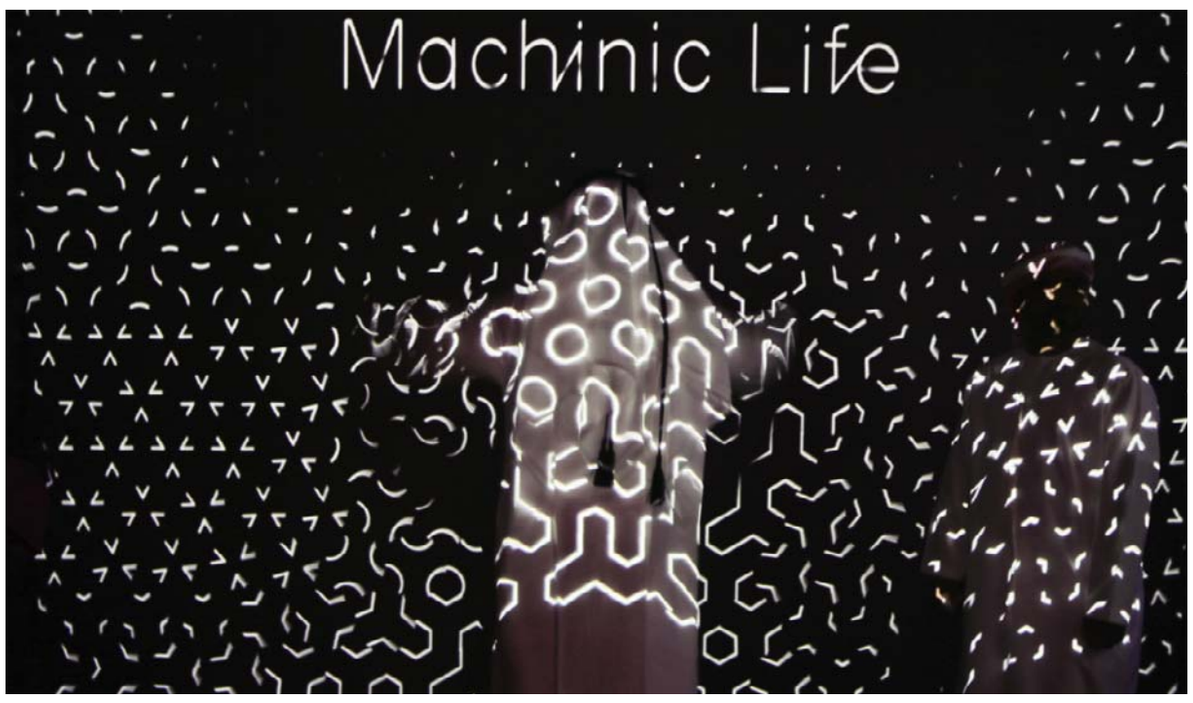
HONG KONG: Hong Kong police yesterday charged two disqualified pro-independence legislators with unlawful assembly and forceful entry over an attempt to barge into a Legislative Council meeting in November. The detentions are likely to add to concern among democracy activists about interference by Beijing in Hong Kong's affairs, despite a system meant to guarantee the autonomy of the financial hub. As they left the police station after being questioned for most of the day, the two disqualified legislators, Yau Wai-ching, 25, and Baggio Leung, 30, told reporters they did not regret their actions.

"The government's regime will do whatever it takes to destroy and wipe out Hong Kong's cries for self-determination. But we will never give up," Yau said. The pair had been picked up at their homes around 7 a.m. and taken to the station for questioning. Later, they were released on bail of HK$3,000 and are due to appear in court on April 28. They said three of their assistants had been detained but it was unclear if they, too, had been charged. Police did not respond to a request for comment.

The two, who represent a new breed of more radical activists moving into the political mainstream, had their swearing-in oaths invalidated last October after they used language deemed derogatory to China and displayed a banner declaring "Hong Kong is not China". The issue of independence, for long taboo, has gained momentum since pro-democracy protests in late 2014, which paralyzed parts of the former British colony, failed to secure concessions from Communist Party rulers in Beijing. "There may be dark days ahead, there may be more arrests and legal challenges but we shall struggle against evil on the streets, in the courts, within the community and on every media platform," their political party, Youngspiration, said. In March, nine leaders of the 2014 democracy protests were charged with inciting the street occupation. The nine were charged just a day after a new Beijing-backed leader, Carrie Lam, was chosen as the city's next leader, seen by many as a worrying sign after she had vowed to heal divisions in the Chinese-ruled city and unite society.

In October, the president of the legislature delayed the second swearing-in of Yau and Leung and temporarily banned them from meetings, an unprecedented step that followed weeks of pressure from factions loyal to Beijing. In November, China's parliament passed a ruling that effectively barred the pair from taking office, Beijing's most direct intervention in the territory's legal and political system since the 1997 handover. A Hong Kong court later disqualified the two from taking office, ruling their oath of allegiance invalid.

Hong Kong returned to China in 1997 under a "one country, two systems" agreement that ensured its freedoms and wide-ranging autonomy, including a separate legal system. But Communist Party rulers in Beijing have ultimate control, stepping in to interpret the Basic Law, Hong Kong's constitution, and some residents are concerned they are increasingly interfering to head off dissent. —Reuters



DUBAI: In this Feb 8, 2016 file photo, an Emirati man poses for a photo at the Museum of the Future during the opening day of the World Government Summit. — AP

As Dubai focuses on future, cybersecurity rising concern

DUBAI: As Dubai races toward a future of self-driving cars and drones filling up its high-rise-studded skyline, cybersecurity is becoming a growing concern in a region replete with examples of cyberattacks. The sheikhdom is hosting a cybersecurity conference this week and at it, a Dubai official involved in protecting the emirate from hacking and other electronic maliciousness offered a rare interview Wednesday describing its efforts. "It's relentless," said Amer Sharaf, the director of compliance at the Dubai Electronic Security Center. "You always have to be up and ahead of the game."

The center, created by decree in 2014, has some 60 employees and hopes to hire another 30 this year, Sharaf said. It oversees government efforts to protect Dubai's government computer systems and infrastructure, as well as plan and respond to any threats or attacks. Speaking at OPCDE, the cybersecurity conference being held in Dubai, Sharaf said there was a "general lack of awareness in the region" about the threat. After his speech, Sharaf spoke to two journalists about specifics.

Dubai's government has faced email phishing scams and other small-scale incidents affecting its networks, he said. It also has been on high alert following Saudi Arabia being hit by Shamoon 2 , a new variant of a computer virus that destroyed systems of the kingdom's state-run oil company in 2012. The emirate was not infected by it, Sharaf said. "We haven't seen any major compromises," Sharaf said.

He also acknowledged the challenge he and others in the cybersecurity field face in trying to determine responsibility for an attack. With Shamoon for instance, it is widely believed that Iran, Saudi Arabia's regional rival, carried out the attack. New research suggests the latest Shamoon attack continues in Saudi Arabia and used code and infrastructure previously tied to hacks linked to Iran. "In many ways, it can be pretty hard" to identify those responsible, Sharaf said. "They can be hidden behind (virtual private networks) and fake companies."

In the case of Shamoon, it came after the Stuxnet computer virus destroyed thousands of centrifuges involved in Iran's contested nuclear program. Stuxnet is widely believed to be an American and Israeli creation. But while Dubai works on cybersecurity, the United Arab Emirates has been suspected of exploiting hacking. An Emirati activist named Ahmed Mansoor became famous in August when he worked with security experts to reveal three previously undisclosed weaknesses in Apple's mobile operating system that then allowed hackers to take complete control of iPhones. — AP

Saudi fire stops 'boat bomb' from Yemen

Continued from Page 1

Separately, increasingly sophisticated hackers possibly linked to a foreign nation aimed to disrupt key organizations in Saudi Arabia, the US-based cyber security firm McAfee said. It did not name the possible attacker but US intelligence officials said they suspected a link to the kingdom's regional rival Iran after the Shamoon virus struck the Saudi energy sector in 2012. Renewed Shamoon campaigns that began late last year attacked a wider range of targets including the public and financial sectors in Saudi Arabia, McAfee said in a blog post dated Tuesday.

The increase in sophistication suggests "the comprehensive operation of a nation-state," it said. "This campaign was significantly larger, well-planned, and an intentional attempt to disrupt key organizations and the country of Saudi Arabia," McAfee's blog said. The attackers entered their targets with phishing emails that allowed "reconnaissance" before initiating the strike which McAfee said is ongoing. In January a senior Saudi telecommunications official was quoted as saying the kingdom's computer security systems are vulnerable to the "Shamoon 2" virus. Among its reported victims was a division of the labor ministry. Saudi Arabia and Iran have no diplomatic ties and support opposite sides of regional wars including in Yemen and Syria. — Agencies

Suspect says IS planned attacks

Continued from Page 1

US troops and serves as a military transit point to Iraq and Afghanistan. Kuwait was the site of a suicide attack linked to the Islamic State (IS) group back in June 2015. A Saudi suicide bomber killed 26 worshippers in a Shiite mosque, the worst such attack in the state's history. Dhafiri was deported earlier in April to Kuwait where he is now set to stand trial on charges of belonging to a banned organization and plotting attacks, Al-Rai said. He had been arrested in Manila along with his wife, whom he married after her high-ranking IS commander husband was killed in Syria.

Authorities in Kuwait have also arrested four of Dhafiri's relatives, including his brother and nephew, in connection with the planned attacks, Al-Rai said. The five suspects told public prosecutors that suicide bombers had been recruited from outside of Kuwait to carry out the attacks, according to Al-Rai. They also said there had been tentative plans to target a church in Kuwait during a visit this week by Coptic Pope Tawadros II.

Kuwaiti courts have handed down multiple convictions on charges of IS membership or financing. Some of the defendants have been found guilty of fighting with militants in Iraq or Syria. All have received lengthy jail sentences. A lower court in December sentenced a Filipina to 10 years in jail after convicting her of joining the group and plotting attacks. — AFP

MP Muwaizri files to grill Abul over...

Continued from Page 1

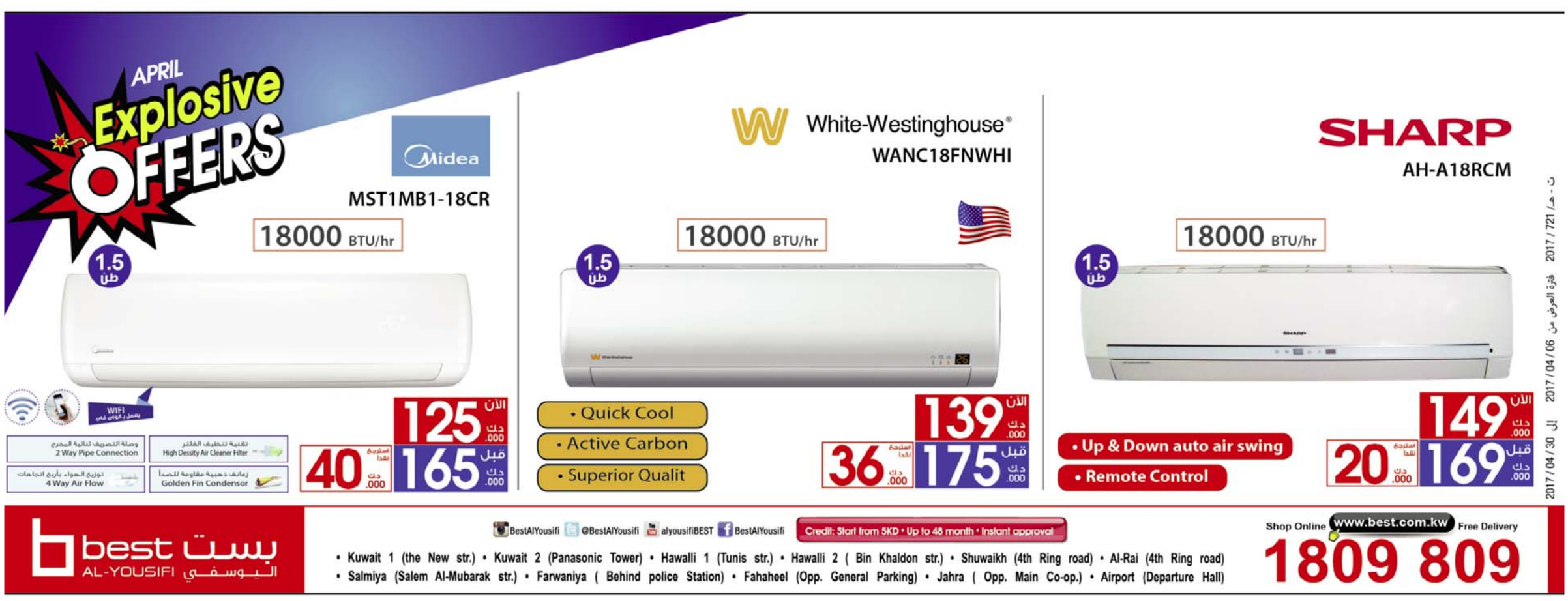
minister for a brief period in 2012, accused the minister of failing to implement a law passed by the Assembly in 1993 to cut the waiting period for government houses to three years from the time of providing the land plot.

The lawmaker said the minister and the entire government failed to implement the law and the waiting period remained very long, with the number of families waiting for houses increasing to over 110,000, representing half of the citizen population. Muwaizri also charged that the minister violated the housing law which requires him to establish Kuwaiti companies to implement housing projects and instead awarded the major Mutlaa housing project to a foreign consortium. The grilling also accused the housing minister of providing contradictory numbers to the Assembly about housing projects. He said that in an answer to a parliamentary question, the minister said only 600 houses of Jaber Al-Ahmad project were found to be defective, while yesterday during the debate, the housing authority said all the 4,500 houses were defective and needed some repairs. Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said the grilling will be listed on the agenda of the next session on May 9 to decide the date of its debate. The minister told reporters he was prepared to face the grilling and he will have the appropriate answers for all the issues raised.

During the Assembly debate on the housing problem, Abul said that in the past three years, there has been a substantial acceleration in awarding government housing. The minister said in the past 60 years, slightly over 98,000 houses were given to citizens, but since 2014, as many as 45,000 houses were distributed. He said the government succeeded in cutting the waiting period to just over three years for some projects and is planning to deliver around 60,000 housing units in the coming few years.

But several MPs said that most of the recent distributions are "fake" and are just on "paper", adding that the problem remained unresolved. MP Saleh Ashour said that the government must change its housing policy completely by providing much cheaper land for the people and inviting the private sector to take part.

MP Omar Al-Tabtabaei said that to solve the housing problem, Kuwait needs to build an entirely new city to accommodate the expected increase in the population. He made a video presentation of a city he called Al-Dorrah as a solution to the problem.



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Focus

Oppn struggles to build on anti-Orban mood in Hungary

Anti-government protesters have filled Budapest's streets in recent weeks, but divisions within the opposition and weak support outside the capital mean they are unlikely to herald a serious threat to Prime Minister Viktor Orban in next year's election. Triggered by a law targeting an international school founded by liberal US financier George Soros, the rallies have galvanized broader public anger against Orban's ambition to create an "illiberal democracy".

They accuse Orban of engineering a crackdown on civil dissent, eroding democratic values and spreading hostility towards the European Union while cozying up to Russia. But the protesters, mostly young and urban, have found little in common with opposition politicians jostling for position ahead of next year's election and struggling to shake off the perception of incompetence and corruption.

Orban's Fidesz has a lead in opinion polls, with its 30-percent support dwarfing its closest rivals, the Socialists and the radical nationalist Jobbik, both at about 10 percent. The rest of the opposition is fragmented between several small parties. "They (protesters) have the street but we don't know for how long," said Zoltan Novak, a researcher at the Centre for Fair Political Analysis. "The sentiment on the street and the sentiment in the opinion polls both have to change. We're not there yet."

Emerging market investors expect the political status quo to hold since Hungary is economically stable and the protests have not posed a risk to Orban's grip on power. "Hungary is not at the top of the list where I would see big political changes in the next few years," said Simon Quijano-Evans, a strategist at Legal & General Investment Management in London. Orban and his Fidesz party also seem relaxed, with the prime minister saying he feels bemused at the rallies. "It always makes one smile when one sees crowds protesting at a lack of democracy," he told public radio this month. "They chant horrible things, insults and insinuations, while they claim there is no democracy. It's rather funny."

The lack of interest in protests among the 80 percent of Hungarians who live outside the capital also makes it unlikely they would have much of an impact. The largest rally drew about a thousand people in Szeged, and that only once. "There are 23,000 students at this university and you did not see them pouring out onto the streets," said Erzsebet Barat, who teaches at the University of Szeged.

Uphill Struggle for Challengers

Hungary's electoral law - created by Fidesz in 2011 - helps Orban stay resilient. In 2014 he won a two-thirds majority with just 2.3 million votes out of 8 million voters. "The system works for Fidesz in the short term," election expert Robert Laszlo told Reuters. In a mixed system of a single-round first-past-the-post vote and party lists, any ballot not used to win in constituencies bolsters the winning party's list, strengthening them further. Losing candidates' votes are not doubled that way.

That, plus gerrymandered constituency borders and lax financial rules, play to Fidesz's advantage now, Laszlo said. To activists Marton Gulyas and Gergely Varga, that is unacceptable. The pair became celebrities among protesters after they were arrested for hurling bottles of orange paint, the Fidesz party colors, at the Presidential Palace at a rally. They have campaigned to level the electoral playing field. "We have to create a free and democratic race for the entire political sphere and not just legitimise the system which only favours Fidesz," Gulyas told Reuters.

Despite the new energy, the protests could easily peter out if opposition parties are unable to capitalize on them. But instead of offering one alternative to Fidesz, a half-dozen parties compete for the protest vote. Unless they forge an alliance they have no chance against Orban's Fidesz in 2018 - and in 2014 they placed a distant second even in an alliance. Amid such competition new players stand to profit, chiefly a group called Momentum, Novak said.

Having made its name by forcing the government to withdraw a bid for the 2024 Olympic Games in Budapest, Momentum has begun a national tour to recruit party activists as it seeks to launch the party in May. It plans a pro-EU protest for May 1, the 13th anniversary of Hungary's accession to the bloc. Radical nationalist Jobbik, a well-financed group that now targets the mainstream, also goes its own way. "I don't see a serious challenge in these movements," Jobbik deputy Istvan Szavay told Reuters. "Only a seasoned and established party like Jobbik can beat Fidesz in 2018." —Reuters

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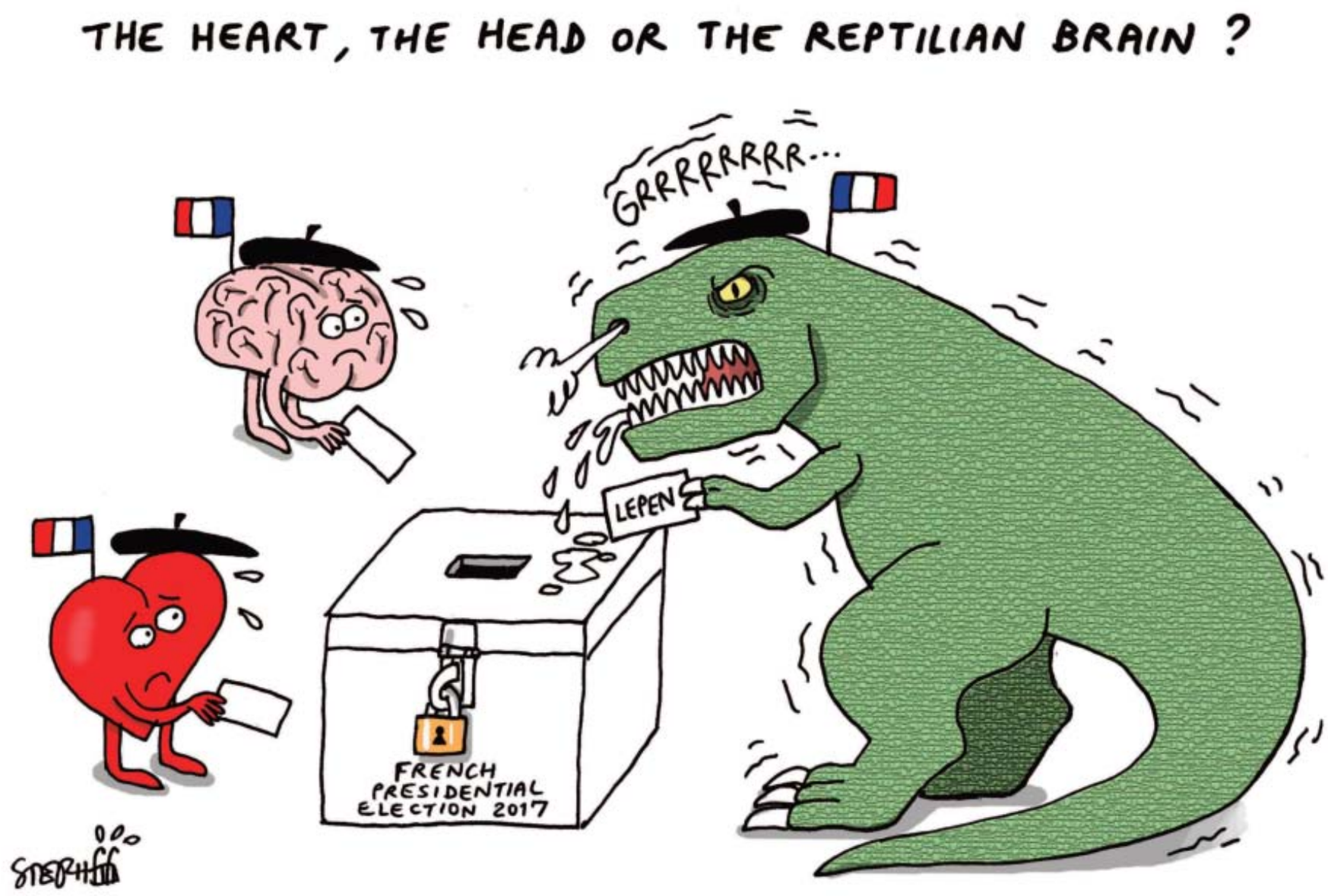


Le Pen thrives among French poor

Marine Le Pen's protectionist, anti-establishment message resonated most in parts of France with lower incomes, lower life expectancy and lower education levels, a Reuters analysis of voting in Sunday's first round shows. However there was no evidence that she scored particularly highly among young voters this time, many of whom backed hard-left campaigner Jean-Luc Melenchon. Moreover, it was not clear that she fared better in rural communities than in towns as some analysts have suggested.

Ahead of a May 7 runoff against centrist Emmanuel Macron, these are some conclusions that can be drawn by plotting Le Pen's scores in France's 'departments' - similar to counties - against government data on key social and economic factors. Surveying Le Pen's results against more than a dozen such measures, the data suggest her message played particularly well in low-income areas with higher numbers of school dropouts.

In fact, for each 1,000-euro drop in the median income in a given area, Le Pen scored nearly two extra percentage points, according to a Reuters calculation using results and data from the Social Affairs Ministry. Meanwhile, life expectancy for women tends to run nearly five years shorter than the average 85.2 in departments where Le Pen scored high and nearly three years lower than the average male expectancy of 79.1.

But among the variables surveyed, education levels are the most revealing. The percentage of under-35 voters to have left school without a diploma has a heavy 60 percent correlation to Le Pen's scores. In statistics, correlation is measured between zero and 100 percent - the higher the count the closer the link. One exception to that trend is Paris' northern working-class suburb of Seine-Saint-Denis, a traditional stronghold of the left, where over one-in-four 25-34 year-olds did not finish school. There, she won only 13.6 percent of the vote, coming in after Melenchon and Macron.

Unemployment is also a major factor explaining where Le Pen did best with the jobless rate by department 58 percent correlated with her scores. Perhaps unsurprisingly given her anti-immigrant stance, departments with high levels of foreign-born populations tended to vote less for Le Pen, notably those areas concentrated around Paris and its suburbs.

And although Le Pen scored high in some rural departments, that was not systematically the case. Similarly, although she did poorly in some more urbanized departments, she also did well in some more densely populated areas. Ahead of the vote, surveys suggested Le Pen was faring much better among voters under-25 than among the population at large, often by a margin as high as 7 percentage points. But in the end there was little evidence that age was a determining factor in her share of the vote.

A study by pollsters Ipsos of the first round results may explain why that was the case: while it found that 21 percent of 18 to 24-year-old voters backed her - largely the same as for the population as a whole - a massive 30 percent opted for her hard-left rival Melenchon. —Reuters

Fight for power takes new forms in Kenya

A crowd of elated young men danced outside the market in Kenya's southern Kisumu city, waving the crisp new 200 shilling ($2) notes that a local politician was distributing from behind a dusty speaker that pounded out music. Shoppers paid scant attention. Cash handouts are common during African elections; in Kenya, the devolution of power to 47 counties has made them ubiquitous in the run up to polls for president, parliament and counties due on Aug 8.

The counties, which manage local infrastructure, were introduced five years ago after a government-appointed international commission concluded power was too centralised in the country and partly to blame for violence that killed 1,200 people and crippled the economy following elections in 2007. The process has been backed by international loans as a way to spread democracy and accountability within a vital Western ally. But devolution has also fuelled local corruption, officials and transparency campaigners say, and with it the prospect of more localised violence come election time.

The prize of county budgets worth billions of shillings mean this month's party primaries for the county elections are hard-fought. Candidates often got into debt to try to buy votes, counting on future riches once in office. Clashes have already broken out, and violent elections could threaten stability in a country that borders two others in turmoil: Somalia and South Sudan. The interior ministry said on Monday that politically instigated violence had been recorded in 12 counties so far. "Politicians and their supporters have engaged in acts of violence, destroying property and creating disturbance in polling stations," it said.

At least 14 civilians and four policemen have been killed in the drought-hit northern Laikipia region. A local politician is charged with inciting violence and arson after invasions of private land by cattle-herders and a spate of attacks on farmers and owners of safari parks. Kenya's ruling coalition annulled 21 county primaries held on Friday amid widespread anger over shortages of voting materials. It began rerunning them on Monday. The opposition will also rerun some primaries after allegations of rigging.

Rose Onyango, who was selling dried fish in the market near the rally in Kisumu last week, said three members of the county assembly and two aspiring governors had given out cash in the market over the past few days, hoping to win votes. "We just had a woman aspirant an hour ago but she gave it to someone to distribute," the 24-year-old said. "The crowd tore her clothes and the money was splashed everywhere."

'Something to Fight For'

Kenyans are haunted by the disputed 2007 presidential poll. Dozens of men, women and children were burned alive in a church. Others were hunted down by machete-wielding gangs during the widespread ethnic violence that followed. More than half a million people fled their homes. Some never returned. Protests also broke out after elections in 2013, but they were much smaller. A case at the International Criminal Court against powerful politicians, including President Uhuru Kenyatta, helped dampen violence.

Nairobi Senator Mike Sonko casts his ballot to vote for the Jubilee Party primaries yesterday. Sonko is running for gubernatorial race for the city Nairobi. —AFP

That case has now collapsed. Kenyatta is running for a second term and his old nemesis Raila Odinga is building an opposition alliance. Odinga has said mass protests are possible if elections are rigged. But this time it is not winner-takes-all. Devolution is designed, in part, to ensure there will be many winners. "Devolution can defuse massive violence, although it can intensify it in individual counties," said Titus Ogalo, head of the local anti-corruption Transparency International chapter. "People feel, 'Even if we lose the presidency, we have something to fight for at the local level'."

The counties get around 20 percent of national revenues. They can also raise local taxes. In return, they must provide most health facilities, preschools, and local infrastructure. Halakhe Waqo, CEO of the government-run Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission, said mismanagement is rife. "Every procurement process is a problem. Funds are given to relatives, contracts are given to relatives and tribesmen," he said.

Kisumu, Kenya's third-largest city perched on the green shores of Lake Victoria, is Odinga's stronghold, dominated by his Luo ethnic group. Residents complain the central government has neglected them for decades. The port is choked by water hyacinth, stranding sun-bleached boats at the docks. The rusting railway has not seen a train for years, and the new international airport has no international flights. Football authorities have stopped holding international matches at the city's stadium because of a rubbish dump nearby.

Muscle and Money

Reuters interviewed more than two dozen voters: all supported devolution as a way of wresting power and resources from the central government. Many also complained that Kenya's powerful Kikuyu tribe dominates that central government. Devolution, some said, was already helping. Kisumu boasts a few new street lights, freshly erected cement market stalls, gravelled roads and newly painted clinics. Governor Jack Ranguma said he had given 530 schoolchildren bursaries and started a free ambulance service.

"I have many top achievements," he said. "The investment in medicine and the investment in physical infrastructure is huge - but a lot of money still remains with national government. That's a serious challenge that we have." Asked about vote buying, Ochien'g Obiero Philip, the governor's director of political affairs, said many voters would not show up unless they received a cash payment. "It's something that the voters expect," he said. "It is one of the challenges of democracy in Kenya. People expect handouts to be motivated to vote. It is widespread and the legal framework has never acted on it so it's a loophole."

Some Kisumu residents said construction was sometimes shoddy or projects sat unused, like the padlocked new clinic at Dunga beach where goats lounge on the porch. Ranguma said there was no money for staff. Locals said the contractor locked the clinic because he was not paid. "Devolution has failed here because we have had bad leaders. Many just want the money," said a doctor in the county hospital. He declined to be named for fear of repercussions.

Hotel receptionist Victoria Ochieng disagreed. "Do you think those people in Nairobi will do better?" she asked. "We used to have one president and now we have 47. The governor is our president ... At least we can see him and make a request." Each governor makes around 14,000,000 shillings per year ($135,000), including perks, according to the International Budget Partnership (IBP), a global organisation that works with civil society groups to analyse budgets in developing countries.

A regular member of the county assembly makes about a third of that, still a premium on the average annual salary in Kenya of 134,000 shillings ($1,300). Officials justify the salaries by saying constituents often seek funds for events like funerals. Many local legislators also take hefty travelling allowances; Kisumu's lawmakers have travelled to Singapore and Dubai, among other places. Ranguma said they were learning about agriculture and devolution.

Waqo from the anti-corruption authority said it has charged more than 300 officials from various counties and is investigating more than 40 of the 47 governors. Charges have been brought against six. After the counties got power and money, many feared violence could follow. "The governors are mini-presidents and those who have muscle or money have the advantage over those with a reputation for integrity," said Kisumu political activist George Ogada. "If the situation does not favour them, then they would prefer to disrupt the election." —Reuters

Parker gives sparring partner WBO title shot

WELLINGTON: New Zealand heavyweight Joseph Parker yesterday drafted in former sparring partner Razvan Cojanu of Romania for his first world title defense after original opponent Hughie Fury pulled out injured. Parker's camp was left scrambling to find a replacement after Fury's late withdrawal from the May 6 bout in Auckland for the World Boxing Organization (WBO) crown. Promoter Duco Events said Cojanu was the only credible fighter available at such short notice. Cojanu, 30, is ranked 14th by the WBO and has a 16-2 win-loss record. Parker, who boasts a 22-0 record, including 18 knock-outs, said taking on Cojanu was a major risk because the Romanian had an inside view of his preparation. "To me, he's a lot more dangerous than Hughie because he knows my style and techniques," the 25-year-old told Radio Sport. Parker said he was willing to consider calls from World Boxing Council champion Deontay Wilder for a unification bout, but that the American was not available to fight on May 6. —AFP

A new T20 tournament in England gets green light

LONDON: A new city-based Twenty20 tournament in England was given the go-ahead to start in 2020 following an England and Wales Cricket Board meeting yesterday. Proposals for the eight-team tournament, designed to rival similar events such as the Indian Premier League and Australia's Big Bash, were approved by 38 of the ECB's 41 members. Essex and Middlesex were the only two English counties who voted against the plans, while Kent abstained. "We are delighted that such an overwhelming majority of our members have voted to support the change to the ECB's Articles," said ECB chairman Colin Graves in a press release. "In doing so, they have paved the way for an exciting new era for cricket in England and Wales." The new tournament will sit alongside England's existing domestic competitions, including the T20 Blast. The cities that will host teams have not yet been announced. "Over the past year our members have seen the clear evidence outlining why an additional new T20 competition is the right way for cricket to reach new audiences, create new fans and drive the future of the game," Graves added. "I passionately believe that the game has chosen the right path. Each of our members will benefit and, critically, so will the whole game. —AFP

Taylor gets 2-game ban over Coleman leg break

LONDON: Wales left-back Neil Taylor has been banned for two games for breaking Republic of Ireland captain Seamus Coleman's leg in two places, the Football Association of Wales revealed yesterday. Taylor, who plays for Aston Villa, was sent off for a foul on Coleman in the 69th minute of the 0-0 World Cup qualifying draw between Wales and Ireland in Dublin last month. The FAW said world governing body FIFA had decided to increase Taylor's automatic one-game ban to a two-match suspension, ruling him out of their next two qualifying matches against Serbia and Austria. "Following a meeting of FIFA's disciplinary committee, the FAW can confirm that Neil Taylor has been suspended for two matches," the FAW said in a statement. "Following his sending off against Republic of Ireland on March 24, Taylor is regarded as having breached art. 48 of the FIFA disciplinary code." Everton right-back Coleman broke the tibia and fibula in his right leg and is facing a long spell on the sidelines.—AFP

ST LOUIS: Toronto Blue Jays' Chris Coghlan scores, leaping over St Louis Cardinals catcher Yadier Molina during the seventh inning of a baseball game on Tuesday, April 25, 2017. —AP

Turner hits for cycle, Nationals beat Rockies

WASHINGTON: Trea Turner hit for the cycle and drove in a career-high seven runs Tuesday night as the Washington Nationals raced to a seven-run lead and held off the Colorado Rockies 15-12. Turner, who went 4-for-6, singled in the first, doubled home two runs in the second, hit his first homer of the season in the sixth (a two-run shot), and tripled home three runs in the seventh. Daniel Murphy tied his career high with five RBIs while going 3-for-5 with a three-run triple that highlighted a five-run second against German Marquez, who was making his 2016 debut. Marquez (0-1) lasted four innings, giving up nine hits and eight runs, the final seven with two outs. Nationals starter Joe Ross was unable to qualify for the win as he worked only 4 2/3 innings, allowing seven hits and five runs.

Tigers 19, Mariners 9

Ian Kinsler had four of Detroit's 24 hits, scored four runs and knocked in two more and Detroit enjoyed its biggest inning in nine seasons while pounding Seattle. Kinsler collected two of his hits during the Tigers' nine-run fifth. James McCann, Justin Upton, Alex Avila and Mikie Mahtook homered for the Tigers, who combined with the Mariners for a Comerica Park-record 40 hits. Nelson Cruz had three hits, including a solo homer, and drove in three runs for Seattle. Mariners starter Felix Hernandez (2-2) lasted two innings, allowing four runs on six hits.

Brewers 9, Reds 1

Hernan Perez delivered two triples and a home run, and Eric Thames hit his major league-leading 11th homer as Milwaukee beat Cincinnati. Zach Davies (2-2) struck out six while allowing six hits and a walk to earn his second consecutive victory. Keon Broxton doubled and drew a pair of walks as Milwaukee recorded 10 hits. Thames went deep against the Reds for the eighth time this season, joining Hall of Famer Willie Stargell as the only players to hit eight April homers against a single team. Stargell did it for the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1971 versus the Atlanta Braves.

Blue Jays 6, Cardinals 5 (11 innings)

Pitcher Marcus Stroman doubled for his first major league hit in the top of the 11th inning and scored the winning run to give Toronto a wacky victory over mistake-prone St Louis. Stroman, pinch-hitting for winning pitcher Jason Grilli (1-2) because the Blue Jays were out of position players, laced a 1-2 pitch from Miguel Socolovich (0-1) into the left field corner. Stroman raced home from second when shortstop Aledmys Diaz threw wide of first on Ezequiel Carrera's two-out bouncer for the Cardinals' fourth error of the game. Ryan Tepera worked around a leadoff single by pinch hitter Eric Fryer in the bottom of the 11th for his first save, handing St. Louis its second loss in eight games.

Angels 2, Athletics 1 (11 innings)

Kole Calhoun's two-out single to center field off Ryan Madson scored Danny Espinosa from second base in the bottom of the 11th inning, lifting Los Angeles over Oakland. The Angels and Athletics played nine innings without a baserunner stepping foot on second base. But on the first pitch of the 10th inning, Oakland's Josh Phegley hit a home run on a 90 mph fastball grooved by Los Angeles' Jose Alvarez. Not to be outdone, the Angels' Mike Trout led off the bottom of the 10th with a home run just inside the right field foul pole against A's closer Santiago Casilla, tying the game at 1-1.

Dodgers 2, Giants 1

Clayton Kershaw limited San Francisco to one run in seven innings and teamed with a pair of relievers on an eight-hitter to lead Los Angeles. Yasiel Puig and Adrian Gonzalez had RBIs in a two-run fourth inning that provided all the offense the Dodgers pitchers needed to deliver a second win in five games on the club's current road trip. Los Angeles had lost six straight in San Francisco. In running his career record against the Giants to 19-8, Kershaw (4-1) allowed six hits and one walk. He struck out seven and was removed from the game after throwing 90 pitches.

Astros 4, Indians 2

Dallas Keuchel pitched his first complete game of the season and Josh Reddick had two hits and three RBIs to lead Houston. Keuchel (4-0) gave up six hits, struck out five and walked three. The Astros lost two players as second baseman Jose Altuve and right fielder Teoscar Hernandez collided while chasing a fly ball. Altuve appeared to get hit in the jaw and Hernandez, who had to be carted off the field, appeared to have a left leg injury. Austin Jackson and Michael Brantley homered for Cleveland. The Indians' Josh Tomlin (1-3) pitched six innings, allowing three runs on eight hits with six strikeouts and no walks.

Diamondbacks 9, Padres 3

Paul Goldschmidt had four hits, including his fourth homer, and he and Chris Owings each had three RBIs in Arizona's victory over San Diego. Daniel Descalso homered, Brandon Drury had three hits and Owings, A.J. Pollock, Nick Ahmed and Yasmany Tomas had two hits apiece for the Diamondbacks, who lead the majors with 121 runs and are 10-2 at home, tying the best start in franchise history. Arizona's Patrick Corbin (2-3) gave up two runs on eight hits in seven innings. He struck out a season-high nine and walked two. The Padres' Yangervis Solarte had three singles for the second game in a row and drove in a run.

White Sox 10, Royals 5

Todd Frazier finished 2-for-3 with two doubles, three RBIs and three runs as Chicago cruised past Kansas City. Leury Garcia and Omar Narvaez drove in two runs apiece as the White Sox bombarded the Royals for double-digit runs for the second consecutive night. Chicago, which beat Kansas City 12-1 on Monday, won its third game in a row. Brandon Moss and Mike Moustakas homered for the Royals, who lost their sixth consecutive contest. Kansas City's Danny Duffy (2-1) surrendered six runs on nine hits in 4 2/3 innings.

Twins 8, Rangers 1

Minnesota scored seven runs in the fifth as it defeated Texas for the seventh time in the last eight meetings dating to last season. Miguel Sano homered among his three hits and drove in two runs for the Twins, who pounded out 14 hits and also drew six walks as they had baserunners in all but two innings. Ervin Santana (4-0) allowed one run and struck out six in seven innings. Andrew Cashner (0-2) was charged with two runs in four-plus innings, walking six and allowing five hits. Anthony Bass allowed six runs (four earned) and nine hits in three frames.

Rays 2, Orioles 0

After scheduled starter Erasmo Ramirez was a late scratch, Tampa Bay used five pitchers and limited Baltimore to two hits en route to victory. The Rays' bullpen retired 17 consecutive batters before Chris Davis earned a two-out walk in the ninth. Chase Whitley (1-0), the fourth Tampa Bay pitcher, threw three perfect innings with three strikeouts to get the Rays into the ninth. Alex Colome got his fifth save. Wade Miley (1-1) struggled with his command but managed to keep the Orioles in the game. Miley allowed two runs on four hits with eight strikeouts and six walks, one shy of a season high.

Cubs 1, Pirates 0

Chicago scored an unearned run in the second inning as Pittsburgh wasted a brilliant performance by Gerrit Cole. Cole pitched seven innings, yielding two hits and striking out eight with no walks. The Cubs' Kyle Hendricks held the Pirates scoreless over six innings, allowing four hits, walking two and striking out three. Koji Uehara, Hector Rondon and Wade Davis completed the shutout with an inning each of shutout relief. Davis recorded his fifth save. Yankees at Red Sox, ppd. The scheduled game between New York and Boston was postponed because of rain. It will be made up as part of a day-night doubleheader on July 16.

Braves at Mets, ppd. The scheduled game between Atlanta and New York was postponed because of rain. It will be made up as part of a doubleheader on September 25. Marlins at Phillies, ppd. The scheduled game between Miami and Philadelphia was postponed because of rain. There was no immediate makeup date announced, but the Marlins return to Philadelphia from August 22-24 and September 12-14.— Reuters

MLB results/standings

LA Dodgers 2, San Francisco 1; Arizona 9, San Diego 3; Toronto 6, St. Louis 5 (11 innings); Chicago White Sox 10, Kansas City 5; Minnesota 8, Texas 1; Milwaukee 9, Cincinnati 1; Detroit 19, Seattle 9; Chicago Cubs 1, Pittsburgh 0; Tampa Bay 2, Baltimore 0; Houston 4, Cleveland 2.

American League

	W	L	PCT	GB
Eastern Division				
Baltimore	13	6	.684	-
NY Yankees	11	7	.611	1.5
Boston	11	8	.579	2
Tampa Bay	11	11	.500	3.5
Toronto	6	14	.300	7.5
Central Division				
Detroit	11	8	.579	-
Chicago White Sox	10	9	.526	1
Cleveland	10	9	.526	1
Minnesota	10	10	.500	1.5
Kansas City	7	13	.350	4.5
Western Division				
Houston	14	6	.700	-
Oakland	10	10	.500	4
LA Angels	10	12	.455	5
Texas	9	12	.429	5.5
Seattle	8	13	.381	6.5

National League

Eastern Division				
Washington	14	6	.700	-
Miami	10	8	.556	3
Philadelphia	9	9	.500	4
NY Mets	8	11	.421	5.5
Atlanta	6	12	.333	7
Central Division				
Chicago Cubs	12	8	.600	-
Milwaukee	11	11	.500	2
Cincinnati	10	11	.476	2.5
St. Louis	9	11	.450	3
Pittsburgh	8	12	.400	4
Western Division				
Colorado	14	7	.667	-
Arizona	14	8	.636	0.5
LA Dodgers	10	11	.476	4
San Diego	8	14	.364	6.5
San Francisco	7	14	.333	7

ANAHEIM: Kole Calhoun #56 of the Los Angeles Angels gets douced with a cooler ice water after he singled in the game winning run in the eleventh inning against the Oakland Athletics at Angel Stadium of Anaheim on April 25, 2017. — AFP

MOTOR RACING

Vettel leads the Red revival to Russia

SOCHI: Formula One Champions Mercedes have led every lap of every Russian Grand Prix since the race made its debut around Sochi's Olympic Park in 2014 but Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel will aim to break that streak this weekend. The four times world champion is enjoying his best start to a season since he was at Red Bull in 2011, leading Lewis Hamilton by seven points after two wins and a second place from the first three races. Another win, at the street circuit where the German finished second in 2015, would signal Ferrari's best opening four races since 2008.

Sebastian Vettel

"Things start to click and hopefully that sort of success now in the first couple of races helps us to build up some sort of momentum that maybe these guys (Mercedes) had in the past," said Vettel after winning in Bahrain on April 16. Hamilton, presented with the winner's trophy by Russian president Vladimir Putin in 2014 and 2015 before now-retired Mercedes team mate and champion Nico Rosberg won from pole position last year, felt the pain in Bahrain. "We're going to push hard together, re-gather as a team and come back fighting," he said after collecting a time penalty and finishing second.

Mercedes, who still look faster over a single lap in qualifying, have done plenty of homework since then but recognize they have a battle on their hands. "In this season with these new regulations, you can't take anything for granted," said team boss Toto Wolff. "The trophies of previous years don't guarantee that we'll be winning in Russia when you have a very fierce competitor like we do in Ferrari. We'll take it one step at a time..." Hamilton saw team mate Valtteri Bottas take a career first pole position in Bahrain and the Finn has a good track record in Sochi too, setting aside a last lap collision with Ferrari's Kimi Raikkonen in 2015 while battling for third place.

Bottas set the first fastest lap of his career there in 2014, on his way to third place, and it is a layout that he likes. "I have always been comfortable there so we will see. It's a completely different type of track again, completely different kind of temperatures, different asphalt so many different things. We'll see," he said. Red Bull, the only team to beat Mercedes last season, have yet to reach the podium in Sochi but both Australian Daniel Ricciardo and Dutch teenager Max Verstappen are hoping for more excitement this time with cars loading more G-forces than previously.

"I expect this year for the track to be grippy and with these cars it should be quite fast," said Ricciardo. "I would say it's going to be more enjoyable than it has been so I'm looking forward to that." Behind them, Force India's Sergio Perez is chasing his 14th successive scoring finish while Sauber and McLaren have yet to open their accounts for the season. Toro Rosso's Spanish driver Carlos Sainz has a three-place grid penalty for his Bahrain collision with Williams' Canadian rookie Lance Stroll, who has yet to see the chequered flag.— Reuters

OLYMPICS

Bitter rift rocks AOC; Coates fights for job

SYDNEY: Powerful Australian Olympic Committee head John Coates is facing a bitter campaign to oust him after 27 years, with his media chief stepping down yesterday amid bullying claims rocking the organization. Coates, also International Olympic Committee vice-president, has never been challenged before but Olympic hockey gold medalist and businesswoman Danni Roche now wants his job, and reportedly has significant backing. She claims the administration is dictatorial and bloated and plans to cut costs and redirect money to athletes and underfunded sports in a shake-up of AOC culture. One contentious point is the more than Aus$700,000 (US$526,000) annual salary of a man seen as one of the most powerful figures in world sport, courtesy of being IOC vice-president and chairman of the co-ordination committee of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. Roche, 47, has pledged to slash the salary to Aus$100,000 if she gets the job.

A secret ballot of summer and winter sports representatives will take place on May 6 for a new four-year term for the presidency, vice-presidency and board. As the deadline looms, allegations of bullying have been splashed across Australia's front pages, mostly linked to Coates' right-hand man and media chief Mike Tancred as the AOC faces rare public scrutiny. One of the claims came from former AOC chief executive Fiona de Jong, who alleged Tancred issued a "highly detailed and personal threat" against her. Tancred faced new allegations published by Fairfax Media on Wednesday that he harassed another former staffer for taking two days off during the Beijing Olympics in 2008 due to a miscarriage.

'Vindictive' campaign

He has denied any wrongdoing but in a statement the AOC said Tancred was "standing down from (his) position of AOC director of media and communications pending the outcome of any investigation of the complaint made against (him) by Fiona de Jong". In a further attempt to get on top of the growing crisis, Coates called a extraordinary meeting of the executive board on Wednesday evening which announced an independent investigation into the bullying allegations. —AFP

Jason Day

GOLF

Zurich Classic unveils its new team format

LOS ANGELES: The US PGA Tour takes an intriguing twist this week as the Zurich Classic of New Orleans unveils its new two-man team format. Eighty teams, a total of 160 players, will tee it up, with the top-ranked committed players choosing their playing partners from among those who have full PGA Tour status or a sponsor's exemption. The teams include such star duos as Australian Jason Day and American Rickie Fowler-the last two winners of the US PGA Tour's Players Championship and the Olympic gold and silver medalists Justin Rose and Henrik Stenson.

"I've loved being a part of team events throughout my amateur, collegiate and now professional career," Rickie Fowler said. "I'm so excited that the Tour and Zurich are making this part of our schedule and can't wait to tee it up." The event also offers a possible foreshadowing of the Presidents Cup in the team of South Africans Branden Grace and Louis Oosthuizen and the Japanese duo of Hideki Matsuyama and Hideto Tanihara.

In the last Presidents Cup pitting US stars against the International team in 2015, Grace and Oosthuizen were better than all the US team could throw at them in the foursomes and four-ball formats that will be used this week at TPC Louisiana. Rose and Stenson have an impressive Ryder Cup track record together. They won all three matches they played together in the 2014 Ryder Cup at Gleneagles. Rose is also a proven winner in Louisiana, where he lifted the title as an individual in 2015. Rose called the team format "incredibly exciting". "Henrik and I are very excited to tee it up together and hopefully we can continue our longstanding chemistry and success in team formats." The tournament will mark the first time since 1981 that a regular US PGA Tour event will feature players competing in teams. Thursday and Saturday will feature alternate shot matches and Friday and Sunday will feature a best ball format. FedEx Cup points toward the US tour's playoffs and prizemoney are up for grabs and will be split between teammates.— AFP

Wanda Group to stage China's first international marathon

BEIJING: Wanda Group said yesterday it would stage several top-level marathons in Asia, including China's first international event, as part of its latest investment in sport. A signing ceremony between the Chinese group and Abbott World Marathon Majors (WMM) took place in Beijing. Wanda, headed by one of China's richest men, Wang Jianlin, is a commercial property developer that has diversified recently into entertainment and sports, partly as a buffer against real estate volatility.

"The fact that marathons are so popular in China is proof that Chinese people are getting richer," Wang told the ceremony. "Once you have enough to eat, you feel like running." Wanda plans to inaugurate the China World Marathon Major in two or three years, he added. Many Chinese cities have hosted marathons in recent years, but none attracted significant numbers of international participants. WMM is the world's largest marathon series, similar to the Grand Slam in tennis. It oversees high-profile races such as the Boston Marathon and the Olympic Games Marathon.

The financial terms of the agreement between Wanda and WMM are unclear. Wanda has agree to stage three WMM races in the Asia-Pacific in the coming decade including one in China, which will be the first time a WMM race has been held in a developing country. Wanda bought AMC Entertainment Holdings-owner of US-based cinema chain AMC Theatres-for $2.6 billion in 2012. Last year it acquired Legendary Entertainment, makers of the recent "Batman" trilogy and "Jurassic World", for $3.5 billion. In 2015 the company spent 45 million euros ($48 million) to acquire 20 percent of Atletico Madrid football club. — AFP

Kuwait National Ice Hockey team win Challenge Cup

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Ice Hockey team won the 2017 Ice Hockey Challenge Cup of Asia after beating Oman 13-0 during the final match Tuesday night. Kuwait players displayed very strong performance during the first and second round as they scored 5 goals in each period of the game. Three goals were then scored in the final period. India was second after beating Macao 7-3. Deputy Director General of Public Authority for Sports (PAS) Dr Humoud Fulaiteh who represented Commerce and Industry Minister and Acting State Minister for Youth Affairs Khalid Al-Roudhan distributed medals and prizes to the winning teams. Kuwait Winter Sports Club President Fuhaid Al-Ajmi lauded the players performance. Al-Ajmi appreciated the support of Minister Al-Roudhan and PAS who had a good contribution in making the event a success. He also thanked the international Ice Hockey Federation for its support.

Nadal cruises in Barcelona, Murray gets walkover

French Open prize money up 12% to 36 million euros

BARCELONA: Rafael Nadal of Spain prepares to serve to Rogerio Dutra Silva of Brazil during the Barcelona Open Tennis Tournament in Barcelona yesterday. —AP

BARCELONA: Rafael Nadal began his quest for a 10th Barcelona Open title in commanding fashion, whilst Andy Murray moved into the last 16 without hitting a ball yesterday. Fresh from winning a record 50th clay court title at the Monte Carlo Masters on Sunday, Nadal swept aside Brazilian Rogerio Dutra Silva 6-1, 6-2 in his first appearance on the newly-baptized Rafael Nadal court. "An honor to see this," Nadal tweeted before the match on a rain-interrupted day in the Catalan capital alongside a picture of the court's new title.

Nadal will face South African Kevin Anderson today. Murray had an even easier route into the next round as Bernard Tomic pulled out of their second-round clash with a back injury. The world number one was a late entry into the draw after suffering a shock defeat in Monte Carlo to Albert Ramos-Vinolas last week as he seeks time on court after recently returning from an elbow injury. However, the Scot will have to wait until today to begin his campaign against Feliciano Lopez, who eased past fellow Spaniard Albert Montanes 6-2, 6-2. Fifth seed David Goffin, who fell to Nadal in the semi-finals in Monte Carlo last week, remained on course for another last-four meeting with the 14-time Grand Slam champion after a 7-5, 6-0 win over Georgia's Nikoloz Basilashvili.

French Open prize up

Meanwhile, the prize money at the French Open, which starts next month, will be up 12 percent on last year, tournament director Guy Forget said yesterday. But the sum handed out to the winner will rise by only five percent from 2.0 to 2.1 million euros ($2.18-2.29 million). A first-round loser, on the other hand, stands to receive an increase of almost 17 percent from 30,000 to 35,000 euros. But the biggest winners will be those coming through qualifying, where prize money will jump around 33 percent, Forget said. "We wanted to put the emphasis on qualification because the gap between the top positions and those trying to live off tennis is getting bigger and bigger," said Forget. The total pot is up from 32 to 36 million euros.—Agencies

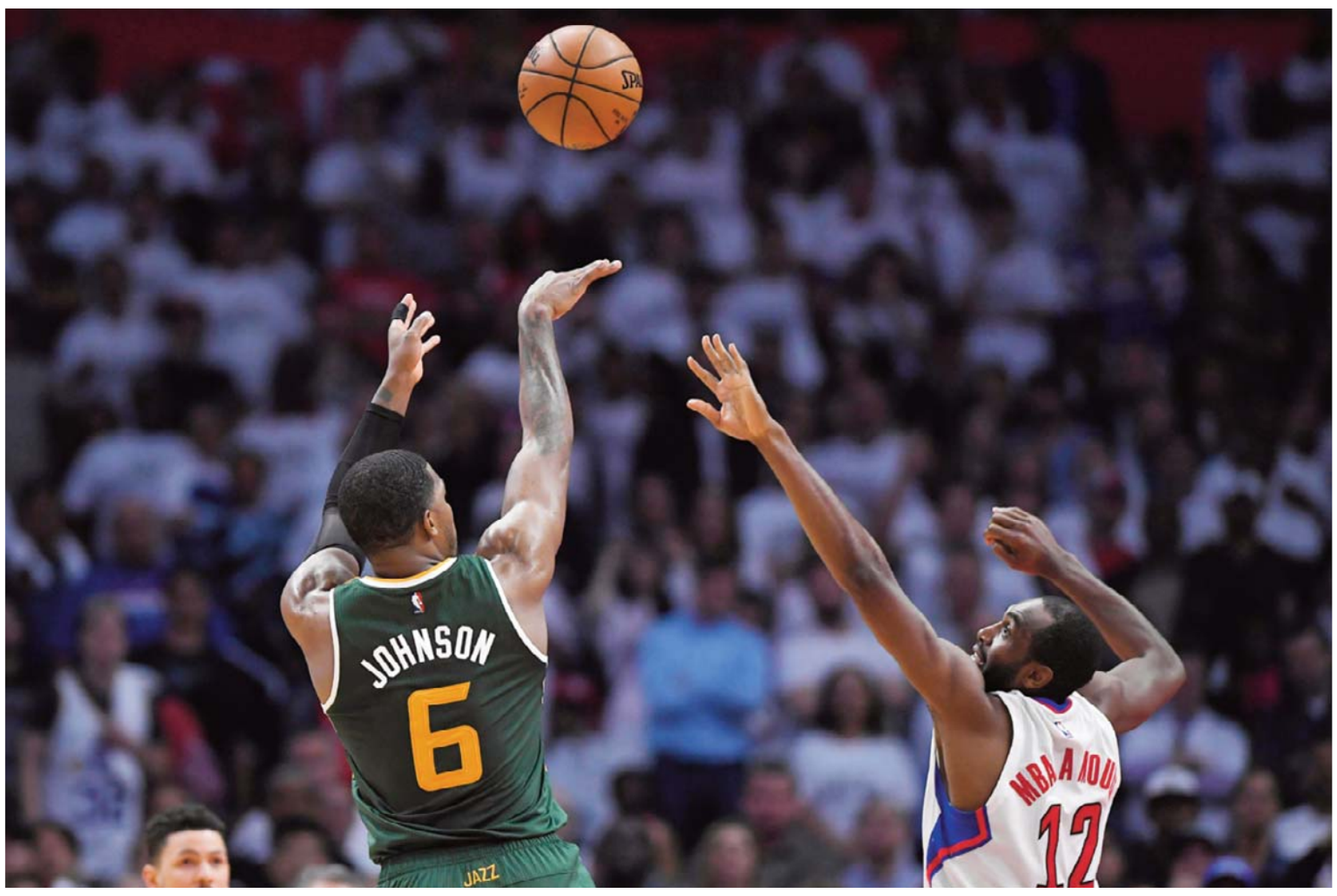
Henman: Nastase slur 'indefensible'

HONG KONG: Former British number one Tim Henman blasted tennis great Ilie Nastase Wednesday, saying his racial slur against Serena Williams was "indefensible". The 70-year-old Romanian Fed Cup captain has been suspended by the International Tennis Federation over his controversial comments about Williams' unborn baby, as well as abusive behavior during a tie between Romania and Britain. "I think it's indefensible really... but there's an investigation going on and I guess we'll just have to see what happens there," said the former world number four. Nastase was overheard by a journalist on Friday commenting on Williams' unborn child-who will be of mixed race as her fiance is white-saying: "Let's see what colour it has. Chocolate with milk?"

A day later the former world number one and two-time Grand Slam winner found himself in hot water once again after swearing at the umpire, British captain Anne Keothavong and British number one player Johanna Konta during a Fed Cup match-calling the latter two "fucking bitches". He also reportedly propositioned Keothavong-who is married and pregnant. Speaking at an event to launch grassroots tennis program. "The Road to Wimbledon" on a fittingly wet day in Hong Kong, Henman told AFP it had been a "pretty unfortunate episode for the Fed Cup".

"It's not something that you like to see going on in tennis. It's got no place in society." Henman also said it was "going to be hard" for fellow Briton Andy Murray to keep his world number one status, with the likely return of Roger Federer at next month's Roland Garros after a break of nearly two months from the sport. "He's had such an incredible end to last year and I think he's probably suffering a little from that, obviously with the shingles and I think his body didn't really have enough time to recover," Henman said. "He's number one in the rankings now but how long he can hold onto that? We'll have to wait and see."

Describing Nadal as "the best clay court player in history", he said: "I'd go with Rafael (to win)." "In recent years he hasn't quite played his best but certainly the way he's played in the early part of this year coming onto clay... totally dominating Monte Carlo and winning another Masters series. I definitely think he's the favorite." Henman was also full of praise for Federer, who won the Australian Open in January aged 35, saying: "I don't know who's writing his scripts but they're certainly good ones." "It's an incredible story for both guys (Federer and Nadal). It's a little bit of a flashback from four or five years ago when they were the two dominant players and I think it's so exciting for the game."— AFP



BARCELONA: Rafael Nadal of Spain prepares to serve to Rogerio Dutra Silva of Brazil during the Barcelona Open Tennis Tournament in Barcelona yesterday. — AP

TENNIS

Serena to be back on the court after baby

VANCOUVER: Superstar athlete Serena Williams late Tuesday promised she would be back on the court after becoming a mom, with her baby hopefully cheering her on. Williams spoke playfully and candidly about family, competition, and her accidently unveiled pregnancy during an on-stage chat with journalist Gayle King at the TED Conference in Vancouver. Williams said she had made a practice of taking a photo of herself each week, to document the progress of her pregnancy, when she accidentally posted a picture of herself in a swimsuit on social media.

She had shared the news with only a few people until the now widely seen image. "You know how social media is; you press the wrong button and there it is," Williams said with a laugh. "I had been so good about it and this one time I slipped." Williams said she learned she was pregnant just two days before the Australian Open, which she went on to win. She told of being nervous about playing, uncertain whether it would be too dangerous for her or the baby. Williams said she played differently, shutting out fatigue and stress.

Everyone expected her to win the tournament, and few knew she was a mom-to-be. "I had to take any negative emotions, bottle them up and figure out what the next step was," Williams said. She won her record-setting 23rd Grand Slam title at the Australian Open in January-where she beat her elder sister Venus in the final. "Playing Venus is like playing myself; she is my toughest opponent," Williams said. "On the court, we are mortal enemies, but the moment we shake hands we are best friends again. It might be a day later for me if I lose." In champion form, she admitted to loathing losing and loving victory. But, if you do lose, learn from it and improve don't make the same mistakes in the future, she advised.

Kelly Bush Novak, Williams' publicist, had said this week that the US star "looks forward to returning in 2018" and that was echoed by her coach Patrick Mouratoglou. Williams is due to give birth in September, the month she turns 36 years old. "I definitely plan on coming back," Williams said of her tennis future. "My baby is going to be in the stands, hopefully cheering for me and not crying too much." In December, Williams announced her engagement to tech entrepreneur Alexis Ohanian and will not play again this year. She said that the next chapter in her life will include her baby, staying fit, playing tennis and working on her fashion line.— AFP

Serena Williams covers her face after defeating her sister, Venus, in the women's singles final at the Australian Open tennis championships in this file photo. A spokeswoman for Williams says the tennis star is pregnant.— AP

Rockets oust Westbrook's Thunder from NBA playoffs

LOS ANGELES: James Harden scored 34 points as the Houston Rockets withstood a furious effort from Oklahoma City star Russell Westbrook to oust the Thunder from the NBA playoffs on Tuesday. The Rockets beat the Thunder 105-99 to win their best-of-seven Western Conference first-round series four games to one.Rockets reserve Lou Williams scored 10 of his 22 points early in the fourth quarter as the Rockets responded to a sensational third quarter from Westbrook, who carried his team to a 77-72 lead going into the final period. Westbrook scored 10 straight points in one stretch and finished with 20 points, five rebounds and three assists in the third.

But Williams opened the fourth with two free throws and added three more from the line along with a three-pointer as the Rockets regained the advantage with Westbrook on the bench - and they held on even after Westbrook re-entered the game as the Thunder missed a string of shots. Westbrook finished with 47 points, 11 rebounds and nine assists, but connected on just two of his 11 shots in the final period. No other Thunder player scored more than 11 points, while Harden had scoring support not only from Williams but also from the 15 points from guard Patrick Beverly and 14 from Brazilian reserve Nene. In the second round the Rockets will face either the San Antonio Spurs or Memphis Grizzlies.

Spurs 116, Grizzlies 103

Kawhi Leonard scored 28 points, Patty Mills added 20 and Tony Parker 16 as San Antonio took a 3-2 lead on Memphis in their Western Conference first-round playoff series. Mills, the backup point guard, made five 3-pointers-four in the fourth quarter-while finishing with a career best for scoring in the playoffs. LaMarcus Aldridge added 12 points and a game-high nine rebounds for the Spurs. Mike Conley scored 17 of his 26 points in the third quarter for Memphis, which trailed by 18 late in the third quarter before going on a 17-3 run. Marc Gasol added 17 points for the Grizzlies.

Jazz 96, Clippers 92

Gordon Hayward scored 27 points and grabbed eight rebounds, and Utah held off Los Angeles to take a 3-2 lead in their Western Conference playoffs series. Rodney Hood scored 16 points, and Joe Johnson delivered nine of his 14 points in the fourth quarter for Utah. Rudy Gobert added 11 points and 11 rebounds for the Jazz, who can clinch the series with a win in Game 6 on Friday in Salt Lake City. Chris Paul scored 28 points and handed out nine assists for the Clippers, who played their second game without forward Blake Griffin, sidelined for the rest of the postseason with a plantar plate injury to his right big toe. JJ Redick contributed 26 points, and DeAndre Jordan collected 14 points and 12 boards.— Agencies

Sharapova returns in grand style

STUTTGART: Maria Sharapova marked her return from a 15-month doping ban yesterday with a rusty 7-5, 6-3 win over Roberta Vinci in Stuttgart, describing victory as the "best feeling in the world". Sharapova, the former world number one and five-time Grand Slam champion, brushed off a nervous start to eventually claim a convincing win on her controversial comeback having tested positive for meldonium at the 2016 Australian Open.

"It's the best feeling in the world to walk out (on court), it's been a stage of mine since I was a young girl and it was very special," said Sharapova who celebrated her win with a succession of double fist pumps and a broad smile before blowing kisses to all corners of the Porsche Arena. "I have been waiting for this a long time." Sharapova was given a wildcard to play in Stuttgart, where she has been champion three times, a move which drew a barrage of criticism from rivals who believed she was receiving preferential treatment.

She fired 39 winners and 11 aces past 34-year-old Vinci, one of many to have voiced her concerns over the Russian benefitting from wildcards. After receiving warm applause from the crowd, which included one fan who held up a Russian flag bearing the words 'Welcome back Maria', Sharapova, dressed in an orange top and lilac-colored dress, initially struggled. She quickly found herself 2-0 down before she broke back to level at 2-0. As was to be expected after her long break, Sharapova labored to find her shots and Vinci profited from several mistakes.

But the 30-year-old Russian started to move her Italian opponent around the court and found her range with a pair of aces. Sharapova finally broke the Italian in the 11th game and then held her service, converting her second set point in exactly an hour. Vinci had lost to Sharapova in both their previous meetings and the Italian trailed from 2-0 down in the second set yesterday. Sharapova quickly moved to 5-3 ahead up with an ace and extended her domination in the following game, racing into a 40-0 lead and converted her first match point for victory in one hour, 45 minutes.

'AT MY BEST'

"I've been doing this for so long and this was my first match for a while, so when you are in the moment, you block everything else out," said Sharapova. "I'm competitive by nature, even when things aren't working out. "That's when I am at my best, when I forget about everything, just be me and just compete." Sharapova will now play fellow Russian Ekaterina Makarova in Thursday's second-round. "It's going to be tough, but every match I play now is important for me," she said.

"It's important to just play, it's a journey and it officially starts for me today and I am looking forward to playing as many matches as I can." Sharapova has also been granted wildcards into the Madrid and Rome tournaments and she will need similar generosity from Roland Garros if she is to make the main draw of the French Open, where she is a two-time champion. Yesterday, the French Tennis Federation repeated that they will not make a decision until next month.

"There is a date which has been fixed. There is no reason to make an exception for Maria Sharapova," said FFT president Bernard Guidicelli."We will meet with the tournament director Guy Forget on May 15. The decision will be taken and communicated at 1900 (1700GMT) on Facebook on May 16. "I know that there is strong expectation from the media and fans but we are not casting. This is not a rock-opera."

With the likes of Serena Williams, Victoria Azarenka and Petra Kvitova sidelined-and potential heir Eugenie Bouchard struggling-women's tennis needs pulling power and Sharapova ticks all the boxes for event organizers. —AFP

STUTTGART: Russia's Maria Sharapova serves to Italy's Roberta Vinci in their first round match at the WTA tennis Grand Prix in Stuttgart, southwestern Germany yesterday. — AFP

SHANGHAI: Shanghai SIPG's Brazilian forward Hulk (left) and FC Seoul's Brazil forward Maurinho vie for the ball during the AFC Asian Champions League group match between the Shanghai SIPG and South Korea's FC Seoul yesterday. — AFP

Hulk's rocket fires SIPG into Asia's last 16

HONG KONG: Shanghai SIPG came from behind to hand FC Seoul a 4-2 defeat and join Japan's Urawa Red Diamonds in the knockout phase of the Asian Champions League yesterday. Brazilian striker Hulk cancelled out Maurinho's opener for the South Korean side with a powerful long-range strike before goals from Zheng Wei and Wu Lei gave SIPG a two-goal cushion at halftime.

Park Chu-young reduced the deficit for FC Seoul before Oscar scored SIPG's fourth as Andre Villas-Boas' team guaranteed themselves a top-two finish in Group F alongside Urawa. "Even though we conceded at the beginning, we stayed composed and managed to come back," said the Portuguese coach. "Individually and as a team we were very good. Every player gave everything they had, and we nailed down a qualifying spot from a difficult group."

Urawa comfortably dismissed 2014 champions Western Sydney Wanderers, with the Japanese side notching up a 6-1 win in which Rafael Silva scored twice as the J League club also earned a berth in the last 16. Mihailo Petrovic's team are joined in the next round by Thailand's Muangthong United, who defeated Brisbane Roar in Group E thanks to goals from former Newcastle United striker Xisco Jimenez, Chanathip Songkrasin and Teerasil Dangda while Kashima Antlers moved a step closer to advancing with a 4-0 win over former winners Ulsan Hyundai.

Also progressing to the knockout rounds are last year's beaten finalists Al Ain from the United Arab Emirates, who defeated Iran's Zobahan to ensure they cannot finish outside the top two in Group C. Bunyodkor's surprise 2-0 win over Al Ahli, meanwhile, stalled the Saudi Arabian club's hopes of progress from the same group for another fortnight. A 3-1 win over Al Jazira of the UAE secured Qatar's Lekhwiya a spot in the next round, with Esteghlal Khouzestan and Al Fateh from Saudi Arabia fighting for second place in Group B after their 1-1 draw. Two-time champions Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia are also through following their 0-0 draw with Persepolis, and the Iranians remain in the hunt for Group D's second berth in the last 16 after Al Wahda thrashed Qatar's Al Rayyan 5-1.

Luiz Felipe Scolari's Guangzhou Evergrande picked up only their second win of the group stages on Tuesday evening as the Chinese Super League champions demolished Hong Kong's Eastern 6-0, with former Tottenham Hotspur midfielder Paulinho scoring twice. Guangzhou lead Group G by a point from Suwon Bluewings of South Korea, who were defeated 1-0 by Kawasaki Frontale as the Japanese side won their first game of the campaign. In Group A, three points covers the four teams with one match remaining after Al Ahli of the UAE were held to a 1-1 draw by Iran's Esteghlal and Saudi Arabia's Al Taawoun and Lokomotiv Tashkent played out an extraordinary 4-4 draw.— Reuters

Indonesia issues work permits for footballers after Essien debacle

JAKARTA: Indonesia's football association pledged yesterday that work permits for foreigners would be issued faster after high-profile moves by former English Premier League stars Michael Essien and Carlton Cole were almost scuppered by red tape. The two were signed with great fanfare last month by Persib Bandung, one of the country's best clubs, in a boost for Indonesian football as it seeks to bounce back from a FIFA suspension and launch a new league.

But they were banned from playing last week just days after making their debuts in Liga 1's first season when authorities discovered they did not have work permits required by foreigners in Indonesia. The ban was short-lived-they were granted permits a few days later and played at the weekend, with Essien immediately making his mark by scoring with a header in a 2-2 draw against PS TNI. However the debacle proved embarrassing for Indonesian football officials after years of problems, from the creation of a rebel association to foreign players dying after going unpaid and being unable to afford medical care.

The football association, known as the PSSI, said they had worked with the government to speed up the permit-issuing process in the latest case, and pledged to ensure it was fast in future. "In the future we will work on the permits as soon as possible," Edy Rahmayadi, chairman of the football association, known as the PSSI said. He said the body would work with clubs when they signed players from overseas, as well as the government, to guarantee the process is smooth. "The clubs have to ensure proper planning from an early stage," added association deputy chairman Joko Driyono.

Work permits for foreigners in Indonesia typically take around a month to process. Seventy-four foreigners currently work in Indonesia's football industry as players or coachers, according to Driyono. Cole, who is English, used to play for Chelsea and West Ham. Indonesia's new top-flight Liga 1 replaces an old top-level league, which was halted in 2015 due to a row between the government and the PSSI which led FIFA to ban the country from playing internationally for a year. The new league and big-name signings are a major boost for football in Southeast Asia's biggest nation.— AFP

DOHA: Indian goalkeeper Paul Subrata (right) poses for a photograph alongside teammates in this file photo ahead of their 2011 Asian Cup group C football match against Bahrain at the Al-Sadd Stadium in the Qatari capital Doha. — AFP

'Indian Spiderman' facing 4-year ban

NEW DELHI: Indian goalkeeping great Subrata Paul said he was "speechless" yesterday after he failed a drugs test and was warned he could face a four-year ban. The "Indian Spiderman", 30, tested positive to a banned substance after a random test by the National Anti-Doping Authority in Mumbai last month. The goalkeeper, capped 64 times by his country, has denied any wrongdoing, saying he could have ingested terbutaline by accident after taking cold and flu medication.

The World Anti-Doping Agency prohibits the use of terbutaline, used in the relief of asthma symptoms. "He has tested positive and the punishment is up to four years," Subrata Dutta, senior vice-president of the All India Football Federation said. "He can appeal though and if his appeal is granted then it can be reduced to two years. If he can prove that it was totally unintentional, he didn't take the drug to enhance his performance, then he can be totally excused." Under international rules, Paul, who plays for the Indian league club DSK Shivajians, has the right to request a second test to challenge the findings. "Nothing to say, I am speechless. I never cheated and will never do it, football is my life," he told AFP.

"I had a bit of cough and cold and took some medicines for it. I have already spoken to my doctor and will chalk out my defense." Paul, from the eastern state of West Bengal, last played for India in 2015, when he moved aside for Gurpreet Singh Sandhu. In 2004, Paul was provisionally suspended by the AIFF after a collision with Dempo's Brazilian striker Cristiano Junior, who died shortly after scoring. He helped India win the 2008 AFC Challenge Cup and reach for the Asian Cup in 2011, where they ended a 27-year absence from the region's top competition.—AFP

The 'Battle of Brisbane', Pacquiao meets Horn

BRISBANE: Manny Pacquiao has had bigger, more significant fights while compiling world titles in an unprecedented eight divisions. The 38-year-old senator from the Philippines may not have fought in front of a bigger crowd, though, than what promoters are predicting for Pacquiao's "Battle of Brisbane" on July 2 against Jeff Horn. The on-again-off-again fight was confirmed after a rich deal for a Pacquiao-Amir Khan bout in the Middle East fell through.

Pacquiao and Horn met for the first time yesterday at the venue where local promoters are expecting a crowd of 55,000 for the WBO welterweight world title bout. That, at least according to veteran American promoter Bob Arum, would beat Pacquiao's biggest live crowd to date - 50,994 at Cowboys Stadium in Texas Suncorp Stadium, usually the home ground for the Brisbane Broncos in Australia's National Rugby League and the annual State-of-Origin rugby league grudge match, has witnessed pretty of brawls, but none of them sanctioned like this one.

Pacquiao is putting his WBO title on the line against Horn, a trained teacher who took up boxing because he was bullied at high school, had his first professional bout in 2013, and is 16-0-1. "If you ask inside my heart, I have confidence to win the fight, but I'm not taking it lightly," said Pacquiao, who has 11 major world titles and has a record of 59-6-2, with 38 knockouts. "I'm not underestimating him."

Since losing to Floyd Mayweather in Las Vegas in April, 2015, a fight which generated a world record 4.4 million pay-per-view buys, Pacquiao has had two fights - wins over Tim Bradley and Jessie Vargas on either side of a brief retirement. The win over Vargas in November earned Pacquiao his third reign as the WBO welterweight champion. When Pacquiao arrived in Australia, he said he didn't know a lot about Horn, but knew the 29 year-old Australian had the kind of style that would make for an entertaining fight. "I want an opponent that wants to fight toe-to-toe, throwing a lot of punches, aggressive," Pacquiao said. "My style is to throw a lot of punches and I believe that will be very effective for Jeff Horn's style. That's why I accepted this fight.

Arum, who sat beside Pacquiao at the news conference yesterday and first saw Horn fight in New Zealand last November, compared the bout with a young lion lying in wait to challenge on old one. "This fight certainly has that theme," he said. The packed news conference was a new experience for Horn, who says he's raw compared with Pacquiao but raring to go. "He's done so much. He's fought a lot of champions," Horn said. But, "If he underestimates me, he's going to know about it July 2. It's going to be a very tough fight - he's going to see that."— AP

BRISBANE: World Boxing Organization (WBO) welterweight defending champion Manny Pacquiao (left) of the Philippines poses for pictures with Australian contender Jeff Horn during a promotional press conference at Suncorp Stadium in Brisbane yesterday. —AFP

Angers reach 'dream' Cup final in 60 years

ANGERS: Angers returned to the French Cup final for the first time since their only other appearance 60 years ago with a 2-0 semi-final victory over Guingamp on Tuesday. "We had said that getting to the final would be a dream-the key word was turning that into a reality, and we did it with all the emotion and joy that produces," said Angers coach Stephane Moulin. "And I told the lads tonight that they knew how to be happy and render others happy-that's the most wonderful thing in life. "We've wiped out 60 years absence from the French Cup final-that's pretty exceptional." Thomas Mangani opened the scoring for the hosts at a packed out Raymond Kopa stadium seven minutes before half-time.

Winners in 2009 and 2014, Guingamp were offered a lifeline two minutes from time when Cheikh Ndoye was controversially penalized for a non-existant handball in the area. But goalkeeper Alexandre Letellier saved Jimmy Briand's penalty and Karl Toko Ekambi sealed the win in injury time. After losing 6-3 to Toulouse in the 1957 final, Angers will now, finally, get a second bite at the cherry against either Paris Saint-Germain or Monaco, who faces off at the Parc des Princes yesterday.— AFP

ANGERS: Angers' players react after wining the French Cup semi-final match between Angers (SCO) and EA Guingamp on April 25, 2017. — AFP

Sunderland's Moyes charged over reporter 'slap' comment

LONDON: Sunderland manager David Moyes has been charged after suggesting to a female reporter she might "get a slap", England's Football Association announced yesterday. Moyes, 54, made the remark, for which he has apologized, to BBC reporter Vicki Sparks following Sunderland's 0-0 draw with Burnley in the Premier League on March 18. "David Moyes has been charged in relation to comments made after the game against Burnley on 18 March 2017," the FA said in a statement.

"It is alleged the Sunderland manager's remarks were improper and/or threatening and/or brought the game into disrepute." Moyes, the former Manchester United manager, has until Wednesday next week to respond to the charge. Should he admit the charge or be found guilty, he is likely to be fined and could be asked to attend an education course. Moyes made his remark at the end of a post-match interview, but the camera was still rolling and footage was published weeks later by a British newspaper.

Having taken exception to one of Sparks's questions, Moyes said: "You were just getting a wee bit naughty at the end there, so just watch yourself. You still might get a slap, even though you're a woman. "Careful the next time you come in." Moyes later apologised in a phone call to Sparks, who did not make a complaint. "In the heat of the moment, I made a mistake in my comments to a BBC reporter, which I profoundly regret. I was disappointed with myself for it," Moyes said. "I subsequently phoned the reporter and apologized, which she accepted. It's not my character, it's not my type, as most people know and once again I apologize for it." Sunderland are currently 12 points adrift of safety at the foot of the table and seemingly doomed to relegation.- AFP

Live Matches on TV
(Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Man City v Man United	**22:00**
beIN SPORTS HD 2	

SPANISH LEAGUE

Deportivo Alaves v Eibar	**20:30**
beIN SPORTS HD 4	
Sevilla FC v Celta de Vigo	**21:30**
beIN SPORTS HD 3	
beIN SPORTS HD 1	
Athletic de Bilbao v Real Betis	**22:30**
beIN SPORTS HD 4	

LONDON: Chelseaís Cesar Azpilicueta (right) competes for the ball with Southampton's Dusan Tadic during the English Premier League soccer match between Chelsea and Southampton at Stamford Bridge stadium on Tuesday, April 25, 2017. — AP

Conte lauds Chelsea for passing Saints test

Chelsea 4
Southampton 2

LONDON: Chelsea manager Antonio Conte said his side had taken "a big psychological step" after they defeated Southampton 4-2 to move seven points clear at the Premier League summit. Chelsea's recent 2-0 loss at Manchester United allowed closest rivals Tottenham Hotspur to trim their advantage to four points. But they beat Tottenham 4-2 in the FA Cup semi-finals on Saturday before overcoming Southampton by the same scoreline on Tuesday to turn up the heat on Spurs, who visit Crystal Palace on Wednesday.

"I think we passed a big, big step," Conte told reporters at Stamford Bridge. "A big psychological step after the defeat against United. Because against United we lost three points and then you had to prepare (for) a semi-final against Tottenham. "We reached the final in the FA Cup, which is a great incentive for us. But the other competition, the league, is totally open. "But I think we are ready to fight until the end. Then we must be proud for our job, for what we are doing this season."

Diego Costa was Chelsea's match-winner against Southampton, scoring twice in the second half to take his Premier League tally to 51 goals in 85 appearances and end a seven-game scoring drought."It's normal for the strikers that it is important to score. The goals are their life," said Conte, whose side visit sixth-place Everton on Sunday. "But, for me, I've always said I've been pleased with his commitment, his work for the team. He always worked for the team.

"Sometimes he was unlucky in different circumstances, but I was always confident about him. After the Tottenham game, I said I'm sure he's keeping his goals for the final weeks of the season. "Now he must continue. He's very important for us. His confidence is very important for us. He scored two very beautiful goals, good combination and technique between him and his team-mates." Chelsea took a fifth-minute lead on a chilly evening in west London when Cesc Fabregas's incisive pass found Costa, whose cutback was swept home by Eden Hazard.

COUP DE GRACE

Oriol Romeu, playing against his former club, leveled mid-way through the first half when he stabbed home Manolo Gabbiadini's cross-shot after Chelsea were found wanting at a corner. But Gary Cahill restored Chelsea's lead in first-half stoppage time, bravely heading in N'Golo Kante's deep cross, before Costa took centre-stage in the second half. He made it 3-1 eight minutes in, nodding in Fabregas's cross, and added a late coup de grace by drilling home after exchanging passes with Hazard and substitute Pedro. Ryan Bertrand, another Chelsea old boy, claimed a consolation with a stoppage-time header. Southampton had been beaten 3-0 by Manchester City in their previous game, 10 days prior, and have failed to record a league victory over any of the teams in the top six this season. But manager Claude Puel, whose side remain ninth, drew encouragement from the moments of discomfort the visitors managed to cause Chelsea. "It was a better performance than against Manchester City," said the Frenchman, whose team lost to Manchester United in the League Cup final earlier this year.

"But we conceded the goals in bad moments-after five minutes, just before half-time, just after half-time. This made the difference."Conte explained he had given club captain John Terry a late substitute cameo to "thank" him, following the centre-back's recent announcement that he will leave the club at the season's end. Conte was typically animated on the touchline, at one point kicking a medical bag sitting beside the dug-out after Chelsea left Gabbiadini unmarked at a second-half corner. "In this moment I wanted to kick the ball and I took the bag as a ball," the Italian explained "Sometimes, believe me, I want to play. I want to play, to kick the ball. But I know that if I kick the ball, the referee will probably send me off."—AFP

This Manchester derby is all about points not managers

MANCHESTER: If the first Manchester derby of the season was excessively dominated by the focus on a fascinating coaching rivalry, today's encounter is strictly business. This time, few care about the Pep Guardiola-Jose Mourinho head-to-head records or their previous meetings in Spain's La Liga. The stakes are high - City are fourth in the Premier League, just a point ahead of United after the same number of games. Both clubs are desperate to ensure a top-four finish and Champions League football next season and today's clash at the Etihad Stadium will be decisive in that contest. Still, given their stature in the game, it is impossible for the two coaches to be completely out of the picture.

Guardiola's first campaign at Manchester City risks ending in the worst Premier League finish for the club in seven seasons. City have not ended a campaign out of the top four since coming fifth in 2011 under Roberto Mancini. Sunday's extra-time defeat by Arsenal in the FA Cup semi-final saw the last chance of silverware disappear after City's loss to Monaco in the Champions League last 16. Former Barcelona and Bayern Munich coach Guardiola has never endured a trophy-less season as a coach and, while City's hierarchy will write this year off as a transitional phase, there will still be some surprise that he has achieved less than his predecessor Manuel Pellegrini.

UNITED PROGRESS

United, who lost 2-1 in the first league meeting with City, have steadily progressed under Mourinho. They have already lifted the League Cup and are 23 league games unbeaten while having a chance of more silverware - and a Champions League place - through the Europa League where they face Celta Vigo in the semi-finals. While United have lost top scorer Zlatan Ibrahimovic and key defender Marcos Rojo to long-term knee injuries, there is a real mood of optimism at Old Trafford. "It's going to be the game of the season," said United's Spanish midfielder Ander Herrera. "We are in a very good moment, on a very good run and we respect them, but we are doing a lot of good things and we have to show it today," he said.

The long season fighting on several fronts has taken its toll on both teams however. As well as Ibrahimovic and Rojo, Mourinho, who has been rotating his squad, must wait to see if Paul Pogba is fit after he was substituted late in Sunday's 2-0 win at Burnley. Central defenders Phil Jones and Chris Smalling and midfielder Juan Mata are also on the injured list. For City, leading scorer Sergio Aguero and playmaker David Silva are battling to be fit while Brazilian striker Gabriel Jesus could return after a long-term injury.— Reuters

A combination of file pictures shows Manchester City's Spanish manager Pep Guardiola (left) and Manchester United's Portuguese manager Jose Mourinho at Old Trafford in Manchester. Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho has an opportunity to score a seismic victory over his old foe Pep Guardiola when his side visit misfiring Manchester City today. — AFP

Mourinho shuns Ibrahimovic talk

MANCHESTER: Jose Mourinho refused to discuss Zlatan Ibrahimovic's Manchester United future yesterday in the wake of the Swedish striker's season-ending knee ligament injury. Ibrahimovic, 35, suffered a serious knee injury in last week's Europa League victory over Anderlecht and was due to undergo surgery in the United States this week. United and Ibrahimovic had been in talks over extending his one-year contract, which expires at the end of the season, but Mourinho would not entertain questions on the player's future. "I don't know, I don't want to know. I'm not interested in it, I don't care about it," said the United manager, who also revealed Paul Pogba will miss Thursday's derby at Manchester City.

"I just want the difficult surgery to go and of course we think he's in fabulous hands and (for him to) recover from the injury to prepare himself mentally for the next step. "And I think the next step will always be something he really wants, which is what I was saying before the injury in the period of doubts over his future. "He's much more important than myself and what I want, it's what he wants. I always want the players to be happy, to choose their future and I think this is what's going to happen. "But now, before such an important surgery, I think it's a waste of time to speak about what next."

Details of Ibrahimovic's injury have been scarce, with United thus far refusing to even specify exactly the nature of the ligament damage.Early outside estimates have suggested he will be sidelined for nine to 12 months. Ibrahimovic himself has already publicly stated his determination to play again, posting a photograph on social media within days of the injury to proclaim he would fight back. It is a prediction with which Mourinho is in wholehearted agreement, even if Ibrahimovic-who played under the Portuguese at Inter Milan-may have played his last game for United.

MAJOR PROBLEMS IN DEFENSE

"The future is a big surgery, a long period of recovery," Mourinho told reporters at United's Carrington training base west of Manchester. "But the future is also in the hands of a very strong guy-mentally very, very strong-who wrote immediately on his social media that he will stop when he wants, not when people think.

"So it looks to me he will not give up and will fight and I'm really pleased with that because that's the Zlatan I know."He fought all his life. That's what I told him: 'You fought all your life since you were born, I don't see a reason for not fighting now.'" Marcos Rojo also sustained a season-ending knee injury against Anderlecht and Pogba has joined Mourinho's growing injury list after picking up a muscular problem. Pogba limped out of Sunday's 2-0 win at Burnley and will miss Thursday's trip to the Etihad Stadium, where victory would take United above City into the Champions League qualifying places. "Paul? No," was Mourinho's response when asked about the France midfielder's chances of playing. Pogba's absence could be a major blow to Mourinho, especially as he still has major problems in defense.—AFP

LONDON: A HM Customs and Revenue officer at West Ham United Football Club in London yesterday. British authorities arrested several men working in professional soccer on suspicion of tax fraud yesterday in a far-reaching case that saw raids in England and France. — AP

UK and France launch a major 'tax fraud' probe

LONDON: British and French authorities launched a major investigation yesterday into a suspected £5 million tax fraud in the football industry, with West Ham United confirmed to have been targeted. Close to 200 tax officials from the two countries swooped on premises on both sides of the Channel in morning raids, arresting several men and seizing financial records. Newcastle United, who this week won promotion to the Premier League, are also thought to have been targeted, but have yet to comment.

"HMRC has arrested several men working within the professional football industry for a suspected £5 million ($6.4 million, 5.9 million euros) income tax and National Insurance fraud," British tax authority HMRC (Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs) said in a statement. "180 HMRC officers have been deployed across the UK and France today. "Investigators have searched a number of premises in the northeast and southeast of England and arrested the men and also seized business records, financial records, computers and mobile phones. "The French authorities are assisting the UK investigation, have made arrests and several locations have been searched in France."

English Premier League club West Ham confirmed they were under investigation. British reports said tax officials had searched West Ham's London Stadium in east London. The Press Association news agency reported that one of the raids was on Newcastle's St James' Park ground in northeast England, with managing director Lee Charnley among those arrested. West Ham, currently 14th in the Premier League table said they were "cooperating fully with HMRC to assist their enquiries". Newcastle are yet to comment, but were thought to be preparing a statement. Both the Premier League and France's Professional Football League declined to comment on the matter when contacted by AFP.

IMAGE RIGHTS

Premier League leaders Chelsea revealed they, too, had been visited by tax officials, but there is not thought to be any allegation of wrongdoing against the club. "In connection with its wider investigation, HMRC has requested certain information which the club will provide," a Chelsea spokesman said. HMRC added: "This criminal investigation sends a clear message that, whoever you are, if you commit tax fraud you can expect to face the consequences. "As this is an ongoing investigation, HMRC is unable to provide any further detail at this time."— AFP

Eintracht Frankfurt into first German Cup final in 11 years

MOENCHENGLADBACH: Eintracht Frankfurt will contest the German Cup final for the first time in 11 years after Branimir Hrgota clinched a 7-6 victory on penalties against former club Borussia Moenchengladbach on Tuesday. The striker has scored only five goals during a lackluster season since signing from 'Gladbach but he found the target when it mattered in the team's biggest game of the season so far. The four-time cup winner could have a chance to avenge its 2006 final loss to Bayern Munich if the German champions overcome Borussia Dortmund in the second semifinal. On a nervy night in Moenchengladbach, Taleb Tawatha's opener was canceled out by home winger Jonas Hofmann's volley in first-half stoppage time and the deadlock couldn't be broken through extra time.— AP

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BARCELONA: FC Barcelona's Gerard Pique (center) kicks the ball during the Spanish La Liga soccer match between FC Barcelona and Osasuna at the Camp Nou stadium yesterday. — AP

Barca thrash Osasuna 7-1; Messi shines

BARCELONA: Lionel Messi rewarded a homage by Barcelona fans with two more goals as they thrashed Osasuna 7-1 to move three points clear of Real Madrid at the top of La Liga. The much-criticized Andre Gomes and Paco Alcacer also bagged doubles, whilst Javier Mascherano scored his first Barca goal in seven years with the club from the penalty spot. Madrid have two games in hand and can move back level on points with victory at Deportivo la Coruna. Osasuna remain rock-bottom and will be relegated if Leganes beat Las Palmas.

Messi's brilliance against Madrid at the weekend El Clasico kept Barca in the title race as he netted his 500th Barca goal with the last kick of the game to hand the Catalans a 3-2 win. A huge "Thanks Leo" banner was raised before kick-off at the Camp Nou, whilst many fans imitated Messi's goal celebration by raising Barca shirts with Messi's name on the back in the 10th minute. The five-time World Player of the Year responded by opening the scoring two minutes later as he pounced on an error in the Osasuna defense to stroll through on goal and lift the ball over the advancing Salvatore Sirigu.Gomes has been the scapegoat for many of Barca's most disappointing defeats this season.

But the Portuguese had arguably his best night in a Barca shirt as he drilled home Ivan Rakitic's cross to make it 2-0 on the half hour. Marc-Andre ter Stegen was Barca's other hero from the weekend with a string of stunning saves. However, the German international was caught out by Roberto Torres's free-kick which brought Osasuna back into the game three minutes into the second half.Barca, though, simply went through the gears with a four-goal burst in 10 devastating minutes. Firstly, Gomes slotted home his second of the night after Gerard Pique's initial effort came back off the post.

Messi then curled in his 49th goal in 47 appearances this season from the edge of the area. And the Argentine instantly made way for 19-year-old Carles Alena to keep him fresh for Saturday's Catalan derby at Espanyol. Alcacer then finished on the stretch for Barca's fifth. And when Denis Suarez was felled in the area seconds later the cry went round the Camp Nou for Mascherano to take the spot-kick. Rakitic obliged by stepping aside to let the Argentine take it and he smashed the ball into the roof of the net for his first goal in 319 Barca appearances. Alcacer rounded off the scoring four minutes from time when he latched onto Suarez's fine through ball to round Sirigu and slot into an empty net.—AFP

RIYADH: Members of a Saudi female soccer team practice at a secret location in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. — AP

Saudi rejects proposal for female sports colleges

DUBAI: A proposal to establish sports education colleges for Saudi women failed to win enough votes in the kingdom's top advisory body, a council member who drafted the plan said yesterday. The proposal on the colleges needed 76 out of 150 votes to pass in the Shura Council, but fell three votes short of that goal. It called for the establishment of colleges that would train Saudi women in how to teach fitness and well-being.

Lina Almaeena, who is one of three council members that submitted the proposal, said 57 members against the measure with the rest abstaining. Some of the kingdom's ultraconservatives shun the concept of women's exercise as "immodest" and say it blurs gender lines. "Obviously there are people who have different schools of thoughts. I don't know what the rational exactly is," Almaeena said, speaking to The Associated Press a day after the proposal failed to pass.

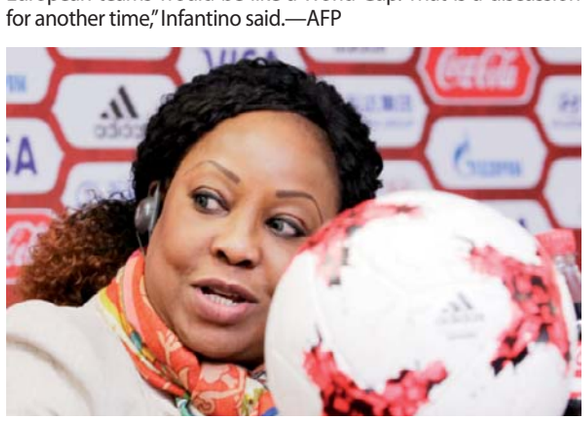
She has long been an advocate for women's access to sports and founded Jeddah United in 2006, the first sports club in Saudi Arabia to include women. Physical education is still not on the curriculum for Saudi girls in public schools, though some private schools offer physical education classes and sports to female students. There are also plans to license dozens of female-only gyms. The kingdom discourages unrelated men and women from mixing and women cannot openly exercise in public. But despite lingering attitudes against women's participation in sports, the kingdom sent women to participate in the Olympic Games twice, doubling its female contingency to four in the 2016 Rio games. Almaeena said she expected the proposal to have greater backing by Shura Council members because it supports the kingdom's Vision 2030 plan, which is a blueprint for a wide-reaching government overhaul to develop the society and the economy. It was introduced under King Salman by his son, Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Vision 2030 specifically calls for encouraging the participation of all citizens in sports and athletic activities. It says currently 13 percent of the Saudi population exercises once a week. The government aims to bump that up to 40 percent and raise life expectancy from 74 years to 80 years. Almaeena said that in order to improve women's health and participation in sports, there have to be women who can teach young girls about fitness and well-being. Saudi women who want to study sports medicine or physical education at the university level have to study abroad. The country's General Sports Authority offers certificates in some courses. Though the college proposal failed to garner enough votes in the Shura Council, Almaeena said strides have been made in recent years. Women were first appointed to the Shura Council in 2013 by the late King Abdullah as part of a wider effort to gradually improve women's rights. The Shura Council does not have authority to pass legislation, but its proposals can become law with the backing of the Cabinet and the monarch. Almaeena said the Ministry of Education can still choose to adopt the proposal. "I'm very optimistic because there is a new vision ... but of course I would have wished it would have passed," she said.—AP

FIFA confirms video refereeing in WCup

SANTIAGO: FIFA president Gianni Infantino confirmed yesterday that video assistant referees will be used at next year's World Cup in Russia for the first time. "We will use video refereeing at the 2018 World Cup because we've had nothing but positive results so far," he said at a congress of the South American Football Confederation (CONMEBOL) in Santiago, Chile."In 2017, when everyone in the stadium or at home can see within seconds if the referee made a mistake, we can't have a situation where the only one who can't see it is the referee." Video assistance was introduced to support referees with "game-changing" decisions for the first time in a FIFA competition at the Club World Cup in Japan in December.

The four areas covered by the video replay official were goals, penalties, red cards and cases of mistaken identity. Infantino had already said he wanted video refereeing for the next World Cup, but that "little hiccups" would have to be worked out first. That included slow decision-making by video assistant referees, he said at a meeting of the International Football Association Board in March. But that is only a matter of training, he said at the time. "The referees... will be able to take decisions much faster when they use it more often," he said.

CONMEBOL said yesterday it was considering ways of boosting attendance at the 2019 Copa America, South America's top international tournament, which will take place that year in Brazil. Proposals include raising the number of competing countries to 16 from the usual number of 12, CONMEBOL's vice-president Arturo Salah said. It has also been suggested that European countries be invited to take part. "The Copa America with European teams would be like a World Cup. That is a discussion for another time," Infantino said.—AFP



FIFA Secretary General Fatma Samoura attends a news conference after the Russia 2018 LOC Board meeting with FIFA participation in St Petersburg. — AP

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SYDNEY: Photo shows a view of Sydney from the north shore of the harbor and central business district. Australians are racking up extreme levels of debt to buy homes that are among the world's most expensive, a ticking time bomb that could wreck the economy if it is hit by a sudden shock, experts warn. — AFP

AUSTRALIA'S HOUSEHOLD DEBT A TICKING TIME BOMB

HOUSEHOLD DEBT-TO-GDP RATIO HITS 123 PERCENT

SYDNEY: Australians are racking up extreme levels of debt to buy homes that are among the world's most expensive, a ticking time bomb that could wreck the economy if it is hit by a sudden shock, experts warn. While the country is one of the best-performing developed global economies, soaring property prices have also made it a world-beater in household debt. The nation has a household debt-to-GDP ratio of 123 percent, largely housing debt-second only to Switzerland, according to the Bank of International Settlements.

Those levels exceed the US, Spain and Ireland before their property market crashes, global ratings agency Moody's said in a report this month, warning Australians also held limited liquid assets. "Australians have borrowed up a storm, and housing prices in this nation are now dangerously dumb," prominent Australian economist Chris Richardson said this month. "Compared with the global financial crisis, our vulnerabilities are higher, our defenses are weaker."

Such dire warnings contrast with Australia's recent economic experience, with the country on course for a record 26 years without a recession. It fared well during the 2008 financial crisis, aided by its largest trading partner China's hunger for commodities. But interest rates have been slashed to a record-low 1.50 percent to boost growth as Australia shifts from a dependence on mining-driven expansion, heating up the housing market. Sydney's median house price is Aus$1.1 million (US$830,000) and nationally prices have soared 250 percent in real terms since the mid-1990s, the OECD said in March.

Little buffer left

However, wage growth has been tepid recently, forcing people to spend a higher proportion of their incomes on mortgages. Reserve Bank of Australia governor Philip Lowe issued a blunt warning this month that "stretched balance sheets make for more volatility when things turn down". "In some cases, lenders are assuming that people can live more frugally than in practice they can, leaving little buffer if things go wrong," he added. Modelling by National Australia Bank found difficulties could kick in if the jobless rate, currently at 5.9 percent, rises to 8.5 percent, chief economist Alan Oster said. "As a bank, what we do is we look at unemployment by postcode," Oster told AFP.

"And what we find is there is around 50 postcodes where we personally don't want to lend much," he said, adding that areas that benefited from the mining boom were now struggling as investment falls. Analysts said a financial crisis worsened by severe household debt would take on a different flavor in Australia. In the US during the 2008 crisis, homeowners walked away from mortgages when situations turned sour. But Down Under-home to the "Great Australian dream" of owning property locals go to great lengths to avoid defaulting on loans.

"Australians will take their kids out of private school, they'll sell their car, they'll not go on holidays... they'll do whatever they feasibly can to avoid defaulting on their mortgage," independent economist Saul Eslake said. "The risk is that if interest rates go up, people will be forced to spend more servicing their mortgages, and thus have less to spend on other things. It's a risk to economic growth, not a risk to financial stability."

RBA reluctance

Most of the debt is held by the richest 20 percent, while banks' bad debt ratios were low, Oster added. Financial institutions are meanwhile viewed as well-capitalized and able to withstand adverse shocks. At the same time, Australia is one of the world's most urbanized developed nations despite being the sixth largest country by land mass, concentrating property purchases in built-up areas.

Coupled with local laws stifling development and population rises boosted by immigration, demand has grown faster than supply in big cities. Yet the central bank is reluctant to raise rates to cool the market, as price increases have been uneven across the country. It has instead turned to financial regulator the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority and corporate watchdog the Australian Securities and Investment Commission to tighten lending standards and police the banks. Canberra is also under growing pressure to enact policies to drive supply and affordable housing, and has hinted at new measures in May's national budget.

The government has so far cracked down on illegal home purchases by foreigners and imposed new taxes on non-local buyers. But politicians have been reluctant to wind back housing tax deductions and concessions blamed as among the biggest culprits in inflating prices, for fear of alienating voters. "There is this... immediate fear, to say we can't impact the price because then what's going to happen to the current borrowers," Pimco's Australia chief Robert Mead said. "It's not popular but I think that's the more sensible approach. It's harder for any government policy to immediately create jobs or immediately increase wages... to improve income."— AFP

CASHLESS SOCIETY 'GETTING CLOSER'

LONDON: More than a third of Europeans and Americans would be happy to go without cash and rely on electronic forms of payment if they could, and at least 20 percent already pretty much do so, a study showed yesterday. The study, which was conducted in 13 European countries, the United States and Australia, also found that in many places where cash is most used, people are among the keenest to ditch it.

Overall, 34 percent of respondents in Europe and 38 percent in the United States said they would be willing to go cash-free, according to the survey conducted by Ipsos for the ING bank website eZonomics. Twenty-one percent and 34 percent in Europe and the United States, respectively, said they already rarely use cash. The trend was also clear. More than half of the European respondents said they had used less cash in the past 12 months than previously and 78 percent said they expected to use it even less over the coming 12 months.

Payment systems such as contactless cards and mobile-phone digital wallets have become so prevalent the issue has become political in some countries. Cash-loving Germans, for example, have been concerned that a move by the European Central Bank to phase out the 500 euro note by the end of next year is the start of a slippery slope.

Germany is one of the countries that uses cash the most. The ING survey showed only 10 percent of Germans saying they rarely use cash, compared, for example, with 33 percent and 35 percent, respectively, in neighbors Poland and France. The survey also showed that, in general, countries where cash is much in use were most likely to want to go cashless. Only 19 percent of Italians said they rarely used cash but 41 percent said they would be willing to go cash. There was a similar trend in Turkey, Romania, the Czech Republic, Spain and even Germany. — Reuters

NO END IN SIGHT FOR JAPAN 'CRISPS CRISIS'

TOKYO: A shopper stands beside shelves with packets of potato chips at a convenience store in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

TOKYO: Legions of Japanese crisps addicts are suffering and it doesn't look like they'll be getting their full fix anytime soon. The country is in the midst of a dire crisps shortage after violent typhoons wiped out potato crops in top tuber producing Hokkaido. The unprecedented series of storms last year has forced chipmakers Calbee and rival Koikeya to halt production of some of their most popular flavours-including pizza and French salad.

Pictures online have shown store shelves bare and bags have been selling for inflated prices on Internet auctions. Calbee, Japan's top snacks maker, has stopped selling about 30 kinds of crisps in all or part of the country since the middle of April. "We don't know when we'll be able to restart," company spokesman Masaya Kawase said yesterday. "Potatoes are only harvested once a year." A dizzying number of government regulations on potato imports is exacerbating the shortage problem. Japan may not usually be associated with crisps, but industry figures show they rake in nearly 163 billion yen ($1.46 billion) in annual sales. — AFP

Australia hits 2-week low after soft core inflation

Kiwi down 0.7 percent

LONDON: The Australian and New Zealand dollars sank yesterday, leading moves among major developed currencies after Australian inflation data pointed to an economy under strain from mediocre growth in China. The euro pulled back from 5-1/2 month highs overnight as the boost from the outcome of Sunday's first round of France's presidential election faded, while the yen - a sufferer this week from buoyant sentiment on stock markets - fell another 0.3 percent.

Traders said the Aussie, kiwi and Canadian dollars - all of which normally gain when investors are feeling good about global growth prospects - were still suffering from steady falls in a number of major commodity markets since February. While global stock markets have bounced to new highs since the French vote, improved appetite for risk on currency markets seems largely confined to Europe, spurred by expectations of a change in the direction of European Central Bank policy in coming months.

Headline Australian inflation rose to 2.1 percent, initially pushing the dollar higher, but the indicators of underlying core inflation were less bright, dragging the currency down. "The fundamental reason for Australia's problems is China and the rotten time that commodities have had since February as a result," said Bank of New York Mellon strategist Simon Derrick. The Aussie was down 0.6 percent at $0.7491 in early European trade, its lowest since April 12. The kiwi lost 0.7 percent to $0.6898.

With global stocks enjoying another day of gains, the dollar rose 0.3 percent to 111.38 yen, pulling further away from a five-month low of 108.13 yen set last week. The focus for the dollar will be on forthcoming US economic data, especially after a softening in some recent indicators, said Teppei Ino, analyst for Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi UFJ in Singapore. "It's too early to say that the dollar will keep trending higher and head above the peak it saw in March," Ino said, referring to the dollar's March 10 high of 115.51 yen. The Trump administration's plans for tax reforms are likely to be another reference point for markets.

US officials said late on Tuesday that Trump is proposing to slash the corporate income tax rate and offer multinational businesses a steep tax break on overseas profits brought into the United States. Analysts said there was still uncertainty over just how quickly such fiscal policies would be implemented. "Just presenting the plan doesn't mean the plan is going to be passed," said Mitul Kotecha, head of Asia macro strategy for Barclays. "The reality is any tax changes or tax reforms or tax cuts, may not take place for some time, and Congress at this point is far from being agreed on what shape or form they are going to take." —Reuters

British Airways appoints Williams as Head of Sales

Middle East 'remains an extremely important region'

KUWAIT: British Airways, the UK's flagship carrier, yesterday reaffirmed its commitment to its Kuwaiti passengers by announcing Robert Williams' appointment as Head of Sales - Asia Pacific and the Middle East. In taking the reins as British Airways' most senior regional executive, Williams' appointment

Robert Williams

British Airways' First Wing London Heathrow

comes on the back of the airline's recent global announcement to boost its customer experience by investing in increased excellence in premium cabins and more choice and quality across all cabins and on-the-ground services.

Based in Singapore and reporting directly into the airline's Head of Global Sales in London, Robert's new role makes him responsible for managing the airline's growth and development across Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman and Qatar - some of British Airways' most important overseas markets. "We've completed 85 years of successful operations here in the Middle East and the region continues to remain important to British Airways," said Robert Williams as his first address in his new role. "It's an exciting time for us at British Airways and we are committed to investing in our customer experience in a rapidly evolving aviation industry. Our customers will continue to notice significant enhancements to their travel experience when flying with us."

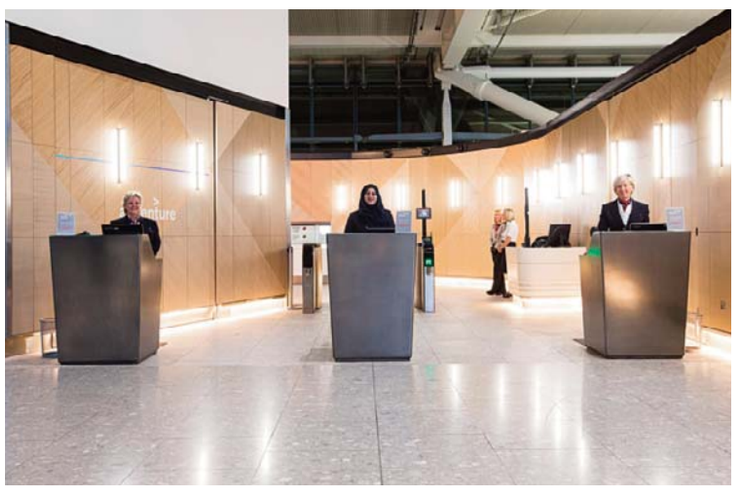
With over a decade of experience working with the British carrier, Robert will drive the airline's regional operations, including the roll-out of new investments in products to improve customer experience, starting with the new First Wing at Terminal 5, which is already accessible for British Airways' Kuwaiti customers flying in FIRST to London Heathrow. Robert added: "We witness a high preference for our premium services from across the region and we are pleased that the new First Wing is immediately available for all passengers flying FIRST with us."

Flights from across the Middle East land at Terminal 5, British Airways' flagship terminal which is now home to its exclusive new 'First Wing' check-in area. The First Wing also includes a dedicated two-lane security channel and direct access to the Galleries First Lounge and Concorde Room for the first time. The two new security lanes also reduce the number of travelers passing through the current South security lanes, helping to speed up the journey for Club World customers too. A relaxed seating area is located after security for customers to gather their possessions in an unhurried atmosphere.

The First Wing gives First and Gold Executive Club customers far greater exclusivity with a dedicated combined check-in and Fast Track space. The full spectrum of other global product investments announced by British Airways' chairman and CEO, Alex Cruz, include: - £400m in Club World (long-haul business class); Introducing Club Europe on UK domestic services; New lounges; First Wing direct security and lounge access at Heathrow; Latest generation Wi-Fi fitted on long-haul and short-haul fleets over the next two years; Self-service check-in and biometric boarding gates to speed up the airport journey.

With British Airways existing network already offering excellent onward connections to the UK, wider Europe and more than 25 destinations in North America from its London Heathrow hub, the airline will also add 22 new routes to its global network by the end of 2017. In a recent statement on the airline's global investment strategy, Cruz said: "We will invest and innovate where our customers value it most, and differentiate ourselves with a unique on-board experience and service. We're investing in Club World, focusing now on improved catering and sleep and in the future on a new seat.

We're investing in the best Wi-Fi in the sky, new lounges and direct access to security and our lounges for our First customers, via our new First Wing at Heathrow." The airline is also developing options for a new seat in Club World with direct aisle access in 2019. Details will be released in due course. Alongside these initiatives, British Airways is also making changes behind the scenes to increase operational efficiency and reliability through new technologies including automatic boarding gates and a re-designed baggage arrivals process.



National Bank of Kuwait Financial Markets Daily Report

At 02:00 PM Previous Day

Global Stock Indices

Index	Previous Close	Last Price	Change		Daily Performance %	Yearly Performance %
Dow Jones	20,763.89	20,996.12	232.23	▲	1.12	6.24
NASDAQ	5,983.82	6,025.49	41.67	▲	0.70	11.93
S&P 500	2,374.15	2,388.61	14.46	▲	0.61	6.75
Financial Times	7,275.64	7,269.49	-6.15	▼	-0.08	1.77
DAX	12,467.04	12,453.28	-13.76	▼	-0.11	8.47
CAC 40	5,277.88	5,278.26	0.38	▲	0.01	8.55
Swiss	8,775.24	8,789.06	13.82	▲	0.16	6.92
Nikkei 225	19,079.33	19,289.43	210.10	▲	1.10	0.92
Topix	1,519.21	1,537.41	18.20	▲	1.20	1.24
Hang Seng	24,455.94	24,578.43	122.49	▲	0.50	11.72
Straits Times	3,163.93	3,173.76	9.83	▲	0.31	10.17

MENA Stock Indices

Index	Previous Close	Last Price	Change		Daily Performance %	Yearly Performance %
Kuwait	6,830.85	6,854.27	23.42	▲	0.34	15.85
Saudi Arabia	6,915.89	6,916.08	0.19	▲	0.00	-4.08
Dubai	3,433.74	3,438.83	5.09	▲	0.15	-2.75
Abu Dhabi	4,564.63	4,541.04	-23.59	▼	-0.52	0.40
Bahrain	1,336.61	1,334.03	-2.58	▼	-0.19	9.52
Qatar	10,157.37	10,205.61	48.24	▲	0.47	-2.68
Oman	5,466.61	5,510.18	43.57	▲	0.80	-5.47
Lebanon	1,154.76	1,151.59	-3.16	▼	-0.27	-4.78
Jordan	2,186.74	2,190.06	3.32	▲	0.15	0.76
Egypt	12,583.13	12,678.89	95.76	▲	0.76	1.93
Morocco	11,370.61	11,371.35	0.74	▲	0.01	-2.34
Tunisia	5,625.10	5,663.28	38.18	▲	0.68	2.48

Global Currencies Exchange Rate

Currency	Kuwaiti Dinar	Saudi Riyal	US Dollar	Euro	Sterling Pound	Swiss Franc	Japanese Yen	Australian Dollar
Kuwait Dinar		12.2146	3.2706	3.0017	2.5488	3.2533	364.25	4.3690
Saudi Riyal	0.08187		0.2678	0.2457	0.2087	0.2663	29.82	0.3577
US Dollar	0.30575	3.7346		0.9178	0.7793	0.9947	111.37	1.3358
Euro	0.33315	4.0692	1.0896		0.8493	1.0840	121.35	1.4564
Sterling Pound	0.39234	4.7922	1.2832	1.1774		1.2768	142.92	1.7151
Swiss Franc	0.30738	3.7545	1.0053	0.9225	0.7832		111.94	1.3429
Japanese Yen	0.00275	0.0335	0.0090	0.0082	0.0070	0.0089		0.0120
Australian Dollar	0.22888	2.7957	0.7486	0.6866	0.5831	0.7446	83.37	

MENA Currencies Exchange Rate

Currency	US Dollar	Kuwaiti Dollar	Saudi Riyal	Bahraini Dinar	Qatari Riyal	Omani Riyal	Emirates Dirham	Egyptian Pound
US Dollar		0.30575	3.7346	0.3740	3.6266	0.3831	3.6570	17.9400
Kuwaiti Dinar	3.2706		12.2146	1.2233	11.8613	1.2530	11.9608	58.6754
Saudi Riyal	0.2678	0.08187		0.1001	0.9711	0.1026	0.9792	4.8037
Bahraini Dinar	2.6737	0.81749	9.9853		9.6965	1.0243	9.7778	47.9666
Qatari Riyal	0.2757	0.08431	1.0298	0.1031		0.1056	1.0084	4.9468
Omani Riyal	2.6102	0.79807	9.7481	0.9762	9.4662		9.5456	46.8273
Emirates Dirham	0.2734	0.08361	1.0212	0.1023	0.9917	0.1048		4.9057
Egyptian Pound	0.0557	0.01704	0.2082	0.0208	0.2022	0.0214	0.2038	

Global Interest Rates

Currency	1-Week	1-Month	3-Month	6-Month	1-Year
Kuwaiti Dinar	0.94	1.38	1.63	1.88	2.13
US Dollar	0.94	0.99	1.17	1.43	1.78
Euro	-0.40	-0.39	-0.36	-0.25	-0.14
Sterling Pound	0.23	0.25	0.32	0.47	0.68
Swiss Franc	-0.80	-0.78	-0.73	-0.66	-0.48
Australian Dollar	1.59	1.67	1.61	1.60	1.62
Japanese Yen	-0.02	-0.02	0.00	0.02	0.13

Global Bond Yields

Country	2-Year	5-Year	10-Year	30-Year
United States	1.28	1.85	2.33	2.98
Europe	-0.71	-0.35	0.36	1.11
United Kingdom	0.09	0.53	1.09	1.71

Commodities

Index	Previous Close	Last Price	Change		Daily Performance %	Yearly Performance %
Kuwait Oil	49.28	49.19	-0.09	▼	-0.18	-7.97
Brent	48.45	48.60	0.15	▲	0.31	-12.82
West Texas	49.23	49.20	-0.03	▼	-0.06	-9.18
Gold	1263.36	1263.53	0.17	▲	0.01	8.83
Silver	17.55	17.56	0.01	▲	0.07	9.18

Source: National Bank of Kuwait

EXCHANGE RATES

Al-Muzaini Exchange Co.

ASIAN COUNTRIES	
Japanese Yen	2.773
Indian Rupees	4.744
Pkistani Rupees	2.908
Srilankan Rupees	2.004
Nepali Rupees	2.964
Singapore Dollar	219.770
Hongkong Dollar	39.219
Bangladesh Taka	3.675
Philippine Peso	6.137
Thai Baht	8.891
GCC COUNTRIES	
Saudi Riyal	81.428
Qatari Riyal	83.867
Omani Riyal	793.009
Bahraini Dinar	810.810
UAE Dirham	83.136
ARAB COUNTRIES	
Egyptian Pound - Cash	19.150
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	16.777
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.226
Tunisian Dinar	133.140
Jordanian Dinar	430.030
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	2.034
Syrian Lira	2.176
Morocco Dirham	31.138
EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES	
US Dollar Transfer	305.150
Euro	333.070
Sterling Pound	392.270
Canadian dollar	226.040
Turkish lira	85.720
Swiss Franc	307.920
Australian Dollar	232.220
US Dollar Buying	303.950
GOLD	
20 Gram	260.990
10 Gram	133.410
5 Gram	67.550

Dollarco Exchange Co. Ltd

Rate for Transfer	Selling Rate
US Dollar	304.800
Canadian Dolla	226.525
Sterling Pound	392.135
Euro	328.485
Swiss Frank	305.110
Bahrain Dinar	808.430
UAE Dirhams	83.380
Qatari Riyals	84.605
Saudi Riyals	82.175
Jordanian Dinar	429.815
Egyptian Pound	16.978
Sri Lankan Rupees	2.005
Indian Rupees	4.728
Pakistani Rupees	2.907
Bangladesh Taka	3.742
Philippines Pesso	6.121
Cyprus pound	168.208
Japanese Yen	3.795
Syrian Pound	2.420
Nepalese Rupees	3.950
Malaysian Ringgit	70.185
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	44.745
Thai Bhat	9.860
Turkish Lira	84.130

Bahrain Exchange Company

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
Europe		
British Pound	0.383256	0.393255
Czech Korune	0.004328	0.016328
Danish Krone	0.040477	0.045477
Euro	0. 325876	0.334876
Norwegian Krone	0.031582	0.036782
Romanian Leu	0.073071	0.073071
Slovakia	0.009134	0.019134
Swedish Krona	0.030326	0.035326
Swiss Franc	0.299765	0.310765
Turkish Lira	0.079720	0.090020
Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.222042	0.234042
New Zealand Dollar	0.206750	0.216250
America		
Canadian Dollar	0.219678	0.228678
Georgina Lari	0.137823	0.137823
US Dollars	0.301050	0.305450
US Dollars Mint	0.301550	0.305450
Asia		
Bangladesh Taka	0.003420	0.004004
Chinese Yuan	0.042816	0.046316
Hong Kong Dollar	0.037122	0.039872
Indian Rupee	0.004258	0.004946
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000018	0.000024
Japanese Yen	0.002686	0.002866
Kenyan Shilling	0.002947	0.002947
Korean Won	0.000260	0.000275
Malaysian Ringgit	0.065828	0.071828
Nepalese Rupee	0.003015	0.003185
Pakistan Rupee	0.002693	0.002983
Philippine Peso	0.006018	0.006318
Sierra Leone	0.000038	0.000044
Singapore Dollar	0.213565	0.223565
South African Rand	0.017863	0.025863
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001636	0.002216
Taiwan	0.009977	0.010157
Thai Baht	0.008513	0.009063
Arab		
Bahraini Dinar	0.802846	0.811346
Egyptian Pound	0.014049	0.019957
Iranian Riyal	0.000084	0.000086
Iraqi Dinar	0.000195	0.000255
Jordanian Dinar	0.425036	0.434036
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000152	0.00252
Moroccan Dirhams	0.020388	0.044388
Nigerian Naira	0.000397	0.001032
Omani Riyal	0.786177	0.791857
Qatar Riyal	0.083006	0.084456
Saudi Riyal	0.080287	0.081587
Syrian Pound	0.001294	0.001514
Tunisian Dinar	0.124004	0.132004
Turkish Lira	0.079720	0.090020
UAE Dirhams	0.081656	0.083356
Yemeni Riyal	0.000992	0.001072

Luxury spenders defy Japan's tight-fisted reputation

TOKYO: Tight-fisted shoppers, unsteady economic growth and a shrinking population: Japan doesn't exactly fit the image of a spending powerhouse these days. But you would never know it in Ginza-Tokyo's answer to the Champs-Elysees or Fifth Avenue-where a new 13-storey upscale mall is proving that Japan is still a whale in the luxury business. The country logs some $22.7 billion in annual spending on top-end goods made by brands including Chanel, Dior, and Prada, ranking it as the world's number two luxury market behind the United States.

"Luxury products may be more expensive, but they are very well-made," said 79-year-old Toshiko Obu, carrying her longtime Fendi bag outside the Ginza Six building, which has been drawing big crowds since last week's opening. Japan is renowned among the world's priciest retailers for its discriminating clientele-Chanel tries to keep local customers physically separated from tourists packing more cash than class. "You shouldn't forget that a big portion of the luxury clientele is here in Japan," Sidney Toledano, chairman and CEO of Christian Dior Couture said at the opening of the 241-store building. "It remains a strategic market for luxury and, I'd say, true luxury."

'Biting their fingernails'

Dior is counting on Japan's luxury market to rise this year, while rival Chanel is also expecting an upbeat 2017, after global sales of personal luxury goods barely grew last year. "We did not lose our character," said Richard Collasse, head of Chanel in Japan. "There are brands that are suffering-the ones that at some stage stopped investing in Japan because China was the new El Dorado. And today they are biting their fingernails." Few brands predicted that deep-pocketed Chinese shoppers visiting Japan would support its luxury market-tourists account for about one-third of top-end spending.

Japan is hoping to land 40 million visitors in 2020, the year that Tokyo hosts the Olympics. Last year, some six million Chinese visited, compared with 2.4 million in 2014. "Historically, (Japan has) been a very insular luxury market where 90 to 95 percent of the spending was by locals," said Joîlle de Montgolfier, Paris-based director of consumer and luxury product research at consultancy Bain & Company. But now some 30 percent of sales are generated by foreign visitors owing to tourism, she added. A stronger yen dented visitors' purchasing power last year, with luxury sales down one percent, after a 9.0 percent rise in 2015. Dior's Toledano said it is an opportunity to refocus on Japanese clientele. "We don't ignore tourists, of course, but we're not a duty-free shop," he added.

'Touching everything'

Some other Chanel shops in Tokyo have a separate cosmetics and perfume section reserved for top Japanese customers, in a bid to keep them away from the nouveau riche crowd. It also tips off local clientele about the expected arrival time of tourist buses so they can avoid them. "The loyal Japanese clients tend to run away from customers who were not very well raised and are wearing whatever or lying all over the sofa, touching everything," said Chanel's Collasse. Dior's haute couture show at the new mall's opening featured Japanese-inspired dresses, underscoring a focus on the local market. But warning signs lurk behind smiling clerks and glitzy interiors at the new property on one of the world's priciest shopping streets. — AFP

TOKYO: Photo shows the exterior of French fashion brand Christian Dior's new shop at the Ginza shopping district in Tokyo. — AFP

Gulf Bank sponsors 'Women and the Economy' Forum

KUWAIT: In line with its corporate social responsibility focus to empower women, Gulf Bank announced its successful sponsorship of the 'Women and the Economy' forum, organized by Kuwait University's Women's Research and Studies Center. The event took place from 24-26 April, under the auspices of HE Dr Mohammad Al-Fares, Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education, at Kuwait University's College of Social Sciences in Shuwaikh.

The forum, which was attended by high profile individuals from Kuwait, the Gulf and other Arab countries, shed light on the significant role women play in developing a country's economy. It also addressed the important role which organizations play in providing training programs that encourage women to join the workforce, and more importantly, the nation's role in encouraging the diversity in the roles which women lead, by altering certain policies.

Commenting on Gulf Bank's sponsorship and participation, Laila Al-Qatami, Assistant General Manager for Corporate Communications, said: "Gulf Bank is pleased to sponsor this event because we believe gender diversity and equality in the workplace is an important issue. Numerous studies show the positive business and financial impact of having a workplace that is appealing to women. Events such as these play an important role in bringing this topic to the forefront and offering solutions to increase female participation in the workplace and economy."

Al-Qatami continued: "We thank Kuwait University and the Women's Research and Studies Center for organizing this conference and bringing together an impressive range of speakers to not only discuss the issues, but to also put forward solutions to encourage women's participation in the labor force and to achieve success in their respective fields."

Jennah Al Mattar, Assistant General Manager for Human Resources at Gulf Bank participated in the panel discussion entitled 'The Role of the Private Sector in Supporting Women's Economic Participation'. Al Mattar shed light on the key motivating factors for women in the workplace, in addition to initiatives steered by Gulf Bank that aim to build a workplace based on gender parity and meritocracy.

A series of workshops were also held during the two-day forum, which focused on the development of women's personal and social skills, and addressed topics such as how to choose the ideal career and how to create a balance between work and personal life. Women and the sustainable development 2030 objectives were also one of the main topics addressed during these sessions. The forum also featured an exhibition, in which Gulf Bank participated, among several other economic and social entities and public benefit associations.

China tries to ward off systemic risks

Xi seeks to maintain financial security

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping called yesterday for increased efforts to ward off systemic risks to help maintain financial security, the official Xinhua news agency said. The country's leaders have pledged to shift the emphasis to addressing financial risks and asset bubbles which analysts say pose a threat to the world's second-largest economy if not handed well. "Financial security is an important part of national security and an important basis for the steady and healthy development of the economy," Xi was quoted by Xinhua as saying. Xi's remarks were made during a group study session for members of the politburo, a top decision-making body of the ruling Communist Party.

They follow a series of measures to more closely regulate the banking and insurance sectors amid concerns of rising risks in the shadow banking industry. "China's financial development is facing many risks and challenges due to the influence of international and domestic economic factors," Xi said, adding that the country's financial risks are still under control. The spillover effect from monetary and fiscal policy adjustments in other countries could have an impact on China's financial security, Xi said, without elaborating.

China must ward off systemic financial risks, and regulators must strengthen financial supervision and increase coordinated oversight of major financial institutions, he said.

Authorities will crack down on debt evasion and control financial-sector leverage, he added. At the session, central bank governor Zhou Xiaochuan and top officials of the country's banking, securities and insurance regulators pledged to take steps to maintain financial security, according to Xinhua. No further details were given.

China's credit growth has been "very fast" by global standards, and without a comprehensive strategy to tackle the overhang, there is a growing risk it will have a banking crisis or sharply slower growth or both, the International Monetary Fund warned late last year. In particular, analysts have been worried about a overheating property market and the risk of a price crash as local governments roll out ever tougher cooling measures. While the central bank has gingerly raised short-term rates recently to contain financial risks and encourage companies to deleverage, economists expect authorities will move cautiously to avoid hurting economic growth. — Reuters

Daimler revs up forecasts

FRANKFURT AM MAIN: World-leading luxury carmaker Daimler yesterday lifted its forecasts for 2017 after a roaring start to the year that outpaced analysts' expectations. At 2.7 billion euros ($2.95 billion), the German firm's net profit doubled between January and March compared with the first quarter last year, on revenues up 11 percent at 38.8 billion euros. Analysts had forecast significantly lower net profit of 2.4 billion euros. "We started 2017 very well and managed to follow up on a record year in 2016," finance chief Bodo Uebber told journalists in a teleconference.

Operating or underlying profit before interest and taxes was up 87 percent compared with the start of 2016, at just over 4.0 billion euros-a figure Daimler revealed earlier this month in preliminary results. The carmaker had a number of windfall gains that had a positive impact on its profits, including a 183-million-euro payout from its investment in high-tech mapping firm Here after new investors climbed aboard alongside rivals BMW and Audi.

Other one-off boosts to the bottom line came from favorable exchange rates, the sale of property in Japan, and 240 million euros received after an investment in China's BAIC Motor was cancelled. Looking ahead to the full year 2017, Daimler expects to increase revenue and operating profit "significantly," contrasting with an earlier forecast of only a slight increase. Daimler's success was powered by a 14-percent rise in sales of its Mercedes-Benz and Smart cars, which account for more than half of its revenue. The Stuttgart-based firm last year overtook Munich rival BMW to become the world's largest luxury car manufacturer by unit sales.

On road to new record?

Mercedes buyers were snapping up a revamped E-Class and the manufacturer's range of SUVs in the first quarter this year. By contrast, the group's trucks division continued to struggle with headwinds in significant markets, including Turkey, North America and Brazil, seeing sales fall by 11 percent. Daimler is "on the path to a new record for the whole year," analyst Frank Schwope of Nord/LB bank commented. "Given the increase in sales figures for the first three months of 2017, the lift in the forecasts is not especially surprising," he continued. By 0950 GMT, Daimler shares had lost 0.45 percent in Frankfurt trading to reach 68.39 euros ($74.53), while the DAX index of leading German shares was almost flat.

The historic carmaker has not escaped the suspicions around diesel vehicles' emissions hovering around the industry, as both US authorities and Stuttgart prosecutors are investigating whether its cars emitted higher levels of pollutants than allowed. Daimler did not rule out facing heavy financial penalties from the probes in its quarterly report. Competitor Volkswagen has already set aside more than 20 billion euros to cover the costs of the scandal, after admitting in September 2015 to installing software to hide high emissions from regulators in 11 million cars worldwide. — AFP

SHANGHAI: CEO of German carmaker Daimler and Mercedes-Benz Dieter Zetsche poses next to a Concept Sedan A car during the media day of the 17th Shanghai International Automobile Industry Exhibition in Shanghai. — AFP

Australia inflation moves back into RBA target band

SYDNEY: Australia's annual inflation rate has moved back into the central bank's target range for the first time in more than two years, data showed yesterday, all but ruling out more interest rate cuts. Consumer prices rose 0.5 percent in the March quarter, taking the annual rate to 2.1 percent, the Australian Bureau of Statistics said. This was up from 1.5 percent in October-December, but slightly below forecast.

The reading is within the Reserve Bank of Australia's 2-3 percent target band for the first time since the September quarter of 2014, boosted by price rises for petrol and electricity, which was partly offset by a drop in the cost of fruit. Underlying inflation, which smooths out volatile price swings, was at 1.8 percent. The dollar slid to 75.09 US cents, from 75.54 US cents, after the figures came out. Analysts said the data reduced any likelihood of more cuts to interest rates, which are already at record lows, as the RBA juggles a booming property market with mixed economic data.

"The rise in underlying inflation in the first quarter, coupled with the RBA's financial stability concerns, dramatically reduces the chances of any further interest rate cuts," said Capital Economics' chief Australia economist Paul Dales. "That said, price pressures and economic growth are not strong enough to warrant interest rate hikes. Interest rates are unlikely to rise above 1.5 percent this year or next year." AMP Capital chief economist Shane Oliver agreed.

"With inflation moving in the right direction and given the RBA's increased emphasis on an inflated Sydney and Melbourne housing market and rising household debt, the RBA is unlikely to make any adjustments to interest rates any time soon," he said. "We expect it to keep the cash rate at 1.50 percent for the next year at least." The Reserve Bank 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. Its board next meets on May 2. — AFP

Twitter records strong growth as shares soar

CALIFORNIA: Shares of Twitter Inc soared in premarket trade yesterday after the microblogging service reported better-than-expected user growth. Despite stiff competition from Facebook Inc and Snap Inc, Twitter's monthly active users, one of the most closely watched metrics for analysts, increased by 6 percent, or 18 million, to 328 million in the first quarter from a year earlier. Analysts on average had expected 321.3 million monthly active users, according to market research firm FactSet StreetAccount.

Twitter also said daily active users rose 14 percent in the first quarter from a year ago. Twitter does not disclose the number of total daily active users. Twitter shares were up 11 percent at $16.25 in premarket trade on Tuesday. "Twitter is becoming more relevant to consumers. They are making their products easier to use. And there is a global thirst for news and information that they are benefiting from," said BTIG analyst Richard Greenfield. "We believe usage will drive meaningful revenue and profit growth in the next few years."

Twitter's revenue, however, fell 7.8 percent to $548.3 million in the first quarter, its first drop since its initial public offering. Net loss narrowed to $61.6 million, or 9 cents per share, in the first quarter ended March 31, from $79.7 million, or 12 cents per share, a year earlier. Excluding items, the company earned 11 cents per share, beating the estimate of 1 cent per share. Twitter's user growth has stalled in the past few quarters and the company has been trying to convince advertisers that it will strengthen its user base.

As part of its efforts, the company has updated its product offerings including live video broadcasts from its app and launched new features to attract users. Twitter's weak performance has raised questions about Chief Executive Jack Dorsey's leadership and whether the company would be bought by a bigger media firm. Financial markets speculated about a sale of Twitter last year, but no concrete bids were forthcoming. Twitter's advertising revenue fell 11 percent to $474 million in the quarter, above the average analyst estimate of $442.7 million, according to market research firm FactSet StreetAccount.

Trump's tweeting

You'd think Twitter would be able to milk its status as President Donald Trump's megaphone. But the company still faces stagnant user growth, has never made a profit and may even report a quarterly revenue decline yesterday, a first since going public. Trump's frequent tweets ricochet well beyond his 28 million Twitter followers. Anything he tweets can serve as fodder for social media, TV news shows and, often, late-night comedy. Analysts say Twitter's user engagement - how often people respond, retweet or "like," for instance - likely benefited from "political discourse" in the first quarter. The problem: The people already on Twitter may well be using it more, but America's first true "Twitter President" hasn't inspired others to sign up for Twitter en masse. Michael Pachter, an analyst with Wedbush Securities, expects "minimal" user growth, consistent with recent quarters. — Agencies

World stocks hit record high as corporate America shines

Prospect of US tax cuts drive world stocks

LONDON: World stocks hit a record high yesterday after strong earnings and the prospect of tax cuts for corporate America boosted US shares and the euro held on to recent gains as political concerns in France ebbed. European shares edged higher towards 20-month highs hit earlier this week after centrist Emmanuel Macron's win in the first round of French presidential elections considerably reduced the risk of a French exit from the single currency.

Yesterday, high-than-expected earnings from European companies helped European stocks reverse early falls and edge higher. "We have had 25 percent of companies reporting, and a majority of those have beaten estimates," said Emmanuel Cau, global equity strategist at JP Morgan. "Pretty much every single euro zone data point out has surprised to the upside, and this is driving upgrades." Overall, first-quarter earnings for STOXX 600 companies were expected to rise 5.5 percent, according to Thomson Reuters I/B/E/S data. Revenues are expected to increase 5.7 percent.

That compares to the 11.4 percent earnings growth expected for top US companies. The euro held on to the bulk of the gains made earlier this week; it fell 0.27 percent to $1.0897 against a strengthening dollar, but is still up over 1.5 percent from Friday's close. Against a backdrop of receding concern over the French presidential elections, US President Donald Trump struck a conciliatory note and flagged tax cuts, boosting investor optimism and demand for risky assets. This, along with a strong set of earnings for US companies for the first quarter pushed the MSCI world equity index , which tracks shares in 46 countries, up 0.1 percent to a fresh record high. It is up nearly 2 percent this week and 8.35 percent since the start of the year. "On top of (the French election result) we have had a very decent set of corporate earnings in the U.S. and that helped push the market further along the same direction," said Investec economist Philip Shaw. "I am unsure how further along we really are on the tax cutting agenda, but it is certainly not doing market sentiment any harm," he added. Further details on President Trump's tax cutting plans are expected to be announced later, potentially reviving reflation bets.

The threat of a US government shutdown this weekend also receded after Trump backed away from demanding Congress include funding for his planned border wall with Mexico in a spending bill. The slew of positive news pushed the Nasdaq composite to a record high on Tuesday while the Dow and S&P 500 brushed against recent peaks. US Treasury yields, meanwhile, rose above 2.30 percent for the first time in two weeks. "US bond yields have broken higher without the support of commodity prices which is one of the clearest signs that the Trump trade is back," Morgan Stanley analysts said in a note.

Oil prices resumed their downward trend yesterday as data showed a rise in US crude inventories and record supplies in the rest of the world cast doubt on OPEC's ability to cut supplies and tighten the market. Euro-zone government bond yields nudged up ahead of Trump's keenly anticipated tax announcement. Investors were also looking ahead to today's policy meeting of the European Central Bank. While no changes are expected, policymakers see scope for sending a small signal in June towards reducing monetary stimulus, according to sources, another factor underpinning the single currency. —Reuters

TOKYO: Pedestrians walk in front of an electronics stock indicator flashing the closing rate of the Tokyo stock exchange in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

Dollar, US yields check emerging market exuberance

LONDON: A rise in US Treasury yields and the dollar checked some of emerging markets' exuberance on Wednesday, with many currencies retreating from multi-week highs and equities stalling after four days of strong gains. Strong US data and company earnings and a positive outcome in the first French election round have boosted emerging assets since the start of the week, along with robust data within the developing world. Brazil, for instance, posted data on Tuesday showing its strongest current account surplus since 2015.

All that has sent MSCI's emerging equity index to near two-year highs but the benchmark was flat as US bond yields rose to two-week highs and the dollar rose before US President Donald Trump tax reform announcement. Asian markets surged in response to Tuesday's strong Wall Street close. The Taiwanese dollar was at 2-1/2-year highs, Indonesian stocks rose to a record and Korean shares shrugged off geopolitics to hit six-year peaks. However, the rouble, rand and lira slipped 0.2-0.6 per dollar, coming off multi-month highs.

"Emerging markets have performed better than anyone could possibly have imagined but given that May is always a challenging month, possibly just for psychological reasons, we will see some caution going into next week," said Simon Quijano-Evans, investment strategist at L&G Investments. He added that Monday's May 1 holiday across Europe would also see liquidity decrease. Focus was on Turkey's central bank, which is likely to leave interest rates unchanged at its meeting later in the day after the central bank governor said policy would remain tight to combat inflation at 8-1/2-year highs.

The lira has rallied alongside most emerging currencies in recent weeks while 10-year bond yields stand just off 4-1/2-month lows. Quijano-Evans said there was little reason for the central bank to move policy for now. "The main thing in Turkey is politics should stay out of monetary policy. Political comments on policy have been backstage recently, that's one reason why lira has rallied from lows and if this continues to be the case the central bank can continue to deal with inflation," Quijano-Evans added. Nigeria meanwhile weakened the naira by 18 percent for investors and will allow them to trade the currency at market-determined rates. But analysts saw the move as creating more confusion and were pessimistic it would tempt back investors. —Reuters

Higher exports lifting German investments

BERLIN: Germany is on a solid economic growth path despite global uncertainties, Economy Minister Brigitte Zypries said yesterday, adding that she expects companies to start investing more as exports gradually grow. She spoke as the German government raised its growth forecast for this year to 1.5 percent from a previous estimate of 1.4 percent. It maintained its forecast for 2018 growth at 1.6 percent. Zypries said that the booming construction sector, helped by a low interest rate environment created by the European Central Bank as well government investments in infrastructure, was providing a strong impulse for the economy.

The ECB's expansive policy has helped revive the euro zone economy. It has also particularly helped boost private consumption in Germany, which is one of three main growth drivers alongside construction and increased state spending. The ECB meets today and is expected to keep policy unchanged. Sources told Reuters this week, however, that many ECB ratesetters see scope for sending a small signal in June toward reducing monetary stimulus.

Zypries said the German economy appears to be shrugging off uncertainties linked to Britain's vote to leave the European Union, protectionist policies in the United States, China's push for more new-energy vehicles, and political risks in Turkey.

She said that the good shape of the world economy, which is expected to grow 3.5 percent this year, would lift German exports and encourage export-oriented German firms to invest. "We know that uncertainties hamper investments and this is totally understandable but not good," Zypries said. "Therefore we need to ensure that the world economic environment improves and that fair and free trade bring about better growth and living standards."

Zypries said that Germany's high current account surplus, which has been criticized by the United States, the International Monetary Fund and European Commission, would fall from 8.3 percent of output in 2016 to 7.3 percent next year. "The current account surplus should fall ... not least because of solid domestic consumption and higher crude oil prices," the ministry said in a statement. —Reuters

Daily Kuwait Stock Exchange Report

Global جلوبل

Wednesday 26 April 2017

Index		Change	Closing	Last Closing	High	Low
Price index	▲	23.42	6,854.27	6,830.85	6,857.22	6,819.97
Weighted Index	▲	0.80	405.85	405.05	407.29	404.50
KSX 15	▼	-1.42	910.69	912.11	917.67	908.25

Volume	274,420,825
Value (KWD)	24,572,390
Number of Trades	4,771

Security	High	Low	Trades Volume	Value (KD)	Trades	Last		Change
MARIN	60	60	7000	420	1	60	—	0.0
IPG	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	400	—	0.0
NAPESCO	1,600	1,520	25,920	40,359	15	1,560	▼	-40.0
ENERGYH	45.5	44.0	38,650	1,722	14	45.5	▲	1.5
GPI	45.5	44.0	3,358,555	150,168	63	45.5	▲	0.5
ABAR	91	85	43,451	3,697	10	85	▼	-5.0
Oil & Gas			**3,473,576**	**196,367**	**103**	**1085.78**	▼	**-15.51**
KFOUC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	290	—	0.0
BPCC	580	570	67,054	38,871	4	580	▲	10.0
ALKOUT	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	700	—	0.0
ALQURAIN	340	330	299,566	101,037	20	340	▲	10.0
Basic Materials			**366,620**	**139,908**	**24**	**1307.08**	▲	**18.33**
KCEM	490	490	73	36	1	490	—	0.0
CABLE	445	430	78,048	34,374	16	440	▲	5.0
SHIP	232	232	20	5	1	232	▲	4.0
PCEM	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	960	—	0.0
PAPER	325	300	30,753	9,443	13	315	▼	-35.0
MRC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	76	—	0.0
ACICO	290	280	27,646	7,841	3	290	▲	10.0
HCC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	208	—	0.0
KBMMC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	156	—	0.0
NICBM	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	214	—	0.0
EQUIPMENT	61	58	4,563,342	269,415	100	60	▲	2.0
NCCI	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	90	—	0.0
GYPSUM	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	95	—	0.0
SALBOOKH	67	65	32,055	2,108	6	66	▼	-1.0
AGLTY	620	620	431,771	267,698	37	620	—	0.0
EDU	305	290	11,710	3,396	4	305	▲	10.0
CLEANING	49.0	48.0	89,296	4,323	5	49.0	▼	-0.5
KGL	60	60	74,000	4,440	3	60	▼	-1.0
KCPC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	174	—	0.0
HUMANSOFT	3,980	3,780	764,578	2,998,240	99	3,780	▼	-100.0
NAFAIS	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	150	—	0.0
GFC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	63	—	0.0
MAYADEEN	29.0	28.5	1,004,010	28,818	20	28.5	▼	-0.5
CGC	560	540	235,957	129,766	20	540	▼	-10.0
MTCC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	56	—	0.0
UPAC	740	740	100	74	1	740	▲	50.0
ALAFCO	255	248	286,000	71,480	8	250	—	0.0
MUBARRAD	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	79	—	0.0
LOGISTICS	68	66	153,816	10,157	8	68	▲	1.0
SCEM	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	90	—	0.0
GCEM	80	76	182,110	14,123	9	77	▼	-4.0
QIC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	85	—	0.0
FCEM	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	90	—	0.0
RKWC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	98	—	0.0
SPEC	90	89	301,011	26,792	12	90	▲	1.0
Industrials			**8,266,296**	**3,882,531**	**366**	**1785.35**	▼	**-11.97**
KSH	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	188	—	0.0
NSH	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	40.0	—	0.0
PAPCO	110	110	50	6	1	110	▲	6.0
CATTL	204	204	3,000	612	1	204	—	0.0
DANAH	89	86	938,500	81,970	35	88	—	0.0
FOOD	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	2,460	—	0.0
Consumer Goods			**941,550**	**82,587**	**37**	**1122.69**	▲	**8.97**
MHC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	310	—	0
ATC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	1,100	—	0
YIACO	226	196	6,000	1,240	7	200	▼	-16
Health Care			**6,000**	**1,240**	**7**	**1340.72**	▼	**-16.19**
KCIN	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	1,400	—	0
KHOT	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	250	—	0
SULTAN	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	67	—	0
CABLETV	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	22.5	—	0
EYAS	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	400	—	0
IFAHR	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	192	—	0
OULAFUEL	124	124	21,711	2,692	18	124	—	0
MUNTAZAHAT	82	80	920,000	74,240	19	81	▲	1
JAZEERA	560	540	154,823	85,761	14	560	—	0
SOOR	124	124	35,804	4,440	20	124	—	0
FUTUREKID	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	124	—	0
ALRAI	178	174	590,131	103,136	28	176	▲	2
ZIMAH	58	57	121,230	6,911	9	58	▲	1
Mezzan	990	990	248,135	245,654	11	990	—	0
Consumer Services			**2,091,834**	**522,833**	**119**	**928.18**	▲	**3.37**
ZAIN	445	440	1,480,899	657,358	52	440	▼	-5
OOREDOO	1,260	1,260	5	6	1	1,260	▲	40
HITSTELEC	46.5	44.5	6,834,417	310,938	155	46.0	▲	2
VIVA	860	820	213,762	177,501	61	820	▼	-20
Telecommunications			**8,529,083**	**1,145,803**	**269**	**624.55**	▼	**-0.89**
NBK	690	670	3,278,284	2,226,333	103	680	▲	10
GBK	250	246	601,500	148,191	20	248	—	0
CBK	395	375	10,381	3,973	6	390	▲	20
ABK	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	310	—	0
ALMUTAHED	430	430	25,010	10,754	5	430	▲	5
KIB	248	248	97,000	24,056	6	248	—	0
BURG	315	305	481,053	148,666	16	305	▼	-5
KFIN	500	495	944,552	468,709	71	495	▼	-5
BOUBYAN	410	405	360,783	146,129	30	405	—	0
AUB	216	212	2,096,965	448,843	43	214	▼	-2
ITHMR	51	49.0	22,178,460	1,112,141	297	51	▲	2
WARBABANK	250	246	517,869	128,263	76	246	—	0
Banks			**30,591,857**	**4,866,058**	**673**	**936.57**	▲	**4.60**
KINS	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	248	—	0
GINS	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	550	—	0.0
AINS	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	480	—	0.0
WINS	92	85	812	69	4	92	▲	5.0
KUWAITRE	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	194	—	0.0
FTI	59	56	24,010	1,345	4	56	▼	-2.0
WETHAQ	54	54	100	5	1	54	▲	3.0
BKIKWT	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	355	—	0.0
Insurance			**24,922**	**1,419**	**9**	**1051.63**	▲	**13.26**
SOKOUK	53	50	24160604	1,234,334	184	52	▲	2.0
KRE	59	57	22,600,169	1,307,779	207	58	—	0.0
URC	90	90	5,050	455	3	90	▼	-5.0
NRE	106	102	1,870,881	195,243	36	106	▲	4.0
SRE	380	380	31,000	11,780	2	380	▲	5.0
TAM	425	405	39,799	16,819	8	425	—	0.0
AREEC	170	162	10,050	1,629	4	170	▲	8.0
MASSALEH	53	49.0	1,266,910	65,368	63	53	▲	3.0
ARABREC	37.0	36.0	2,707,661	98,994	54	37.0	▲	1.0
ERESCO	43.0	41.0	905,350	37,953	52	41.5	—	0.0
MABANEE	820	800	271,511	219,391	17	800	▼	-20.0
INJAZZAT	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	93	—	0.0
INVESTORS	26.5	26.0	1,177,015	30,787	23	26.0	—	0.0
IRC	36.5	36.0	898,500	32,450	28	36.5	▲	0.5
ALTIJARIA	76	75	508,211	38,224	16	76	—	0.0
SANAM	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	55	—	0.0
AAYANRE	89	86	479,252	41,825	22	88	▲	2.0
AQAR	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	82	—	0.0
ALAQARIA	44.5	42.0	2,129,699	92,452	63	43.0	▲	0.5
MAZAYA	128	118	15,996,346	1,927,360	186	124	▲	4.0
ADNC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	11.0	—	0.0
THEMAR	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	90	—	0.0
TIJARA	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	58	—	0.0
TAAMEER	43.0	41.0	13,879,010	583,408	106	43.0	▲	2.5
ARKAN	84	82	10,050	824	2	84	—	0.0
ARGAN	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	188	—	0.0
ABYAAR	27.5	26.0	10,021,232	268,971	116	27.0	▲	0.5
MUNSHAAT	58	56	3,621,788	206,242	95	57	▲	1.0
FIRSTDUBAI	60	58	3,022,561	179,376	76	60	▲	2.0
KBT	54	52	2,216,232	117,098	61	53	▲	2.0
REAM	285	270	150	41	2	270	—	0.0
MENA	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	32.0	—	0.0
ALMUDON	47.0	45.5	2,676,413	123,921	58	46.5	▲	0.5
MARAKEZ	47.0	45.0	128,350	5,776	7	47.0	—	0.0
REMAL	74	71	2,687,720	193,910	43	73	▲	2.0
AWJ	83	78	1,606,407	128,850	49	83	▲	1.0
Real Estate			**114,927,921**	**7,161,259**	**1,583**	**996.58**	▲	**12.21**
KINV	100	100	505,000	50,500	15	100	▼	-2.0
FACIL	164	162	70,000	11,380	6	162	—	0.0
IFA	44.0	42.0	5,158,242	223,476	88	44.0	▲	1.5
NINV	106	104	134,361	13,978	8	104	—	0.0
KPROJ	420	410	397,877	163,430	19	415	—	0.0
COAST	45.5	44.0	778,600	35,227	22	45.5	▲	0.5
SECH	50	47.5	7,297,153	352,787	149	48.5	▼	-1.5
SGC	99	95	419	40	2	99	—	0.0
ARZAN	39.0	37.0	3,440,804	130,035	93	38.0	▲	0.5
MARKAZ	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	106	—	0.0
KMEFIC	31.5	29.5	52,750	1,585	24	31.5	▲	1.5
ALAMAN	49.0	49.0	2,900	142	1	49.0	—	0.0
ALOLA	49.5	48.5	48,200	2,339	6	49.0	—	0.0
ALMAL	21.0	20.0	3,789,524	77,673	29	20.0	▼	-1.0
GIH	43.5	42.0	2,841,677	121,012	66	43.5	▲	1.5
AAYAN	50	49.0	3,848,382	190,836	72	50	▲	0.5
BAYANINV	51	48.0	16,365,645	810,075	97	51	▲	3.0
OSOUL	63	62	30,010	1,861	2	63	▲	1.0
KFIC	51	51	4,850	247	1	51	▲	2.5
KAMCO	94	89	76,452	6,805	8	93	▼	-1.0
NIH	65	64	70,507	4,548	5	65	▼	-1.0
UNICAP	49.0	48.0	450,050	21,709	6	49.0	▲	0.5
MADAR	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	12.5	—	0.0
ALDEERA	36.5	36.0	38,501	1,403	11	36.5	▲	1.0
ALSALAM	50	48.0	4,326,019	212,075	86	50	▲	2.5
EKTTITAB	40.5	39.5	3,346,640	133,713	62	40.0	▲	0.5
ALMADINA	49.5	47.0	1,522,800	74,421	53	49.5	▲	2.5
NOOR	52	50	720,793	37,351	18	52	▲	1.0
TAMINV	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	320	—	0.0
EXCH	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	158	—	0.0
KSHC	40.5	39.5	1,719,000	68,603	46	40.5	▲	0.5
ASIYA	38.5	37.0	196,937	7,364	16	38.0	▼	-0.5
GNAHC	39.0	38.0	387,709	14,902	14	38.5	—	0.0
AMWAL	71	70	500	35	2	71	—	0.0
ALIMTIAZ	174	166	8,316,260	1,402,356	164	168	▼	-4.0
MANAZEL	58	55	32,693,225	1,860,469	96	57	▲	3.0
NIND	122	118	325,909	39,357	16	122	▲	2.0
BIIHC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	21.5	—	0.0
SENERGY	42.5	41.5	2,444,934	102,200	81	42.0	—	0.0
AGHC	99	91	745,015	68,298	50	94	▼	-2.0
KPPC	53	52	760	40	2	52	—	0.0
TAHSSILAT	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	31.0	—	0.0
JEERANH	44.5	44.5	1,000	45	1	44.5	▼	-0.5
EKHOLDING	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	192	—	0.0
GFH	188	184	84,314	15,682	17	188	▲	4.0
INOVEST	110	104	2,515,580	271,124	89	106	—	0.0
Financial Services			**104,749,299**	**6,529,121**	**1,543**	**741.49**	▲	**6.42**
Investment Instruments			**0**	**0**	**0**	**0.00**	—	**0.00**
ASC	265	265	26,550	7,036	4	265	▼	-25.0
OSOS	138	136	22,687	3,103	4	138	▲	4.0
HAYATCOMM	85	80	87,330	7,305	20	85	▲	1.0
Technology			**136,567**	**17,444**	**28**	**705.97**	▼	**-4.82**
SANAD	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	100	—	0.0
AFAQ	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	160	—	0.0
ALSHAMEL	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	335	—	0.0
EFFECT	37.5	37.5	300	11	1	37.5	▼	-0.5
AJWAN	85	82	255,000	21,310	6	82	▼	-1.0
MASAKEN	75	75	60,000	4,500	3	75	▼	-3.0
DALQAN	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	350	—	0.0
ALEID	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	86	—	0.0
MIDAN	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	1,220	—	0.0
THURAYA	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	204	—	0.0
AMAR	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	57	—	0.0
Parallel Market			**315,300**	**25,821**	**10**	**1194.95**	▼	**-10.14**

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Italy seeks Alitalia sale, rules out rescue

ROME: Italy's centre-left government said yesterday Alitalia would be sold to the "highest bidder", again ruling out a state rescue as fears mounted that the troubled airline is plummeting towards bankruptcy. Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni said he had been disappointed by staff's rejection of a rescue plan involving deep job and salary cuts, and reiterated that the state could not and would not step in.

"The truth is what I said before the vote and what I say again today: the conditions are not there for Alitalia to be nationalised," Gentiloni said. Transport Minister Graziano Delrio meanwhile said the company would be "sold to the highest bidder" and the government made favourable noises about the mooted possibility of a partial takeover by Germany's Lufthansa. The loss-making national carrier's future is up in the air after its workforce rejected a restructuring plan which management had presented as the only alternative to bankruptcy.

Etihad Airways, which owns a 49 percent stake in Alitalia, and other shareholders had made staff acceptance of the plan a precondition for their participation in a two-billion-euro recapitalisation plan involving a combination of loans and new shareholder financing. But despite earlier proposals being watered down in negotiations with unions, over two thirds of staff voted to reject them in a ballot on Monday, in which more than 90 percent of employees took part. The latest draft of the restructuring plan involves eliminating 1,700 jobs from a global headcount of 12,500 and wage cuts of up to eight percent for some of the remaining staff. The company's board on Tuesday asked the government to appoint administrators to find a purchaser or organize the winding up of the company. "The most plausible outcome is that we are moving to a brief period of extraordinary administration which could conclude in six months with a partial or total sale of Alitalia's assets," said Economic Development minister Carlo Calenda.

Phoenix from the ashes?

Delrio added: "The business will be sold to the highest bidder ... but Alitalia has been weakened by the outcome of the ballot and its competitors will not give it any gifts." Asked about the Lufthansa rumors, Delrio said the government was not opposed while Calenda described the possibility as "interesting to explore". Calenda said the government would seek EU permission to lend Alitalia 300-400 million euros of working capital to keep its planes in the skies for the next six months pending a sale. Economists have warned Alitalia going out of business could destroy some 20,000 jobs when the impact on sub-contractors is added to that on directly-employed staff. But the government is reluctant to inject any more taxpayers cash into what consumers group ADUC recently called a "bottomless pit" for public funds.

Calenda said the government had already pumped some 7.4 billion euros into the company, which was rescued from bankruptcy in 2014, when Etihad acquired a 49 percent stake. Another consumer rights group Condacons has urged the government to guarantee tickets already sold will be reimbursed if Alitalia is grounded, which the state seems willing to do. John Strickland, an independent airline consultant based in London, said there was a real chance of Alitalia going under. "It has led a charmed life and had numerous near death experiences," he said. "Whether they will rise like a Phoenix from the ashes again seems less likely at present." Alitalia has been loss-making for years and has been squeezed hard recently by the emergence of leaner, low-cost rivals on domestic and European routes, particularly Ryanair, which is now the market leader in Italy. Alitalia lost 460 million euros last year and a similar loss is predicted for this year. The restructuring plan envisaged a return to profitability by 2019 and a subsequent expansion of long-haul operations. — AFP

News in brief

Fiat Chrysler profit up

MILAN: Carmaker Fiat Chrysler Automobiles reported yesterday that its first-quarter earnings rose by more than a third mainly due to an improved performance in Europe and by its luxury Maserati brand. The Italian-American carmaker made a net profit of 641 million euros ($ million) in the first three months of 2017, up 34 percent from 478 million euros in the same period last year. The carmaker, formed from the 2014 merger of Fiat and Chrysler, confirmed its 2017 targets, including net profit of 3 billion euros on revenues of 115 billion-120 billion euros. Shares in the company rose 4 percent to 10.09 euros in Milan trading. Fiat Chrysler said adjusted earnings before interest and taxes rose by 85 percent to 178 million euros in Europe, with the Fiat Tipo family and the Alfa Romeo Giulia and Stelvio driving higher shipments, and by 75 percent to 21 million euros in Asia due to a joint venture in China. In North America, adjusted earnings were flat at 1.24 billion euros.

S Korea's Uber fined

SEOUL: Uber's local unit in South Korea was fined yesterday for operating an illegal taxi service, in the US firm's latest brush with authorities. The smartphone ride-hailing app started its service in Seoul in 2013, sparking angry protests from South Korean taxi drivers. The firm's global CEO Travis Kalanick and its local unit were indicted for violating a law on passenger transport services after the Seoul city government claimed Uber's operations raised passenger safety issues. The Seoul Central District Court said yesterday the company had admitted the charges but had modified "issues that were in violation of the law" and had since been operating legally, according to Yonhap news agency. It fined the firm 10 million won ($8,900). CEO Kalanick did not appear for the trial and his case was postponed. Uber is the most prominent of several smartphone apps that are shaking up the traditional taxi landscape in cities around the world. But it has faced criticism and significant resistance from regulators in several countries, who accuse it of unfair competition and a lack of standards.

Standard Chartered posts profit

HONG KONG: Asia-focused bank Standard Chartered yesterday said its first quarter pre-tax profit nearly doubled compared to the same period last year, benefiting from the dampened effect of bad loans. Chief executive Bill Winters said the bank made "good progress" for the quarter, following a swing back to profitability in 2016 after it saw its first annual loss since 1989 in 2015. Late that year, it announced it was re-focusing on "affluent retail clients" and would exit or restructure $100 billion of assets. The bank also said in 2015 it would cut 15,000 jobs around the world. "The significantly increased profit before tax results from particularly low loan impairment and our focus on cost control," Winters said. He replaced former CEO Peter Sands after shareholder calls for a boardroom cull following profit warnings. Underlying pre-tax profit was at $1.05 billion for the first three months of the year, almost double that of the same period last year and beating five analysts' average estimate of $850 million.

Iberdrola's profits down

MADRID: Spain's largest power company, Iberdrola, posted yesterday a fall in its first quarter net profit, partly due to the weakness in the pound following Britain's decision to exit the European Union. The company, which generates over a quarter of its earnings in Britain where it owns Scottish Power, said its net profit in the January-March period dropped 4.7 percent over the same time last year to hit 827 million euros ($901 million). That is slightly above the average for the period of 824 million euros expected by analysts surveyed by Factset. Earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA) for its generation and supply business in Britain plunged by 75.3 to 55.4 million euros due to the depreciation of the pound by 10.3 percent during the first quarter, Ibderdrola said in a statement. EBITDA for its network business in the country fell by 11.2 percent to 322.6 million euros.

Hyundai Motor profits drop

SEOUL: South Korea's biggest automaker Hyundai Motor posted a 21 percent drop in first-quarter profits yesterday, hammered by the fallout from a diplomatic spat between Seoul and Beijing over a US missile defense system. In a statement, Hyundai said it posted 1.46 trillion won ($1.3 billion) in net profits during the January to March period, its 13th consecutive quarter of profit downturn. "Partial suspensions at factories increased cost burdens while bigger marketing fees were spent to overcome the global economic slowdown," the company said. The firm said it recorded strong sales in emerging markets like Russia and Brazil but added that "weak demand" by Chinese consumers resulted in a drop in overseas sales.

Brexit leaves industrial firms staring into regulatory void

Companies fear duplicated EU, UK processes

LONDON: Summit Therapeutics is about to start pivotal tests of a novel antibiotic discovered by UK scientists to treat a sometimes deadly bowel infection, but Britons could be the last patients to get it after Britain leaves the EU. The biotech company headquartered outside Oxford is one of thousands of manufacturers, from aerospace engineers to makers of plastic mouldings, facing an uncertain future as Britain's departure from the European Union leaves a potential regulatory vacuum in its wake.

While London plans a mammoth cut-and-paste job to convert EU law into domestic legislation, dubbed the Great Repeal Bill, this will not answer the question of what happens to the work of EU agencies that have legal powers to regulate industry. Some manufacturers are already seeking to write into supplier contracts a clause asserting who should shoulder the burden of additional costs if Britain creates its own regulators, duplicating the work required to trade in the UK and Europe.

"We will do clinical trials in the UK, but the question is what will be the process for getting UK approval?" Summit's Chief Executive Glyn Edwards said. "The big issue is really for UK patients. If there isn't some kind of mutual recognition and participation in the EU system for drugs, then the focus will be on getting first approval in Europe because the market there is so large." Officials say relations between regulatory bodies after Britain leaves the EU is a matter for Brexit negotiations in the run-up to the divorce scheduled for March 2019.

'Brexit department'

The minister in charge of Prime Minister Theresa May's "Brexit department", David Davis, told parliament at the end of March the government would build relationships with its European partners that enable it to maintain common standards. He refused to go into details about how this would work, however. May has called a snap election for June 8, hoping to strengthen her hand with a bigger parliamentary majority so she can secure what she calls the best deal for Britain in the Brexit talks.

One option might be to agree special relationships with certain EU regulatory systems, either on a transitional or long-term basis. Currently, for example, drugmakers in the European Economic Area, or single market, can tap the entire market of 500 million potential patients with a single EU marketing approval. The single market includes Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway as well as the EU. May has ruled out Britain being a part of the single market, however, and the rest of the EU may in any case baulk at allowing London to use its regulatory machinery after it leaves.

Further, EU agencies are beholden to the European Court of Justice, whose jurisdiction Britain is determined to escape. "The issue of how quickly these things can be clarified is really important," said Andrew Bonfield, finance director of National Grid and chairman of the 100 Group, representing finance heads of FTSE 100 companies and some big private firms. "People need to know how they are going to operate," he told Reuters.

"I cannot see a solution which would enable the UK to be under EU regulation if we are talking about a proper exit from the EU." Opposition Labor lawmaker Chris Leslie believes it would be difficult for Britain to be a "rule taker" from EU agencies in the long term, since regulation could be used as a tool to gain an edge over rivals. "Different groups will press for variance to get a short-term competitive advantage over European competitors," he said. Escaping the "yoke" of EU regulation, or "taking back control", was one of the reasons campaigners gave to vote in favor of Brexit in the June 2016 referendum.

LONDON: Businesswoman, Gina Miller speaks during a television interview on College Green in London yesterday. A businesswoman who took the British government to court to force a parliamentary vote on the UK's split from the EU launched a campaign yesterday to oppose an 'extreme Brexit'. — AFP

Tiny market

In the case of drugs, leaving the nearly 900-person European Medicines Agency, which is set to move from its current base in London, would mean Britain would need a stand-alone UK regulator to decide if drugs are fit for use. Since companies must pay fees to have new drugs assessed and separate filings involve extra work, the cost of accessing a British market that accounts for only 2-3 percent of global sales would likely delay the introduction of new medicines into the UK. Industry figures who have met the government to discuss the issue say they do not expect UK rules to diverge enormously from EU ones after Brexit, but they are concerned about the lack of clarity about what they will look like. It is a particular worry for small, resource-limited businesses like Summit, which was founded in 2003 as a spin-out from the University of Oxford and has a staff of 45. Ultimately, Summit might even relocate. The company already has a U.S. office and it will almost certainly set up an organization in continental Europe to be within the EU zone.

"Brexit tilts the balance less in favor of remaining based corporately in the UK," Edwards said. Other industries have similar questions. The chemicals and plastics industry has invested heavily to meet strict EU rules on safety and environmental standards, known as REACH, and could now face new UK regulations. Tim Thomas, a policy director at manufacturing and engineering trade body the EEF, said companies were concerned. "Businesses are, understandably, asking questions about future regulation and regulators, as future changes will need to be built into commercial arrangements," he said. "Different regimes are likely to bring with them new costs and burdens."

Aerospace firms fear losing oversight from the European Aviation Safety Agency, which endorses product quality, while airlines warn of disruption if Britain is cut out of Europe's single aviation market. The need to create a British regulatory system will require legislation, piling up an already daunting workload for lawmakers now further delayed by the June election. "It will take a phenomenal amount of parliamentary time and this new parliament (after the election) will be much, much more busy than anything we've seen in the last two years," said Leslie. "There are a whole array of areas that lots of people haven't quite got their heads around yet." — Reuters

Burgan Bank invites its 'Youth' for a FREE coffee at Bon Café!

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank, in collaboration with "Bon Cafe", is inviting its Youth customers to have free coffee on Friday April 28, 2017. Today, coffee shops are becoming large hubs for young coffee lovers and fit in with their current lifestyles. In addition to a wide range of privileges associated with the Youth Account, each "Youth" Account holder will be entitled to a free cup of coffee on that day. All they have to do is present their Youth ATM card to avail the free coffee. Bon Cafe is located in Mubarak Al Kabeer Street, Derwaza Al Abdulrazzaq building in Kuwait City.

The Youth Account is designed for the Bank's customers between the ages of 15 and 25 years, and seek to attain an account which represents their current lifestyle and helps in planning a successful financial future. There is no KD limit to open an account, and no minimum balance required to maintain it.

Furthermore, account holders receive free prepaid card and an ATM card which entitles them to discounts at select merchants.

Uber to launch 'flying car'

SAN FRANCISCO: Uber said Tuesday it wants to launch a system of flying cars to move people around cities, with a goal of putting demonstration projects in place by 2020. The ridesharing giant announced a series of partnerships to manufacture "vertical takeoff and landing" (VTOL) vehicles and put networks in place, a system dubbed Uber Elevate. The partner cities working with Uber are Dubai and the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolis in Texas.

"The goal of these partnerships is to develop a new on-demand VTOL network to enable customers in the future to push a button and get a high-speed flight in and around cities," Uber said in a statement. The announcement came at a summit held in the Dallas area with partners in the project. "What started as a simple question 'why can't I push a button and get a ride?' has turned, for Uber, into a passionate pursuit of the pinnacle of urban mobility-the reduction of congestion and pollution from transportation, giving people their time back, freeing up real estate dedicated to parking and providing access to mobility in all corners of a city," said Uber chief product officer Jeff Holden. "Urban aviation is a natural next step for Uber in this pursuit, which is why we are working to make push a button, get a flight a reality." Uber's goal is to have the first demonstration network in place in Dubai for the 2020 World Expo in that city, and another pilot in Dallas the same year ahead of "full-scale operations" in the Texas region by 2023. The announcement came a day after Silicon Valley "flying car" startup Kitty Hawk, reportedly backed by Google co-founder Larry Page, released a video of its airborne prototype and announced plans for deliveries of a "personal flying machine" this year.

Uber's plans appear more ambitious, and include partnerships with US-based Bell Helicopter, Brazilian manufacturer Embraer and Slovenia's Pipistrel to produce flying machines for short distance urban operations. "Uber's Elevate network is an exciting opportunity for Bell Helicopter to help transform how cities move people and products in the future," Bell president and chief executive Mitch Snyder said in a statement. Embraer CEO Paulo Cesar de Souza e Silva praised the "unique opportunity to complement the air transport knowledge of a visionary and revolutionary ground transport company." — AFP

flydubai showcases its growing network

KUWAIT: flydubai, at the Arabian Travel Market, showcased its growing network including its latest destinations for the upcoming summer season. Flights to Batumi in Georgia, Qabala in Azerbaijan and Tivat in Montenegro will operate from June to September 2017, creating a network of 93 destinations in 44 countries for the Dubai-based airline. This reflects the growth and maturity of flydubai which since 2015 has added 18 new destinations.

"At flydubai we remain committed to providing our passengers with a variety of destinations to travel to, especially during the summer season," said Ghaith Al Ghaith, Chief Executive Officer at flydubai. "The decision to launch our seasonal routes to complement our existing networkis a direct response to customer feedback and we hope our passengers enjoy what these hidden gems have to offer," he added.

flydubai's popular leisure destinations reflect the diversity of its network. Last year, its top four destinations for a beach getaway in terms of passenger numbers were Colombo, Salalah, Male' and Zanzibar. The airline has seen passenger numbers to Colombo grow by 24% in 2016 compared to the previous year, with passenger numbers to Salalah and Male' increasing by 40% and 29% respectively during the same period.

For those looking for a city break, Amman, Tbilisi and Beirut were amongst the most visited destinations in 2016. The number of passengers travelling to Amman grew by 7% in 2016 compared to the previous year along with Tbilisi which saw passenger numbers double for the same period. Other popular destinations included Istanbul and Bucharest, with passenger growth figures of 21% and 37% respectively in the same period.

The highest growth of passengers in 2016 was seen by Azerbaijan's capital Baku, which saw six times the number of passengers travel in 2016 compared to the previous year due to changes in visa requirements. "While the majority of our passengers travel point to point, our connecting passengers are able to benefit from our interline agreements, which provide opportunities for onward travel to more than 200 destinations," said Jeyhun Efendi, Senior Vice President Commercial (UAE, EU, ME, CIS) at flydubai.

"This is especially beneficial to the passengers of the 62 previously underserved markets we operate to who are now able to access Dubai's efficient aviation hub and explore destinations that were previously out of reach." Along with a diverse network, flydubai continues to enhance its product offerings for passengers. 48 out of flydubai's 58 aircraft are now equipped with WiFi

and Live TV services, providing passengers with greater connectivity throughout their journey.flydubai's Business Class continues to offer passengers a personalized travel experience with increased comfort and added convenience.

OPEN, flydubai's new rewards program, has been well received across the region since its launch in October 2016 and has been designed to make earning and spending reward points simple and straightforward. "Our latest product offerings continue to reflect the growth and maturity of our airline," said Sudhir Sreedharan, Senior Vice President Commercial (GCC, Subcontinent and Africa)at flydubai. "With passengers being able to benefit from connectivity in the air, comfort in Business Class and more options for travel on our network, we continue to give passengers more reasons to fly with flydubai."

CFA Society Kuwait hosts Fintech Conference

KUWAIT: CFA Society Kuwait, CFA Institute's local association of investment professionals consisting of portfolio managers, financial analysts and investment advisors, held a Fintech conference on 24th April, 2017 at the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce. The event was in collaboration with the Union of Investment Companies (UIC), Ajar, StartupQ8 and Sirdab Labas part of CFA Institute's global "Putting Investors First" initiative.

Mijbel Al Qattan, President of CFA Society Kuwait

Prominent figures from Kuwait's investment industry attended the conference. Speakers such as Saalim Chowdhury, Entrepreneur-in-Residence at 500 Startups- the world's most active Fintech investor -, Shaheen Al-Khudari, co-founder and CEO of Ajar Online - a cloud service platform that simplifies the rent collection process for landlords and tenants - and Haider Al-Mosawi, CEO and co-founder of Sirdab Lab - a startup hub that aims to empower entrepreneurs - addressed the latest developments in financial technology, its benefits, and the challenges it's presenting to the industry.

Mijbel Al Qattan, CFA, President of CFA Society Kuwait, said: "The investment management industry is undergoing a significant disruption due to Fintech innovations, which are offering both opportunities and challenges. It is critical for organizations and professionals to adapt their business models and services to technological advancements such as artificial intelligence, smart machines, data analytics systems and block chain; which are changing the way the industry works.

By supporting CFA Institute's "Putting Investors First" initiative, we want to inspire our community to make real impact and foster a market environment where investors can thrive. Hence CFA Society Kuwait has chosen to partner with some of the country's leading investment entities, in order to educate professionals on protecting investor interests amidst the changes these developments are causing to existing practices."

Fadwa Darwish, Director of Technical Support at UIC & Acting Director of Investment Studies Center, commented: "Factors such as big data and artificial intelligence will impact current models for investment research and asset management, although the GCC has been relatively slower in its adoption of Fintech innovations; compared to other regions around the world.

Since the need for specialized investment advisory will always be necessary, it is important for professionals to understand how to ethically implement these tools for growth purposes.

CFA Institute's "Putting Investors First" initiative is aimed at building awareness of investor rights and encouraging investment professionals to shape a trustworthy, forward-thinking financial industry that better serves society.

Etihad Airways' first apartment on the A380

Etihad Airways A380 goes 'double daily' to Sydney

ABU DHABI: Etihad Airways yesterday announced all 14 weekly flights on the popular Abu Dhabi - Sydney route will be operated with its flagship A380 aircraft, effective October 29. The current daily A380 Sydney flights will be joined by a second daily superjumbo service, upgraded from a 328-seat Boeing 777-300ER. The announcement comes as Etihad Airways marks the 10th anniversary of flying to Sydney, its first Australian destination.

Featuring the carrier's revolutionary The Residence - the world's first three-room suite on a commercial airliner - the additional deployment of the 496-seat double decker aircraft means one of Australia's largest cities will join London and New York as an all-A380 operation. Business and leisure travelers to and from Abu Dhabi, the airline's operational hub, will enjoy increased capacity. The carrier will meet growing demand from the UAE and connecting cities across the Gulf region, Middle East and Europe.

The Sydney - London Heathrow route, via Abu Dhabi, will also offer guests the consistency, convenience and comfort of a seamless all-A380 service in both directions. Etihad Airways' three daily London Heathrow flights are operated with an A380. Beginning June 1, the second daily New York service will be upgraded to the superjumbo. Introduced on the Sydney route two years ago, the A380 accommodates up to two guests in The Residence, which features a living room, bedroom and shower, together with nine First Apartments, 70 Business Studios and 415 Economy Smart Seats.

Peter Baumgartner, Etihad Airways Chief Executive Officer, said: "Sydney is one of our busiest and best performing long-haul routes where we have experienced increased demand, particularly in our premium cabins, since the launch 10 years ago. "By introducing the A380 on the second daily flight, we are able to ensure our flagship product is on all of the Sydney services each week. The upgrade of this service will help fulfill growing demand, benefiting travelers to and from Abu Dhabi, and across Etihad Airways' global network."

South Africa ratifies Citi's $5 million FX rigging settlement

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa's Competition Tribunal yesterday confirmed a 69.5 million rand ($5.25 million) settlement with Citibank for its role in rigging rand currency trading, making the US bank the first among more than dozen banks named in a probe. The fine is less than 10 percent of Citibank's annual revenue in South Africa - the potential size of the penalty - because the bank is one of two co-operating with anti-trust authorities' investigating arm, the Competition Commission.

The Commission, which investigates cases before referring them to the Tribunal for adjudication, said in February it had found more than a dozen local and foreign banks colluded to coordinate trading the rand and the US dollar. It recommended fines amounting to 10 percent of the banks' South African revenues in a scandal that has piled political pressure on local banks. The Tribunal said Citibank admitted to manipulating the price of bids and offers through agreements to refrain from trading, and created fictitious bids and offers.

"Citibank additionally admitted to fixing bids, offers and bid-offer spreads in relation to spot trades on ZAR (rand) currency pairs through co-ordination/alignment of the bids, offers, and bid-offer spreads quoted to customers," it said in a statement.

Barclays Africa is also cooperating with investigators in exchange for immunity from prosecution. The Commission has granted the regional unit of Barclays PLC conditional immunity. — Reuters

JPMorgan zooming in on Warsaw for new global back office centre

WARSAW: US bank JPMorgan Chase is zooming in on Warsaw as a destination for its new back office operations centre which could eventually employ several thousand people supporting the bank's European and Asian business, sources said. As Britain prepares to leave the European Union, and banks and other financial firms look to shift jobs from London's financial centre, Poland has set its sights on mid-tier work where salaries may not be astronomical but jobs are numerous.

A delegation from JPMorgan visited Warsaw last month, the sources said, to look for real estate that could house the new centre, which could become of the largest of its kind in Poland. "The focus is definitely Warsaw," said one source familiar with the matter, speaking anonymously as discussions are not public. JPMorgan has also visited Poland's western city of Wroclaw and Hungary's capital Budapest as possible contenders, the source added.

"There were serious talks last month. It looks like they are close to picking Poland but never say never until deal is signed," another source said. Plans to create the centre were not connected to Britain decision to exit the EU, the first source said. JPMorgan declined to comment on its plans. Poland, the EU's largest eastern economy, has already established itself as a major offshoring site for banks. The country has a population of 38 million and a relatively high-skilled and inexpensive workforce - average wages are roughly three times lower than in neighboring Germany. Goldman Sachs already has 300 people working in the Polish capital and is seeking 200 people more, while Credit Suisse employs several thousand people in Warsaw and Wroclaw. UBS has also based large IT and back office administrative operations in the country.

The estimates of financial services jobs moved from all Western countries to Poland range from 35,000 to 45,000, with Britain's decision to exit the EU seen accelerating the process.

A third source familiar with the matter said Warsaw was likely to emerge as the winner. "JP Morgan wants to hire 2,500 people and only Warsaw has a job market which is deep enough to bear with such an investment," the source said. Another Warsaw-based real estate source that although there was not enough prime real estate to accommodate several thousand employees right now, it could become available over the next year or so. JPMorgan would likely start with a few dozen people on the ground in the Polish capital by the end of year if plans are finalized, the first source said. — Reuters

Mining giant BHP reports a slump in copper output

Strike action dents production

SYDNEY: Mining giant BHP Billiton reported a slump in copper output yesterday as strike action at the world's largest mine for the metal dented production, while flagging the sale of some US shale assets. The world's biggest miner said copper production slid 44 percent to 227,000 tons in the first quarter of 2017 compared to the same period last year, revising down its annual forecast to between 1.33 million and 1.36 million tons.

It blamed a 43-day strike at the Escondida mine in Chile where BHP has a 57.5 percent stake. Workers ended their lengthy stand-off last month, triggering a law that pushed back pay negotiations by 18 months. Earlier this month, Rio Tinto also reported a plunge in copper output due to the strike in Chile, where it has a 30 percent interest. BHP said in a quarterly report it had "initiated the divestment of non-core acreage" in its shale fields in the US, just weeks after rejecting an activist hedge fund proposal to restructure the business and spin off its US petroleum arm.

The sale of 50,000 acres in Hawkville was "well advanced", the miner said, adding that it was "considering all options" including the sell-down of its Fayetteville gas assets. "Everything we do at BHP Billiton is designed to create value for all of our shareholders, today and for the long term," chief executive Andrew Mackenzie said. BHP knocked back a call this month from New York-based Elliott Advisors, a significant shareholder, to merge the miner's British and Australian entities into a single Australian-headquartered and Australian tax resident listed company.

Elliott, run by billionaire Paul Singer, also wants BHP to spin-off its petroleum business into a separate entity listed on the New York Stock Exchange and return more cash to shareholders through buy-backs. The mining giant in February reported a dramatic rebound in half-yearly profits to US$3.2 billion on the back of surging commodity prices-including iron ore-and improved productivity. On Tuesday it reported continued record production from its Australian iron ore and coal mines for the nine months to March. — AFP

Mobi Baitak

KFH Headquarters

KFH continues to Serve clients electronically

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) announced that it is ready to fulfill its commitments towards its clients during the holiday. The bank will continue to offer various services for its clients in Kuwait and overseas through its website that offers over 150 eservices, in addition to the 24/7 airport branch and other service channels that provide clients with necessary services round the clock.

Moreover, the Call Center will be ready to receive calls from clients throughout the day, and will work relentlessly to overcome any problems that might face clients in Kuwait and overseas.

In addition, KFH continues to offer its IVR service on 1803333 that is available throughout the day. Clients can call to make account transactions, ask for financial transaction, pay bills, purchase cards to recharge cell phone, and other services. Further, clients can take advantage of KFH's ATM machines (Shamel) that are available at most of the branches in vital locations. KFH offers Mobi Baitok vehicles that serve as mobile branches that allow people to deposit and withdraw cash in addition to other usual transactions.

KFH has additional technical privileges, such as allowing clients to conduct basic banking operations through smart phones on kfhonline application. KFH has recently launched a new e-service that allows KFH customer subscribed to KFH's SMS Baitak notification service to receive Push message-type notifications - in addition to the regular SMS notifications - onto their smartphones. KFH's e-Banking customers who are also SMS Baitak subscribers will be able to register to - and receive - the Push messages for free via the KFH Online Smartphone app, and will also be able to receive and view the Push messages using the smartphone apps.

United investigates 'dead rabbit' report

LONDON: United Airlines is investigating a report that a giant rabbit died on one of its trans-Atlantic flights. Distraught breeder Annette Edwards from Worcestershire in central England told The Associated Press by phone yesterday that Simon, a 10-month-old, 3-foot (meter) -long continental rabbit, had a vet check shortly before traveling from London's Heathrow airport to Chicago's O'Hare airport.

She said Simon had been purchased by a celebrity whom she did not identify. "Simon had his vet check just before getting on the plane," she said. "He was fit as a fiddle." The airline said in a statement that it was "saddened" by the news and had been in contact with Edwards and offered assistance.

"The safety and wellbeing of all the animals that travel with us is of the utmost importance to United Airlines and our PetSafe team," the airline said. Edwards said the airline was examining CCTV images to determine what might have happened to the rabbit. United declined to comment on the matter beyond its statement. United is dealing with public relations issues after a passenger who would not give up his seat was dragged forcibly from a plane in Chicago. Airport officers removed David Dao, a 69-year-old from Kentucky. Images of his bloodied face were widely circulated on social media, forcing the airline's CEO to apologize. — AP

Can crowd funding help scale up solar power for Africa's poor?

NAIROBI: When Ronald Van Harten arrived in Kenya from the Netherlands in 2015 he was determined to invest in solar-powered equipment for homes across Africa, make a profit and help the rural poor get energy. But within two years his company EcoZoom, which sells solar lights, radios, MP3 players and other equipment to some of Kenya's poorest residents, ran into financial difficulties. The banks were not willing to lend him the capital he needed to stay afloat and loans available from microfinance institutions were too small.

So, like a number of new technology companies seeking to scale up their programs in Africa, he turned to a crowd funding company. "Few banks if any could finance a social investment project dealing with people seen as high risk group, and even worse banks are expensive and give conditions that are not easy to meet," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation, referring to high interest rates charged by banks.

TRINE, a Swedish company which raised funds for EcoZoom, has a community of about 1,000 young investors in northern Europe willing to each give a minimum of 25 euros ($27.14) to solar firms which aim to help the world's poorest. Using crowd funding, it has raised more than 750,000 euros ($814,200) for 10 renewable energy projects since its launch last year, said Matthew McShane, TRINE's regional manager in East Africa. The firm has invested in countries including Kenya, Zambia, Uganda, Tanzania and Senegal.

In Kenya, EcoZoom received 170,000 euros in February, while 160,000 euros went to Azuri East Africa, part of Azuri Technologies. Two solar microgrids have also received funds. "The majority of (our) investors can invest in many other ventures in Europe but choose to put their money in social impact projects partly because they want to touch the lives of the poor and partly because returns are slightly higher when compared to ... normal investments," McShane said. The returns are about 6 percent, because of the perceived higher risk associated with this market, he said.

Growing trend

Globally, crowd funding provided $2.1 billion in investment in 2015, and investments in developing countries alone are predicted to exceed $96 billion a year within a decade, according to the World Bank. It is emerging as an increasingly important means of financing new technology at scale in rural Africa, said Azuri Technologies CEO, Simon Bransfield-Garth.

Unlike microfinance institutions where large investors make many small loans to firms, crowd funding allows many small lenders to provide substantial finance to organizations with the reach and scale to deliver significant impact, he said. "Crowd funding is clearly no longer just for start-ups and has the potential to provide a new class of capital for energy access," Bransfield-Garth said. Azuri East Africa turned to crowd funding when it wanted to raise cash to help its Kenyan partner, Raj Ushanga House, sell solar panels to 1,200 homes, helping 6,000 people access electricity. —Reuters

SAN FRANCISCO: In this file photo, the Waymo driverless car is displayed during a Google event, in San Francisco. — AP

Waymo testing self-driving car ride service in Arizona

SAN FRANCISCO: Alphabet Inc's Waymo autonomous vehicle group will begin testing a self-driving car program for hundreds of families in Phoenix, Arizona and is buying 500 Chrysler minivans to do so, the companies said on Tuesday. Waymo, which along with Google is owned by Alphabet Inc, recently has been quietly testing the service for a handful of families, learning what potential customers would want from a ride service, the company said in a blog post.

It urged people to apply to take part in an expanded test, which is the first public trial of Waymo's self-driving cars. The vehicles include human operators from Waymo behind the wheel, in case intervention is required and to take feedback. Silicon Valley is racing to master self-driving technology, betting that it will transform the auto industry and be a gold mine for leading companies. Waymo has one of the best technology track records, and it has an alliance with Fiat Chrysler Automobiles.

Many companies expect that customers will use autonomous vehicles as a service, rather than owning them outright. Ride service Uber in particular expects to use autonomous cars. The new Waymo test in Arizona is meant to help the company understand what people want out of self-driving cars and see how they use and integrate the service. Testers will get access every day at any time. Waymo already has with 100 Chrysler Pacifica minivans and is acquiring five times more, partly to be able to support the service. —Reuters

Russia-linked hackers target Macron campaign

'Serious, but nothing was compromised'

PARIS: Researchers with the Japanese anti-virus firm Trend Micro say the campaign of French presidential front-runner Emmanuel Macron has been targeted by Russia-linked hackers, adding more details to previous suggestions that the centrist politician was being singled out for electronic eavesdropping by the Kremlin. The campaign's digital chief, Mounir Mahjoubi, confirmed the attempted intrusions in a telephone interview late Monday but said they had all been thwarted. "It's serious, but nothing was compromised," he said.

The French presidential race is not yet over. Macron faces far-right rival Marine Le Pen in France's presidential runoff on May 7. Macron favors a strong European Union, while Le Pen wants to pull France out of the bloc, weakening it. Trend Micro said it discovered the campaign by monitoring the creation of rogue, lookalike websites often used by hackers to trick victims into giving up their passwords. The Tokyo-based firm recently detected four Macron-themed fake domains being set up on digital infrastructure used by a group it calls Pawn Storm, according to Trend Micro researcher Feike Hacquebord.

Mahjoubi confirmed that at least one of the sites had recently been used as part of an attempt to steal campaign staffers' online credentials. Unmasking which group is behind this or that spying campaign is one of the most challenging aspects of cybersecurity, but Hacquebord said he was confident Trend Micro had gotten it right."This is not a 100 percent confirmation, but it's very, very likely," Hacquebord said, adding the political nature of the targeting was "really in line with what they've been doing in the last two years."

Trend Micro has stopped short of accusing any country of pulling Pawn Storm's strings, but American spy agencies and a variety of threat intelligence firms say that Pawn Storm, an extraordinarily prolific group also known as Fancy Bear or APT28, of being an arm of Russia's intelligence apparatus. French officials have also tended to be more circumspect than their American counterparts, repeatedly declining to tie Pawn Storm to any specific actor. Russian government officials have long denied claims of state-sanctioned hacking.

PARIS: French centrist presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron pays respect during a ceremony marking 102nd anniversary of the slaying of Armenians by Ottoman Turks in a brief ceremony in Paris. — AP

On Monday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov was quoted as saying that the notion that Russian hackers were targeting the French election was "completely incorrect." The Associated Press left several messages with the hacker or hackers who registered the rogue Macron websites. None were returned. Mahjoubi said the attempts to penetrate the Macron campaign date back to December. In February, the campaign complained publicly of being targeted by Russia-linked electronic spying operations, although it offered no proof at the time.

Trend Micro's report, which was produced independently of the Macron campaign and lists 160 electronic espionage operations across a series of targets, adds a measure of evidence to the notion, even if the fact that the rogue websites were registered in March and April doesn't line up with the campaign's timeline. The French election, the first round of which Macron won Sunday with just over 24 percent of the vote, has been closely watched for signs of digital interference of any kind.

Many observers feared a repeat of the US electoral contest in 2016, when hackers allegedly backed by Moscow broke into the email inboxes of the Democratic National Committee and other political operatives. Pilfered documents subsequently appeared on WikiLeaks and other more mysterious websites, putting the Democrats on the defensive during their losing campaign against Donald Trump. —AP

TED: Smart machines to recover lost memories, mind your children

VANCOUVER: Intelligent machines of the future will help restore memory, mind your children, fetch your coffee and even care for aging parents. It will all be part of a brave new world of the not-so-distant future, in which innovative smart machines, rather than being the undoing of people-as some technophobes have long feared-actually enhance humans.

Many expert say technology will allow people to take on tasks they might only have dreamed of in the past. "Super-intelligence should give us super-human abilities," said Tom Gruber, head of the team responsible for Apple's Siri digital assistant, during an on-stage talk at the prestigious TED Conference.

Smarter machines, smarter humans

"As machines get smarter, so do we," Gruber said. "Artificial intelligence can enable partnerships where each human on the team is doing what they do best," he told the popular technology conference. Gruber, a co-creator of Siri and artificial intelligence research at Apple, told of being drawn to the field three decades ago by the potential for technology to meet people's needs. "I am happy to see that the idea of an intelligent personal assistant is mainstream," he said.

Now he has taken his innovative approach to smart machines, and is turning the thinking about the technology on its head. "Instead of asking how smart we can make our machines, let's ask how smart our machines can make us," Gruber said. Already smart technology is taking hold, with popular digital assistants like Apple's Siri, created Gruber.

South Korean giant Samsung created Bixby to break into a surging market for voice-activated virtual assistants, which includes Amazon's Alexa, Google's Assistant and Microsoft's Cortana. Amazon appears to have impacted the sector the most with its connected speakers using Alexa. The service allows users a wide range of voice interactions for music, news, purchases and connects with smart home devices.

Remembering everything

Gruber envisions artificial intelligence-AI-getting even more personal, perhaps augmenting human memory. "Human memory is famously flawed-like, where did the 1960s go and can I go there too?" Gruber quipped. He spoke of a future in which artificial intelligence remembers everyone met during a lifetime and details of everything someone read, heard, said or did.

"From the tiniest clue it could help you retrieve anything you've seen or heard before," he said. "I believe AI will make personal memory enhancement a reality; I think it's inevitable." Such memories would need to be private, with people choosing what to keep, and be kept absolutely secure, he maintained.

Surefooted robots

Boston Dynamics robotics company founder Marc Raibert was at TED with a four-legged SpotMini robot nimble enough to frolic amid the conference crowd. He smiled but would not comment when asked by AFP about the potential to imbue program the gadget with the kind of artificial intelligence described by fellow speakers.

Raibert did, however, note that the robots are designed to be compatible with new "user interfaces." Current virtual assistants have been described as a step into an era of controlling computers by speaking instead of typing or tapping screens. "I think it won't be too long before we're using robots to take care of our parents, or help our children take care of us," Raibert said from the TED Talk.

The gorilla problem

Not everyone at TED embraced the idea of a future in which machines are smarter and more capable than humans, however. Stuart Russell, a University of California at Berkeley computer sciences professor, referred to the situation as the "gorilla problem" in that when smarter humans came along it boded ill for evolutionary ancestors.

"This queasy feeling that making something smarter than your own species is not a good idea," said Russell, co-author of the book Artificial Intelligence: A Modern Approach. As an AI researcher he supported research in the technology. However, he urged programming machines with robotic laws of behavior, in a shrewd spin on work of science fiction author Isaac Asimov. He gave the example of a robot being told to simply fetch coffee.

A machine not constrained by proper principles might decide that accomplishing the task required it to defend against being shut down and remove all obstacles from its path by whatever means necessary. Russell counseled robot principles including altruism, humility, and making a priority of human values. "You are probably better off with a machine that is like this," Russell said. "It is a first step in human compatibility with AI."—AFP

Huawei hosts its second Global Safe City Summit

By Ben Garcia

DUBAI: In the onset of global terrorism and various issues on public security and safety, Huawei hosted its Second Global Safe City Summit 2017 themed 'Leading New ICT, The Road to Collaborative Public Safety' in Dubai. The event kicked-of yesterday and continued till today. Huawei admitted to have been servicing more than 350 government customers, industry experts, and partners wherein some of them are also participating in the summit to share their experience and opinions, and promote digital transformation of the public safety industry.

In a round-table discussion yesterday Huawei introduced the C-C4ISR Collaborative Public Safety Solutions, which they said would drive digital transformation of the global public safety industry. A former law enforcer in Singapore over the last 30 years, Hong Eng Koh, Huawei Global Chief Public Safety Expert, Enterprise Business Group presented the projects being maintained in Singapore to ensure safety and security of all its citizens as well as visitors.

"Until now I continue to fight crimes, this time, through the help of Huawei technology. Public safety is the main and key concern of Huawei so I was really moved by the fact that I belong now to a company that can really provide solution. Now, I am helping the public to ensure safety and security through Huawei technology. It means this company is admirable doing great favor around the world in order to save lives and properties. Let us accept, the world is changing rapidly, with increasing global urbanization, cities are expanding and becoming less safe, we need a technology that can provide solution," he said.

Alaa Elshimy, confirmed some of the projects being implemented in Kuwait in collaboration with the Kuwaiti authorities to ensure safety and security are observed. "We cannot divulged our collaborative projects with the Kuwaiti government, it's not in our hand to discuss in public, we have confidentiality issue, but yes, we have several collaborative projects being implanted in Kuwait, some are still being shaped," said Elshimy.

He also mentioned security and safety projects being implemented in other countries in the world and in particular Middle East such as Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Qatar. "We are involved in 80 countries and 200 cities all over the world. Our projects are all in collaboration with the local government involved. We respect and follow their local laws with regards to installing our technology solutions," he said.

World-leading public safety partners such as YITU, SenseTime, Zenith, iOmniscient, and GSAFETY, Huawei also released the first all-cloud and matrix intelligence Video Cloud Solution and Crisis and Disaster Management Solution. The solutions are designed to address diverse safety threats and protect citizens in cities across the world. Asked on the accuracy and commenting on public safety, Fan Siyong, President of Public Sector of Huawei Enterprise Business Group, said: "As cities embrace digital transformation, new safety threats are emerging that need to be addressed by the public safety industry.

We need to keep pace with social and technological developments and shift from a traditional city safety construction model to one of collaborative public safety. By building cross-region and cross-agency collaborative public safety systems that connect governments and citizens, we can help cities better prevent, detect, handle, and recover from various threats. The 'collaborative' method of C-C4ISR will be fundamental to digital transformation of the public safety industry.

Using new ICT such as Internet of Things (IoT), Big Data, mobile broadband, and Software-Defined Networking (SDN), as well as cloud-pipe-device synergy, the solution will drive efficient collaboration among governmental agencies as well as between governmental agencies and citizens." Today will be the formal opening and the signing of MOU's at Intercontinental Hotel and the media tour at Huawei OpenLab in Dubai Media City.

Trump looks to lift protections on America's vast nature preserves

WASHINGTON: After moving to unstitch climate change rules, US President Donald Trump is turning his sights on America's vast nature preserves, with a view to possibly lifting federal protections brought in over the past two decades. Yesterday, he is to sign an executive order reviewing decisions by predecessors Barack Obama, George W Bush and Bill Clinton to designate public land a "national monument" under a 1906 law known as the Antiquities Act. The aim is to "give states and local communities a meaningful voice in the process," said Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, whose department oversees federal land use under the motto "Protecting America's Great Outdoors and Powering Our Future."

Zinke said the outcome of the review was not pre-ordained. His department is to provide an interim report in 45 days then a fuller one in 120 days. But it conceivably could roll back protections fixed under the Antiquities Act-brought in under president Theodore Roosevelt, keen on conserving America's natural heritage-and set the scene for fierce legal challenges. "National monument" land has come to be synonomous over the years with a bar to drilling for fossil fuels on public land, or other commercial activities.

While Republicans in Utah and other states are keen to lift protections they see as too expansive and undermining economic opportunities, environmental groups and Native Americans are deeply opposed. In the past, areas presidents have tagged as "national monuments" were later transformed by Congress into full-fledged National Parks-the Grand Canyon and Death Valley among them. Since the Act came into force more than a century ago, only three presidents-all Republicans-did not use its powers: Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and George H. W. Bush.

Obama had millions of hectares (acres) classified under the Act during his presidency, including maritime zones, especially in the Pacific. Under Trump's review, only "monuments" of 40,000 hectares (100,000 acres) or more will be examined. A key area will be the Bears Ears National Monument, a 530,000-hectare (1.3-million-acre) zone in Utah Obama proclaimed in 2016. Another will be the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument also in Utah-a spectacular tract of canyons, ridges and a river-designated by Clinton in 1996. The Republican senator for Utah, Orrin Hatch, has railed against the national monument decisions made in Washington, saying his state should have more say over how the land is protected. In a Washington Post opinion piece, Hatch said Obama "ignored the best interests of Utah and cast aside the will of the people - all in favor of a unilateral approach meant to satisfy the demands of far-left interest groups." Other presidents, too, went too far Hatch said, adding that Trump "stands ready to undo the harm brought about by their overreach." —AFP

PEMBA, Mozambique: Members of the Mozambican Forestry Police stop and search a truck for illegal wood on the outskirts of Pemba in Pemba. —AFP

Mozambique battles illegal logging to save tropical forests

PEMBA, Mozambique: A squad of Mozambican forest rangers made their first arrest just minutes after arriving at a checkpoint near the northern port city of Pemba. Nicolau Moises, the forestry department chief in Cabo Delgado province, one of Mozambique's top timber-producing regions, quickly seized a truck piled high with freshly-cut bamboo stalks. The driver of the vehicle was accused of breaking an annual 90-day ban on logging-just one tactic in Mozambique's battle against deforestation. That moratorium has been extended a further three months. Tropical forests cover more than half of the southern African country's landmass but China's insatiable appetite for rare types of wood to feed its furniture industry-and an uncontrolled surge in logging-means Mozambique is being stripped of its slow-growing tropical forests while some hardwood species are facing extinction.

The London-based Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) estimated that in 2013, at least 93 percent of logging in Mozambique was illegal-and that most of the illicit timber ended up sold in China. "For the past five years we have seen illegal logging increasing," Environment Minister Celso Correia told AFP. "It's been a big challenge for the country."

'Limbs cut off'

Corruption, weak laws and ineffective institutions, coupled with inadequate resources to fight illicit logging, have left the country's forests unprotected. But Correia said intelligence-gathering has proven to be particularly important to the fight. "Our communities, our institutions are very vulnerable to corruption," he said. "It's really organized crime. So it's a different fight. It will not be normal institutions that will win this war." He estimates that illegal logging costs Mozambique more than half a billion dollars (around 460 million euros) a year. To tackle the crisis, the government has launched a slew of measures that include a ban on the export of all unprocessed logs and a five-year moratorium on the exploitation of vulnerable species.

New logging permits will also not be issued until at least 2019. "There was no regulation in the past, but now we have managed some strong regulations," said the minister. "And we have increased our capacity of command and control on the field." But the work of policing the sprawling country's vast forests is "complicated," Moises said. "We don't have sufficient means, we don't have enough personnel" to deploy in the forests where the trees are sawn down. "It's like we have our limbs cut off." According to Correia, more than 120 timber companies were raided in March alone and at least 75 percent were found to be involved in illegal activities. At least 150,000 cubic meters (5.3 million cubic feet) of logs were seized during the sting operation. After making their first arrests, Moises and his team raided a Chinese-run timber export firm where hundreds of logs lay stacked, ready to be shipped eastward.

But everything was found to be in order. "We are following the law and we never (export wood illegally)," said Rothschild Xu, a Chinese timber trader, who has been working in Pemba for five years. There are dozens of Chinese logging companies in Mozambique-and some operate outside the law. China has been largely blamed for the deforestation in Mozambique since it began curtailing commercial logging in its own forests in the early 2000s.

'Fighting for our lives'

Investigative journalist and government critic Erik Charas is not convinced the new laws will bring lasting change. He has also alleged that the reforms and anti-graft drive are a government ploy. "The government is not doing enough," Charas said, adding that "key, leading figures in government" are working with Chinese timber traders. Mozambique's wood processing industry however has embraced the new legislation. "I think this is a positive measure as the processing of wood locally will create more jobs locally," said Narciso Gabriel, the owner of a sawmill in Pemba, and president of the country's lumber association.

"But obviously not everyone has the capacity to invest in wood processing, this is the big difficulty". Processed timber can fetch high prices. The government says exporting raw logs is "daylight robbery" because merchants buy a cubic meter for around $5 but resell it on the international market for $300. Despite these challenges, Correia remains confident the country will prevail in its fight against illegal logging. "We will win for sure, there is no 'plan B'. This is fighting for our lives and for future generations," he said. —AFP

In Mexico City, water a rare commodity

MEXICO CITY: In a teeming, hardscrabble neighborhood on the outskirts of Mexico City, Virginia Solis spends a big part of her day hauling sloshing buckets to her home-one of tens of thousands in the capital without running water. Solis lives in the shadow of a ruddy mountain on the sprawling city's far east side, in an impoverished district called Iztapalapa. There are no water pipes in her neighborhood. Instead, tanker trucks deliver water to a cistern at the end of her street once every three days.

Solis and her neighbors then haul it home in plastic buckets. The Sisyphean work of providing her family's water supply has made her ruthlessly economical with every drop. "When water makes you suffer, you don't waste a bit of it," she said. "If I needed to flush the toilet right now, I'd wash some laundry first, then reuse the water." Her neighbor Norma Calderon oversees the neighborhood's ad hoc water delivery system. It's another thankless job. There are simply too many people lining up for every 200-liter (50-gallon) cistern filled by the tanker trucks.

"One cistern is tiny. There are families here with seven, eight, nine people," she said. Iztapalapa is the poorest and most populous area in Mexico City — 1.8 million of the capital's 8.8 million people live here. It is also the one that suffers most from a lack of water. Even in neighborhoods that have running water, it often doesn't work. But Iztapalapa isn't alone. Across the city, more than half a million homes lack a daily water supply, and nearly 50,000 have no running water.

Sinking city

Originally, Mexico City was built on a lake. Founded by the ancient Aztecs, who called it Tenochtitlan, it was constructed with a system of levees and canals. Today, five centuries after the Spanish conquest, nothing remains of the lake-except its soft clay bed. Decades of over-tapping the city's aquifers have dehydrated that spongy foundation, squishing it down. Parts of the city are now sinking by two to 30 centimeters (three-quarters of an inch to one foot) a year, according to official data.

"This problem's been around for a long time... but we've just kept putting it off," said Claudia Lartigue, a water specialist at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. The latest fix is to transport water from the state of Michoacan, 300 kilometers (nearly 200 miles) to the west, using a massive system of pumps and tunnels. Today, that supplies nearly one-third of the city's water. Pumping aquifers still supplies the rest. But nearly 40 percent of the total is lost to leaks in the city's antiquated system of pipes, according to the municipal water authority.

IZTAPALAPA, Mexico : A municipal employee fills barrels of water from a tanker truck in a neighborhood in the Mexico City borough of Iztapalapa. —AFP photos

IZTAPALAPA, Mexico : Women fill buckets from barrels of drinking water loaded from tanker trucks in the Mexico City borough of Iztapalapa.

Tankers under escort

Tanker trucks, which started as an emergency solution, have become a daily supply source. "We've become a vital link" in the system, said Alberto Sanchez, who manages one of the wells where the trucks fill up. After filling his 40,000-liter truck beneath a giant black hose, driver Emilio Santos explained his dangerous job as he made his deliveries. Sometimes, when a neighborhood has gone days without water, "people climb up on the truck with sticks and stones" to force him to deliver to their street first, he said.—AFP

Cuban sugar burns to recapture sweet smell of success

PEDRO BETANCOURT, Cuba: A sweet smell of treacle used to fill the air in the village of Pedro Betancourt-but like the workers from the derelict Cuba Libre sugar refinery, it has dispersed. It was the smell of success against the odds for Cuba, reviled by the United States and its allies in the Cold War but still a world champion sugar producer-until the Soviet Union fell and stopped buying it from Fidel Castro's communist regime. Now a demolition crane is attacking what is left of the Cuba Libre refinery's rusty steel skeleton. Fidel is dead, the Cold War is over-and Cuba wants its sugar industry back. "The refinery was the life of the people who lived here," says Arnaldo Herrera, 86. He lost his job at the plant when it closed in 2004. "When that changes, life changes."

Britain and other colonial powers grew fat on Cuban sugarcane-harvested by black slaves-from the 18th century until independence at the turn of the 20th. The island then sold a lot of sugar to the United States until Washington imposed a trade embargo after communist revolutionary Castro took over in 1959.

Castro later announced a "revolutionary offensive" to relaunch the industry. The Soviet Union bought the sugar at preferential prices. For 1970 Castro famously set a production target of a "great harvest" of 10 million tons. (He fell short by 1.5 million.) But after the Soviet bloc collapsed in 1989, with the US embargo still in place and prices falling, the island could no longer compete.

Two-thirds of its refineries-about 100 plants-have shut down since 2002. From eight million tons a year in the 1990s, production plunged to just over one million in 2010. "That was when we touched bottom," says Rafael Suarez, head of international relations for the state sugar monopoly Azcuba. "Since then an effort has been made. The refineries have been improved and a lot of emphasis has been put on recovering sugarcane production." Suarez says Azcuba is also looking to expand production of sugar derivatives: rum, cattle feed and renewable fuel.

Human cost

Some 100,000 Cubans used to work in refineries like the one in Pedro Betancourt in the east.The refineries used to pay well, for Cuba-at least double the $28 average monthly salary. Julio Dominguez, 84, worked in Cuba Libre until it shut. "This town has been stripped bare. Tobacco production is all it has left," he says. The refinery stopped milling in 2004 and demolition began in 2007. Like everything in Cuba, it takes time. Some still weep when they pass the site, says the head of the demolition, Eliecer Rodriguez. "I am knocking it down, but that was someone else's decision," he says. —AFP

Huge dam to shore up Kenya's urban water - but may threaten Maasai Mara

'This is a soft poison because it directly going to impact on downstream'

KURESOI, Kenya: A dam being built on the edge of Kenya's largest water catchment is drawing criticism from experts who fear it could threaten water supplies in the country as much as supplement them. The Itare Dam will be the largest water supply project in the southern Rift Valley, and is intended to shore up water for the city of Nakuru and nearby villages as drought hits Kenya more frequently. The dam, and the 700-acre (280-hectare) reservoir that will be formed behind it, will be in Kuresoi, at the northern edge of the Mau Forest Complex, Kenya's largest water catchment.

Construction of the 57m-high (187 feet) dam began in June 2016. At a cost of 38 billion Kenyan shillings (about $370 million), it is one of the flagship water supply projects under Vision 2030, the Kenyan government's national long-term development policy. The government says that the dam, due to be completed in 2020, will supply 100 million liters of water a day to 800,000 people in Nakuru and surrounding villages east of the Mau Complex, via a 114km (72-mile) pipeline.

But despite the benefits of a better water supply, as well as the jobs and improved roads predicted to come with the dam's construction, experts and local people complain that the project could also end up reducing water supplies for downstream rivers and affecting the region's wider water availability.

Stephen Laboso, whose land borders the dam site, serves on a committee formed by local people to provide input on the project to the Rift Valley Water Service Board. He said that once the construction area is fenced off, it will be hard for members of the community to access the Ndoinet River and surrounding springs for water. "As they construct the dam, dust deposits on the water and (it) becomes dirty, (and) locals are forced to look for (an) alternative source of water," Laboso said. "They should also consider giving the community alternative sources of water." The chair of the Itare Dam Water Project, Michael Kipruto Sang, said that project managers were in constant contact with the Rift Valley Water Service Board to address issues as they arose. But experts say the larger environmental impact of the Itare Dam is the bigger worry.

Less water downstream?

The Mau forest is the largest source of water in Kenya. Twelve rivers originate from it, serving the fragile Mau Mara Serengeti ecosystem, which supports the Maasai Mara National Reserve, an international tourist attraction, as well as the Lake Victoria Basin to the west. Paul Orengoh, coordinator of the Water and Ecosystem Management Centre at Research Triangle Institute, a think-tank, believes that construction of the dam will have a negative impact on the entire Mau Mara Serengeti ecosystem. "This is a soft poison because it is directly going to impact on downstream, gradually killing the biodiversity within and outside the forest (and) posing a serious danger to the sustainability of the Mara Serengeti ecosystem," Orengoh predicted.

He said that a major project like the new dam should have a 5-10km (3-6 mile) buffer zone around it to protect the natural systems that help the Mau forest supply water to downstream rivers. "More water will go to the dam and less water to the underground water aquifers. The dam is constructed using concrete (and) hence doesn't support groundwater recharge. (This) means a decrease of water generating streams which feed rivers like the Mara River," Orengoh said.

The dam has sparked intense debate and criticism from the council of elders of the Kalenjin tribe, which lives downstream from the dam's catchment area. Council members say that downstream communities were not adequately consulted about the project, and that they fear it will bring adverse economic, social and environmental impacts. William Ketienya, a member of the council of elders, said he feared rotting vegetation on the land flooded by the dam will increase greenhouse gas emissions and further drive climate change and warmer temperatures that threaten tea plantations in the area. Agriculture and tourism are Kenya's two leading economic sectors, and both depend on supplies of fresh water. Tea cultivation contributes 4 percent of Kenya's GDP and 26 percent of the country's export earnings.

Joseph Mitei, a water engineer, said that all the rivers in the Mau basin should have been assessed to measure their flow and ensure that they would not receive significantly less water after the dam is built. Orengoh, of Research Triangle Institute, agreed, arguing that the Rift Valley Water Service Board should have analysed how water generated by the Mau forest supports agriculture, tourism, and livelihoods in areas beyond Nakuru, and then balanced the competing demands.

Government policy is supposed to integrate climate risk management into water management initiatives such as the Itare Dam Project, the experts said. Carlos Cheluget, the Rift Valley Water Service Board's communications officer, said that the board had taken all necessary steps, including hydrological surveys, environmental impact assessments and establishing engagement structures to involve local communities in decisions about the dam. "In case of any issue, the committee alert us and we are addressing it accordingly. At the moment we are in the process of providing communities with alternative source of water points," he said. —Reuters

Q&A: Hawaii reassures tourists after brain parasite cases

HONOLULU: A California couple on their honeymoon and two people who drank a homemade herbal beverage are among the rising number of victims in Hawaii falling ill with a potentially deadly brain parasite. After the newlyweds' plight with rat lungworm disease recently got attention online, the couple and some experts accused Hawaii of failing to adequately warn tourists and residents of the danger they can face. Tourism officials say the disease is rare and there's no need to cancel vacation plans.

"It never occurred to us that our honeymoon would be two weeks in paradise to return home with worms in our brains," Ben Manilla of San Francisco said in an email after spending a month in the hospital, undergoing several operations and suffering complications. Hawaii has seen the same number of infections so far this year that it will often get annually. Eleven cases have been confirmed - six on Maui and five on the Big Island.

The reason for the "concerning increase" is not clear, said Dr Virginia Pressler, director of the state health department. But it could be blamed on a recent Maui influx of a semi-slug that can carry the disease. What to know about the disease and how the state is responding:

What is rat lungworm disease?

A roundworm parasite found in rodents causes the disease affecting the brain and spinal cord. When rodents expel the larvae of the worm, they can be ingested by snails, slugs, crabs and frogs, then passed to people. The disease is prevalent in Southeast Asia and tropical Pacific islands and has been seen in Africa, the Caribbean and the US. It's rare, and most people completely recover without treatment, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Symptoms can range from mild headaches to temporary paralysis, and diagnosis is difficult, requiring a spinal tap, said William L Gosnell, program director for the graduate certificate in tropical medicine at University of Hawaii's medical school. Hawaii sees between one and 11 cases each year, with 11 in 2016, state health officials said. Two deaths have occurred since officials began tracking it in 2007.

How do people get it?

By eating food contaminated by the larvae of the parasite. They can be found in raw snails or in produce contaminated by tiny snails or slugs. Two adults on the Big Island got the disease after consuming contaminated homemade elixir, health officials said last week.

They left homemade kava, a dietary supplement, in uncovered buckets overnight and noticed slugs after drinking it, Pressler said. Four others who drank the same batch are suspected of being infected.

How do you prevent it?

Avoid eating raw snails or slugs and properly wash produce. Manilla said had he and his wife, Eliza Lape, known about the disease, they would have more thoroughly cleaned fruits and vegetables. They believe they contracted it in the remote Hana area of Maui early this year. "It's easy in the US to think that we're impervious to things that occur often in the developing world and apparently in some of the remote areas of Hawaii," Manilla said in an email.

The couple declined an interview but told Hawaii News Now that the symptoms began after they returned to San Francisco. "My symptoms started growing to feeling like somebody was taking a hot knife and just stabbing me in different parts of my body," Lape told the Honolulu news station. Still, the couple can't wait to return to Hana, Manilla said. "We'll do it a bit differently next time knowing what we know now about rat lungworm disease," he wrote.

What is Hawaii doing about it?

The state health director says the department works with the Hawaii Tourism Authority to warn visitors about risks on the islands. Pressler pointed to "hard to miss" information about the disease on the department's website. The tourism agency also has been meeting with members and contractors who book travel to explain the disease, and it's working on getting messages to tourists that Hawaii is safe, said George Szigeti, president and CEO. It noted a special alert on its website and a mention in its e-newsletter.

For residents, the state is holding community forums, Pressler said. Hawaii needs to do much more, said Susan Jarvi, professor of pharmaceutical sciences at the University of Hawaii's Hilo campus. "I think most people on the island of Hawaii feel the state hasn't done enough to help," she said. Jarvi wants to see more funding to combat disease-transmitting pests and more education about controlling invasive species. "The research and education on this disease is really lacking," she said.

Should tourists avoid Hawaii?

The tourism authority said people should not overreact and urged visitors to keep eating at restaurants and enjoying fresh produce. "The key facts that everyone needs to remember about rat lungworm disease is that it is very rare, it is very uncommon for people to get infected, and the disease is easily preventable by properly washing and storing all food, especially produce, before eating," Szigeti said in a statement.

Ashlynn Martin, of Yuma, Arizona, has been planning a Maui vacation for two years. The October trip isn't refundable, so she and her husband aren't changing their plans. "We're just going to take the chance," she said, adding that she will make sure to wash produce. "It worries me, but I feel like so many people travel to Hawaii. ... I think we'll be OK." —AP

Simulating mom's womb in research to help earliest preemies

WASHINGTON: Researchers are creating an artificial womb to improve care for extremely premature babies - and remarkable animal testing suggests the first-of-its-kind watery incubation so closely mimics mom that it just might work. Today, premature infants weighing as little as a pound are hooked to ventilators and other machines inside incubators. Children's Hospital of Philadelphia is aiming for a gentler solution, to give the tiniest preemies a few more weeks cocooned in a womb-like environment - treating them more like fetuses than newborns in hopes of giving them a better chance of healthy survival.

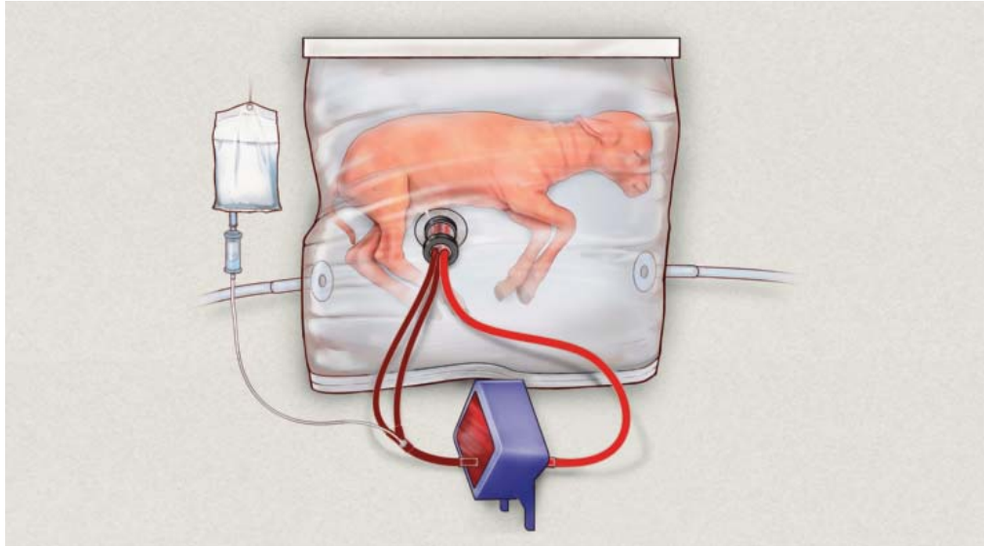
The researchers created a fluid-filled transparent container to simulate how fetuses float in amniotic fluid inside mom's uterus, and attached it to a mechanical placenta that keeps blood oxygenated. In early-stage animal testing, extremely premature lambs appeared to grown normally inside the system for three to four weeks, the team reported Tuesday.

"We start with a tiny fetus that is pretty inert and spends most of its time sleeping. Over four weeks we see that fetus open its eyes, grow wool, breathe, swim," said Dr. Emily Partridge, a CHOP research fellow and first author of the study published in Nature Communications. "It's hard to describe actually how uniquely awe-inspiring it is to see," she added in an interview.

Human testing still is three to five years away, although the team already is in discussions with the Food and Drug Administration. "We're trying to extend normal gestation," said Dr Alan Flake, a fetal surgeon at CHOP who is leading the project and considers it a temporary bridge between the mother's womb and the outside world.

Increasingly hospitals attempt to save the most critically premature infants, those born before 26 weeks gestation and even those right at the limits of viability - 22 to 23 weeks. Extreme prematurity is a leading cause of infant mortality, and those who do survive frequently have serious disabilities such as cerebral palsy. The idea of treating preemies in fluid-filled incubators may sound strange, but physiologically it makes sense, said Dr. Catherine Spong, a fetal medicine specialist at the National Institutes of Health.

"This is really an innovative, promising first step," said Spong, who wasn't involved with the research. One of the biggest risks for very young preemies is that their lungs aren't ready to breathe air, she explained. Before birth, amniotic fluid flows into their lungs, bringing growth factors crucial for proper lung development. When they're born too soon, doctors hook preemies to ventilators to keep them alive but risking lifelong lung damage.



Flake's goal is for the womb-like system to support the very youngest preemies just for a few weeks, until their organs are mature enough to better handle regular hospital care like older preemies who have less risk of death or disability. The device is simpler than previous attempts at creating an artificial womb, which haven't yet panned out. How the "Biobag" system works:

- The premature lambs were delivered by C-section and immediately placed into a temperature-controlled bag filled with a substitute for amniotic fluid that they swallow and take into their lungs. "We make gallons of this stuff a day," said fetal physiologist Marcus Davey. It's currently an electrolyte solution; he's working to add other factors to make it more like real amniotic fluid.
- Then the researchers attached the umbilical cord to a machine that exchanges carbon dioxide in blood with oxygen, like a placenta normally does.
- The lamb's heart circulates the blood, without the need for any other pump.

The researchers tested five lambs whose biological age was equivalent to 23-week human preemies, and three more a bit older. All appeared to grow normally, with blood pressure and other key health measures stable and few complications during the weeks they were inside the womb-like device. The study didn't address long-term development. Most of the lambs were euthanized for further study that found normal organ development for their gestational age. One was bottle-weaned and is now more than a year old, apparently healthy and living on a farm in Pennsylvania.

Flake stressed that the womb-like system isn't intended to support preemies any younger than today's limits of viability - not what he calls the more "sensationalistic" idea of artificially growing embryos.

He acknowledged that parents might question the approach, but notes that the preemies always could be whisked into standard care if they fared poorly in the new system. And while he said further adaptation of the device is needed before it can begin human testing, he envisioned parents being able to see the baby and even piping in the sound of mom's heartbeat. —AP

World's mushrooming cities pose big vaccination challenges - UNICEF

LONDON: Rapid urban growth poses a big challenge for efforts to vaccinate the world's poorest children and increases the risk of rapidly spreading disease outbreaks, the head of immunization at the UN children's agency said. A growing number of unvaccinated children live in city slums, where immunisation coverage is limited, said Robin Nandy, principal adviser and chief of immunization at UNICEF.

"We're particularly worried about disease outbreaks in urban settings because they have the potential to spread fast and affect a large number of people," Nandy told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. By 2030, an estimated 1 in 4 people will live in urban slums and informal settlements, mainly in Africa and Asia, in dire need of clean water, energy, food, sanitation and health services, according to the United Nations. The 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa showed how fast disease outbreaks can spread in cities, said Nandy.

"One of the complexities...was the fact that cities were affected. In urban areas communicable diseases like Ebola spread faster and the outbreak lasted longer than previous (ones) that had been limited to rural settings," he said. Another example was the deadly yellow fever outbreak in Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo last year which spread fast in the capitals of Luanda and Kinshasa, Nandy said.

"One thing that adds to the complexity in cities is that often these megacities have a different administrative structure than rural districts...," said Nandy, an epidemiologist and public health physician. Growing numbers of refugees coming to cities add to immunization challenges, in particular as many of them may not have been vaccinated due to a breakdown of health services in their conflict-ridden home areas.

"They are particularly vulnerable because they may also lack access to water and sanitation and nutrition services and therefore are more likely to die as a result of vaccine preventable disease like measles," said Nandy. In famine-threatened Somalia, thousands of children have been infected by measles, UNICEF said this week, as it launched a campaign to vaccinate some 360,000 children in one month. Many of the children have never been immunized before as they have come to cities such as Baidoa in central Somalia from remote areas health workers often cannot reach due to conflict.

Unfinished business

Access to immunization in the past two decades has led to a dramatic drop in deaths of children under five from vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles and tetanus. It has also brought the world closer to eradicating polio, with only Nigeria, Pakistan and Afghanistan still affected.

Between 2000 and 2015 under five-year-old deaths from measles dropped 85 percent and those due to neonatal tetanus by 83 percent, according to UNICEF. But such success has led to complacency, and 1.5 million children still die every year from diseases that could be prevented through vaccination, said Nandy. "Vaccination programs have been very successful over the past two decades but complacency has set in among public health practitioners, governments and also donors who feel that immunization is a done deal because it has reached achieved 85 percent coverage globally," said Nandy.

Around 19.4 million children still miss out on full vaccinations every year, many of them in areas affected by conflict, while weak health systems, poverty and social inequality also mean one in five children under five is still not reached with life-saving vaccines. The poorest children are nearly twice as likely to die before the age of five than the richest, and in countries where 80 per cent of under-five child deaths occur, over half of the poorest children are not fully vaccinated, according to UNICEF. Nandy said he was concerned about recent outbreaks of highly-contagious measles both in rich and poor countries. "If we drop our guard, measles can come back and cause unnecessary illness and deaths among children." —Reuters

Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah was honored by a visit by Pope Tawadros II of the Coptic Church, Alexandria to the Amricani Cultural Centre. He was escorted by Ali Al-Yoha, Secretary-General of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) and Abdulkarim Al-Ghadban, Assistant Undersecretary of the NCCAL for Islamic Culture.

Kuwaiti drama wins prestigious award

Kuwaiti drama 'Al-Sabiliyat' won the Golden Stage Award during the International University Festival of Monodrama which took place recently in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia. 'Al-Sabiliyat,' a Loyac Academy of Performing Arts (LAPA) production, also won the best female artist award, as Shereen Haji was co-awarded with the prize. Furthermore, the drama won the best musical display award which went to Meshari Mahmoud. 'Al-Sabiliyat' is based on the best-selling novel of the same name by veteran Kuwaiti writer Ismail Fahad Ismail, which has qualified to the shortlist for the Arabian Booker Award.

MES holds workshop on 'Multiple Intelligences for Success'

Muslim Educational Society (MES) Kuwait, conducted a workshop on 'Multiple Intelligences for Success' at KMA Hall in Jabriya on 22 April. The workshop was facilitated by Santhosh Kumar Shenoy and R Roopesh. Students from various Indian schools enthusiastically participated in the workshop. Through various activities, students learned how to think differently and be unique; goal setting, strategies for achieving success, and importance of lateral thinking, were also explored during the workshop. Students also learned how to deal with failures in life and to improve their confidence while dealing with situations, as well as how to face examinations confidently and be successful in life. The workshop was part of ongoing social commitment efforts by MES, to develop global citizens while keeping their cultural roots intact. Certificates were given to the participants, MES president Sadiq Ali welcomed the gathering and Education Convener Anwar Mansoor Saith delivered the vote of thanks. General Secretary Arshad T V, Dr Mustafa, Mohammed Rafi, Mujeeb, Rameez Saleh, Ashraf P T, Feroz and Rayiz Saleh coordinated the event.

BPP forms Ladies Wing

Sthreeshakthi, the Salmiya Ladies Wing Committee of Bharatiya Pravasi Parishad, elected office-bearers. The meeting was presided over by Ramesh, the president of Salmiya area BPP who witnessed the election of new office-bearers. The new office-bearers are: Chandrika Prasad — President, Bini Anup — Vice President,

Srikala Dileep — Secretary, Chandrika Ravikumar — Joint Secretary, Sulekha Ajay — Treasurer and Srividya Dileep — Programe Coordinator. Rathi Venkat, Radhika Rajendran, Srividya Venugopal, Sreelatha Vijayan, Rajashri, Sujatha Menon, Sreela Raviprasad and Lavanya Vinod were elected as executive members.

Farwaniya Education Zone concludes physical education activities

Ibn Al-Ameed Boys Secondary School in Farwaniya Education Zone hosted a ceremony in conclusion of physical education activities for boys. The ceremony took place under the patronage of Director General of Farwaniya Education Zone, and support from Public Authority for Sports (PAS). Deputy Director General for Sports Dr Humoud Fulaiteh, Sheikha Naeema Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber, Acting Technical Director Ahmad Al-Fayez and all physical education supervisors in all education zones attended, the event. Meanwhile, an operetta was performed during the ceremony.

CEO of Ooredoo Group Sheikh Saud bin Nasser Al Thani

Ooredoo Kuwait CEO and General Manager Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Thani

Mijbil Al-Ayoub, Corporate Communications Senior Director, Ooredoo Kuwait, speaks to officials.

Social Responsibility Director Yousuf Al-Shallal speaks with CEO of Ooredoo Group Sheikh Saud bin Nasser Al Thani and Deputy CEO Waleed Al-Sayed.

Ooredoo officials visit the company's head office.

Ooredoo officials visit the corporate communications department.

Ooredoo Kuwait hosts Group Leaders Team

To discuss common strategies, ways of cooperation

Ooredoo, Kuwait's fastest network, proudly hosted the Ooredoo Group Leaders Team annual meeting earlier this week over the span of three days, in which they discussed ways to enhance cooperation and issues of concern. The meeting was attended by the CEO of Ooredoo Group Sheikh Saud bin Nasser Al Thani, Deputy CEO Waleed Al-Sayed, and executive management representatives from Ooredoo Qatar, Ooredoo Oman, Ooredoo Maldives, Ooredoo Myanmar, Ooredoo Algeria, Ooredoo Tunisia, Wataniya Mobile Palestine and Asiacell Iraq.

Ooredoo Kuwait CEO and General Manager Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Thani stressed in a statement made on the event the importance of this meeting, which allows the leaders a platform to discuss challenges and ways to overcome them. He also expressed his pride in Ooredoo Kuwait for showcasing its successful experiences in various fields in the market as well as in its corporate social responsibility efforts. Leaders in the meeting discussed ways to enhance the portfolio of the companies' offerings, to better meet the needs and enhance the experience of customers in the mobile market, whether for internet or phone services. This is in alignment with the group's strategy to embrace digitalization as a mode of operations, in keeping up with the fast pace of the telecom sector.

The delegation visited the Ooredoo Kuwait head office to meet with their executive management and learn about the different departments and divisions in the company.

Exclusive services

The delegation visited the Nukhba Lounge, Ooredoo's dedicated lounge for VIP clients. The department offers comprehensive package, which can be tailored to cover all the needs of our elite customers. Nukhba plans include exclusive benefits such as discounts and VIP invitations to certain events throughout the year. Nukhba customers enjoy the services of a designated account manager, a special hotline (110) to answer any of their queries around the clock, and are always kept up to date with future packages and products before they are released in the market. This is in addition to the customary Ooredoo benefits such as unlimited minutes, contract freeze, and easy transfer of contract ownership for customers' convenience. Nukhba customers can benefit from an exclusive concierge service that can be availed at most valet parking spots in Kuwait, in addition to entering VIP lounges in most international airports.

Youth Support

The delegation also visited Ooredoo's Corporate Communications Department, where they were briefed about the company's corporate social responsibility achievements in the past year. Ooredoo is proud to be the first company to sign a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of State for Youth Affairs. The memorandum aims at enhancing cooperation between the two entities to support youth-related projects. The delegation were also briefed about Ooredoo Kuwait's volunteer program, which it intends to launch for the third consecutive year this summer. The program succeeded in attracting hundreds of youth from across Kuwait. The program, launched in collaboration with Spread the Passion, aims to prepare youth with all the essential skills necessary for them to volunteer, before matching them with volunteering opportunities. The company is also a proud sponsor of Ata Hub, a Kuwaiti online community for non-government entities and volunteer groups aimed at helping all volunteers find the right volunteer opportunities.

Leading the Market

The delegation were also briefed about the new data center launched by FASTtelco, the internet service provider that was recently acquired by Ooredoo Kuwait. The center provides end-to-end IT solutions to customers in various sectors including financial, healthcare, media, e-commerce, educational and governmental. The center is fully equipped to deliver an exceptional experience in services and solutions like managed CPE, cloud services, NOC and operations, data center consultancy, and much more. This is especially important today, where businesses are faced with growing challenges to respond efficiently to new digital trends in IT, security and control. FASTtelco strives to be the trustworthy choice among its growing customers as it continually transforms its services to meet the needs of the digital world, ensuring peace of mind with end-to-end solutions and 24/7 NOC, in addition to opportunities for scalability and maximum return of investment.

Ooredoo officials visit the data center.

The delegation visits the Nukhba Lounge.

Ooredoo officials visit the corporate sales department.

A group photo at the Nukhba Lounge.

The delegation members pose for a group photo.

OSN MOVIES ACTION

01:00 Zero Tolerance
02:45 Sharknado 3: Oh Hell No!
04:30 DCU: Justice League vs Teen Titans
06:30 Tekken: Kazuya's Revenge
08:15 Run All Night
10:15 Die Hard
12:30 Hudson Hawk
14:15 Gone In Sixty Seconds
16:30 A View To A Kill
18:45 The Living Daylights
21:00 King Arthur
23:15 Universal Soldier: The Return

ANIMAL PLANET HD

00:50 Snake Sheila
01:15 Snake Sheila
01:45 Bondi Vet
02:40 Wild Animal Rescue
03:35 Tanked
04:25 North America
05:15 Gator Boys
06:02 Snake Sheila
06:27 Snake Sheila
06:49 The Pool Master
07:36 Swamp Brothers
08:25 Pit Bulls & Parolees
09:15 The Pool Master
10:10 North America
11:05 Tanked
12:00 Pit Bulls & Parolees
12:55 Bondi Vet
13:50 The Pool Master
14:45 Gator Boys
15:40 North America
16:35 Tanked
17:30 Snake Sheila
17:55 Snake Sheila
18:25 Treetop Cat Rescue
19:20 Voodoo Shark
20:15 Tanked
21:10 Tigers Attack
22:05 Treetop Cat Rescue
23:00 Voodoo Shark
23:55 Gator Boys

BBC FIRST

00:35 Doctors
01:05 Eastenders
01:40 Benidorm
02:25 Last Tango In Halifax: Christmas

RUN ALL NIGHT ON OSN MOVIES ACTION

Special
03:20 Silent Witness
04:15 Silent Witness
05:10 Doctors
05:40 Eastenders
06:10 Stella
07:00 Death In Paradise
07:55 Doctors
08:25 Eastenders
08:55 Father Brown
09:40 Stella
10:25 Death In Paradise
11:20 Father Brown
12:05 Doctors
12:35 Eastenders
13:05 Stella
13:50 Death In Paradise
14:45 Doctors
15:15 Eastenders
15:45 Father Brown
16:30 Stella
17:20 Death In Paradise
18:15 The Durrells
19:05 Doctors
19:35 Eastenders
20:05 Father Brown
21:00 Holby City
22:00 Benidorm
22:50 I Want My Wife Back
23:20 Big School
23:55 Inside No. 9

crime & investigation network

00:00 My Ghost Story: Caught On Camera
01:00 Leah Remini: Scientology And The Aftermath
02:00 Paranormal State
02:30 Paranormal State
03:00 My Crazy Ex
04:00 My Ghost Story: Caught On Camera
05:00 Leah Remini: Scientology And The Aftermath
06:00 Paranormal State
07:00 My Crazy Ex
09:00 Evil Up Close
10:00 It Takes A Killer
10:30 It Takes A Killer
11:00 Robbie Coltrane's Critical Evidence
12:00 The First 48
13:00 The First 48
14:00 My Crazy Ex
15:00 Evil Up Close
16:00 Robbie Coltrane's Critical Evidence
17:00 It Takes A Killer
18:00 The First 48
19:00 The First 48
20:00 Evil Up Close
21:00 Gangs Of Britain With Gary And Martin Kemp
22:00 Robbie Coltrane's Critical Evidence
23:00 Homicide Hunter

COMEDY CENTRAL

00:15 Tosh.0
00:40 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
01:05 South Park
01:30 South Park
01:55 South Park
02:20 Ugly Americans
02:45 The Alternative Comedy Experience
03:10 South Park
03:35 South Park
04:00 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
04:25 Disorderly Conduct: Video On Patrol
05:15 Lip Sync Battle
05:40 Ridiculousness
06:05 Disaster Date
06:30 Lip Sync Battle
06:55 Lip Sync Battle
07:20 Framework
08:10 Disorderly Conduct: Video On Patrol
09:00 Disaster Date
09:25 Disaster Date
09:50 Ridiculousness
10:15 Key And Peele
10:40 Disaster Date
11:05 Ridiculousness
11:30 Impractical Jokers UK
12:00 Tattoo Disasters
12:25 Tattoo Disasters
12:50 Idiotsitter
13:15 Lip Sync Battle
13:40 Impractical Jokers UK
14:10 Disorderly Conduct: Video On Patrol
15:00 Ridiculousness
15:25 Catch A Contractor
16:15 Idiotsitter
16:40 Disaster Date
17:05 Disaster Date
17:30 Impractical Jokers UK
18:00 Lip Sync Battle
18:25 Key And Peele
18:50 Frankenfood
19:15 Frankenfood
19:39 Ridiculousness
20:03 Disaster Date
20:27 Impractical Jokers
20:50 Ridiculousness Arabia
21:15 Another Period
21:37 I Live With Models
22:00 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
22:30 Key And Peele
23:00 The Half Hour
23:25 South Park
23:50 Broad City

Discovery Family

00:15 Destroyed In Seconds
00:40 Beyond Survival With Les Stroud
01:30 Redesign My Brain
02:20 Zoltan The Wolfman
03:10 Finding Bigfoot
04:00 Destroyed In Seconds
04:50 Beyond Survival With Les Stroud
05:40 How It's Made
06:05 How It's Made
06:30 Dirty Jobs
07:20 Mythbusters
08:00 Doki
08:25 Kids vs Film
08:50 Bad Dog
09:40 How It's Made
10:05 How It's Made
10:30 Redesign My Brain
11:20 Mythbusters
12:10 Bad Dog
13:00 Beyond Survival With Les Stroud
13:50 How It's Made
14:15 How It's Made
14:40 Strangest Weather On Earth
15:30 Doki
15:55 Kids vs Film
16:20 Mythbusters
17:10 Redesign My Brain
18:00 Bad Universe
18:50 Raging Nature
19:40 Destroyed In Seconds
20:30 How It's Made
20:55 How It's Made
21:20 Mythbusters
22:10 Bad Universe
23:00 Raging Nature
23:50 Destroyed In Seconds

ID X

00:40 Dead Silent
01:30 Blood Relatives
02:20 The Perfect Murder
03:10 Pandora's Box: Unleashing Evil
04:00 Dead Silent
04:48 I Almost Got Away With It
05:36 Bad Blood
06:24 A Crime To Remember
07:12 Evil Online
08:00 I'd Kill For You
08:50 I Almost Got Away With It
09:40 Bad Blood
10:05 Bad Blood
10:30 A Crime To Remember
11:20 Evil Online
12:10 Killer Instinct With Chris Hansen
13:00 I'd Kill For You
13:50 I Almost Got Away With It
14:40 Bad Blood
15:30 A Crime To Remember
16:20 Evil Online
17:10 Evil Online
18:00 I'd Kill For You
18:50 I Almost Got Away With It
19:40 Bad Blood
20:30 Swamp Murders
21:20 Evil Online
22:10 Murder Comes To Town
23:00 Pandora's Box: Unleashing Evil
23:50 Murder Book

Disney Channel HD

00:10 Hank Zipzer
00:35 Binny And The Ghost
01:00 Binny And The Ghost
01:25 Hank Zipzer
01:45 The Hive
01:50 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
02:15 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
02:40 Hank Zipzer
03:05 Binny And The Ghost
03:30 Binny And The Ghost
03:55 Hank Zipzer
04:15 The Hive
04:20 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
04:45 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
05:10 Hank Zipzer
05:35 Binny And The Ghost
06:00 Binny And The Ghost
06:25 Hank Zipzer
06:45 The Hive
06:50 The 7D
07:00 Jessie
07:25 Jessie
07:50 Tsum Tsum Shorts
07:55 The Zhuzhus
08:20 Elena Of Avalor
08:45 Bizaardvark
09:10 Bizaardvark
09:35 Stuck In The Middle
10:00 Stuck In The Middle
10:25 Austin & Ally
10:50 Austin & Ally
11:15 Alex & Co.
11:40 Cheetah Girls
13:10 Welcome To The Ronks
13:20 Girl Meets World
13:45 Girl Meets World
14:10 Best Friends Whenever
14:35 Best Friends Whenever
15:00 Bunk'd
15:25 Bunk'd
15:50 Sunny Bunnies
15:55 The Zhuzhus
16:20 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
16:45 Elena Of Avalor
17:10 Liv And Maddie
17:35 Descendants Wicked World
17:40 Girl Meets World
18:05 Stuck In The Middle
18:30 Bunk'd
18:55 Bizaardvark
19:20 Disney Mickey Mouse
19:25 Alex & Co.
19:50 Jessie
20:15 Tsum Tsum Shorts
20:20 Backstage
20:45 Austin & Ally
21:10 The Next Step
21:35 Cracke
21:40 Disney The Lodge
22:05 Girl Meets World
22:30 That's So Raven
23:00 The Lion Guard
23:25 The Lion Guard
23:55 PJ Masks

Discovery Channel HD

00:30 Fast N' Loud
01:20 Street Outlaws
02:10 World's Top 5
03:00 You Have Been Warned
03:50 Deadliest Job Interview
04:40 Fast N' Loud
05:30 Storage Hunters
06:00 How Do They Do It?
06:30 How Do They Do It?
07:00 Railroad Australia
07:50 Street Outlaws
08:40 Fast N' Loud
09:30 Marooned With Ed Stafford
10:20 Storage Hunters
10:45 How Do They Do It?
11:10 How Do They Do It?
11:35 World's Top 5
12:25 You Have Been Warned
13:15 Deadliest Job Interview
14:05 How Do They Do It?
14:30 Storage Hunters
14:55 Storage Hunters
15:20 Gold Rush
16:10 Marooned With Ed Stafford
17:00 Gold Divers
17:50 Fast N' Loud
18:40 Street Outlaws
19:30 How Do They Do It?
19:55 How Do They Do It?
20:20 Ed Stafford: Into The Unknown
21:10 Storage Hunters
21:35 Storage Hunters UK
22:00 What On Earth?
22:50 Sydney Harbour
23:40 The Wheel: Survival Games

Disney XD

00:00 Programmes Start At 6:00am KSA
07:00 Gravity Falls
07:25 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
07:50 Penn Zero: Part Time Hero
08:15 Milo Murphy's Law
08:25 The 7D
08:40 Supa Strikas
09:05 Two More Eggs
09:10 K.C. Undercover
09:35 Counterfeit Cat
10:00 Lab Rats: Bionic Island
10:25 Lab Rats: Bionic Island
10:50 Future-Worm!
11:15 Two More Eggs
11:20 Pair Of Kings
11:45 Pair Of Kings
12:10 Danger Mouse
12:35 Supa Strikas
13:00 Supa Strikas
13:30 Gravity Falls
13:55 Annedroids
14:20 Atomic Puppet
14:45 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
15:10 Disney Mickey Mouse
15:15 Mighty Med
15:40 Disney Cookabout
16:05 Lab Rats vs Mighty Med
16:55 Mighty Med: The Mother Of All Villains
17:50 Walk The Prank
18:15 Mech-X4
18:40 Milo Murphy's Law
19:05 Disney Mickey Mouse
19:10 Gravity Falls
19:35 Mighty Med
20:00 Atomic Puppet
20:25 Gamer's Guide To Pretty Much Everything
20:55 K.C. Undercover
21:20 Mech-X4
21:45 Mighty Med
22:10 Walk The Prank
22:40 Disney Mickey Mouse
22:45 Marvel's Avengers: Ultron Revolution
23:10 Ultimate Spider-Man
23:35 Boyster

E! HD

00:00 E! News
00:15 Famously Single
01:05 Famously Single
01:55 Famously Single
02:50 E! News
03:50 Celebrity Style Story
04:20 Celebrity Style Story
04:50 Mariah's World
05:40 Mariah's World
06:30 Celebrity Style Story
07:00 La Clippers Dance Squad
07:55 E! News
08:10 La Clippers Dance Squad
09:10 E! News
10:10 So Cosmo
11:05 So Cosmo
12:00 So Cosmo
13:00 E! News
13:15 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry
14:10 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry
15:05 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry
16:00 E! News
16:15 So Cosmo
17:10 So Cosmo
18:05 So Cosmo
19:00 So Cosmo
20:00 E! News
21:00 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
22:00 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
23:00 Keeping Up With The Kardashians

Food Network

00:00 Guy's Grocery Games
01:00 Chopped
02:00 The Great Food Truck Race
03:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
03:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
04:00 Man Fire Food
04:30 Man Fire Food
05:00 Chopped
06:00 Guy's Grocery Games
07:00 Barefoot Contessa
07:30 Barefoot Contessa
08:00 The Kitchen
09:00 The Pioneer Woman
09:30 The Pioneer Woman
10:00 Cooking For Real
10:30 Cooking For Real
11:00 Siba's Table
11:30 Siba's Table
12:00 The Kitchen
13:00 The Pioneer Woman
13:30 The Pioneer Woman
14:00 Siba's Table
14:30 Siba's Table
15:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
15:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
16:00 Chopped
17:00 The Kitchen
18:00 Cooking For Real
18:30 Cooking For Real
19:00 Chopped
20:00 Chopped Junior
21:00 Tia Mowry At Home
21:30 Tia Mowry At Home
22:00 Dinner At Tiffani's
22:30 Dinner At Tiffani's
23:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
23:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives

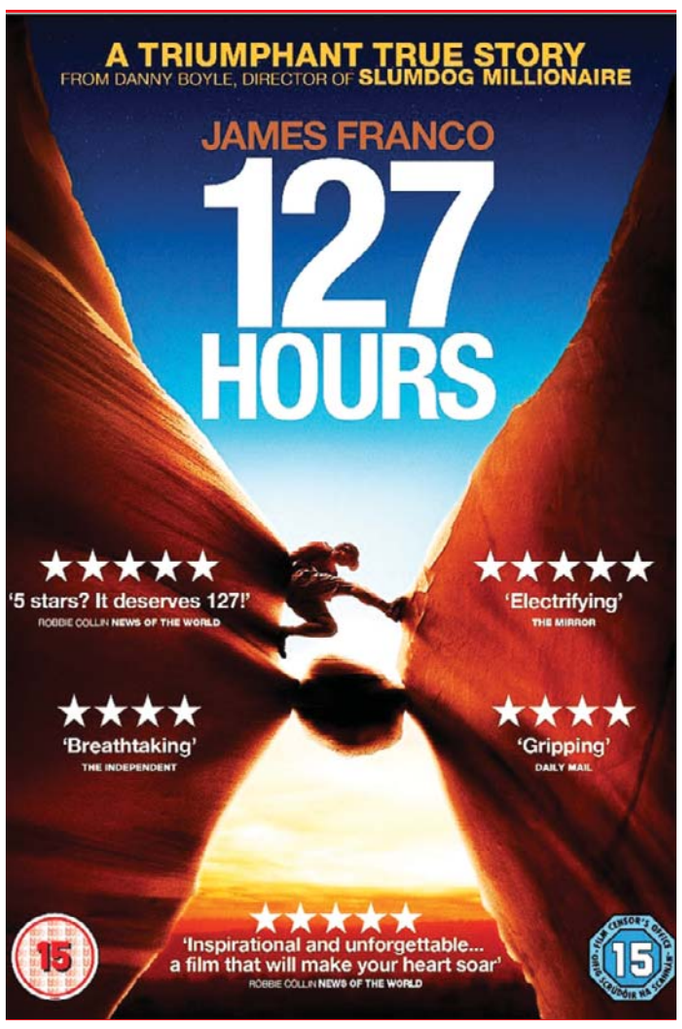
ITV HD CHOICE

00:15 Coronation Street
00:40 Coronation Street
01:10 The Chase
02:00 Emmerdale
02:30 Coronation Street
03:00 Coronation Street
03:30 Guess This House
04:25 Broadchurch
05:20 Broadchurch
06:15 Come Date With Me Australia
06:45 Come Date With Me Australia
07:10 The Chase
08:05 Guess This House
09:00 Broadchurch
10:00 Broadchurch
11:00 Come Date With Me Australia
11:30 Come Date With Me Australia
11:55 The Chase
12:50 Guess This House
13:45 Emmerdale
14:15 Coronation Street
14:45 Coronation Street
15:15 The Chase
16:10 Guess This House
17:00 Paul O'Grady's Animal Orphans
17:55 5 Star Family Reunion
18:50 Come Date With Me Australia
19:45 Emmerdale
20:15 Coronation Street
20:45 Coronation Street
21:10 Guess This House
22:00 Paul O'Grady's Animal Orphans
22:55 5 Star Family Reunion
23:50 Emmerdale

H2 HD

00:00 The Universe: Ancient Mysteries Solved
01:00 Ultimate Guide To The Presidents
02:00 Ancient Discoveries
03:00 Monster Quest
03:50 Ancient Aliens
04:40 Ancient Top 10
05:30 The Universe: Ancient Mysteries Solved
06:20 Ultimate Guide To The Presidents
07:10 The Universe
08:00 Ancient Discoveries
09:00 Monster Quest
10:00 Ancient Aliens
11:00 Ancient Top 10
12:00 The Universe: Ancient Mysteries Solved
13:00 Ultimate Guide To The Presidents
14:00 Ancient Discoveries
15:00 Monster Quest
16:00 Ancient Aliens
17:00 Ancient Top 10
18:00 The Universe: Ancient Mysteries Solved
19:00 Ultimate Guide To The Presidents
20:00 Ancient Discoveries
21:00 Monster Quest
22:00 Ancient Aliens
23:00 Million Dollar Genius

TRASH ON OSN MOVIES FESTIVAL



127 HOURS ON OSN MOVIES HD

History HD

00:30 American Pickers
01:20 Britain's Bloody Crown: War Of The Roses
02:10 Big Easy Motors
02:35 Big Easy Motors
03:00 Forged In Fire
03:50 Storage Wars
04:15 American Pickers
05:05 Pawn Stars
05:30 Pawn Stars
06:00 Mountain Men - Closest Calls
07:00 Ultimate Wheels
07:50 Ice Road Truckers
08:40 Counting Cars
09:05 Car Hunters
09:30 Pawn Stars
09:55 Pawn Stars
10:20 Storage Wars
10:45 Storage Wars
11:10 American Pickers
12:00 Sean Bean On Waterloo
12:50 Billion Dollar Wreck
13:40 Swamp People
14:30 Ax Men
15:20 Mountain Men
16:10 Alaska Off-Road Warriors
17:00 Ultimate Wheels
17:50 Pawn Stars
18:15 Pawn Stars
18:40 Forged In Fire
19:30 Big Easy Motors
19:55 Big Easy Motors
20:20 Mountain Men
21:10 American Pickers
22:00 Billion Dollar Wreck
22:50 Gold Hunters: Legend Of The Superstition...
23:40 Mountain Men - Closest Calls

NAT GEO people HD

00:00 The Game Chef
00:25 Dog Whisperer
01:15 Bangkok Airport
02:05 Places We Go
02:30 Dog Whisperer
03:20 Access 360 World Heritage
04:10 Fish Of The Day
04:35 George Clarke's Amazing Spaces
05:25 Miguel's Tropical Kitchen
05:50 Miguel's Tropical Kitchen
06:20 Raw Travel
06:45 Raw Travel
07:15 Restoration Man
08:10 Places We Go
08:35 Dog Whisperer
09:30 Access 360 World Heritage
10:25 Fish Of The Day
10:55 George Clarke's Amazing Spaces
11:50 Miguel's Tropical Kitchen
12:15 Miguel's Tropical Kitchen
12:45 Raw Travel
13:10 Raw Travel
13:40 Andy And Ben Eat Australia
14:05 Dog Whisperer
15:00 Access 360 World Heritage
15:55 Fish Of The Day
16:25 George Clarke's Amazing Spaces
17:20 Miguel's Tropical Kitchen
17:45 Miguel's Tropical Kitchen
18:15 Raw Travel
18:40 Raw Travel
19:10 Restoration Man
20:05 Fish Of The Day
20:30 George Clarke's Amazing Spaces
21:25 Miguel's Tropical Kitchen
21:55 Miguel's Tropical Kitchen
22:20 Raw Travel
22:45 Raw Travel
23:10 Restoration Man

NAT GEO WILD HD

00:30 Shark Men
01:20 Big Cat Odyssey
02:10 Wild 24
03:00 Hyena Coast
03:50 I, Predator
04:45 Botswana
05:40 Unlikely Animal Friends
06:35 Hyena Coast
07:30 I, Predator
08:25 Botswana
09:20 Unlikely Animal Friends
10:15 Caught In The Act
11:10 How Human Are You?
12:05 Botswana
13:00 Cuba's Secret Reef
13:55 Black Mamba: Kiss Of Death
14:50 Polar Bear Invasion
15:45 Dr Oakley: Yukon Vet
16:40 Unlikely Animal Friends
17:35 Among The Great Apes
18:30 How Human Are You?
19:25 World's Weirdest Extreme Body Parts
20:20 Dr Oakley: Yukon Vet
21:10 Unlikely Animal Friends
22:00 Among The Great Apes
22:50 How Human Are You?
23:40 World's Weirdest Extreme Body Parts

OSN MOVIES HD FAMILY

00:00 Chicken Little
02:00 Black Beauty
04:00 Race To Witch Mountain
06:00 Turbo: A Power Rangers Movie
08:00 Atlantis: Milo's Return
10:00 Winnie The Pooh
11:15 Chicken Little
12:45 Turbo: A Power Rangers Movie
14:45 Winnie The Pooh
16:00 Toy Story
18:00 Brave
20:00 Pirates Of The Caribbean: On Stranger Tides
22:15 Bark Ranger

OSN MOVIES FESTIVAL

02:00 The Birdcage
04:00 Batkid Begins
05:30 Fast Girls
07:15 Boychoir
09:00 Batkid Begins
10:30 Trash
12:30 The Help
15:00 Searching For Bobby Fischer
17:00 Le Weekend
18:45 Get On Up
21:00 Meadowland
23:00 The Shining

OSN MOVIES HD KIDS

00:15 Moomins And The Comet Chase
02:00 Doctor Proctor's Fart Powder
03:45 Virus Attack The First Antivirus
05:30 Ploddy Police Car On The Case
07:00 Marco Macaco
08:30 Memory Loss
10:00 Miffy The Movie
11:30 Doctor Proctor's Fart Powder
13:15 Virus Attack The First Antivirus
15:00 Curious George
17:00 Miffy The Movie
18:45 Blue Elephant 2
20:45 The Heart Of The Oak
22:30 Curious George

OSN MOVIES HD

00:45 Hustle And Flow
03:00 Barely Lethal
05:00 While You Were Sleeping
07:00 The Ladykillers
09:15 Beaches
11:45 Jurassic World
14:15 The Taking Of Pelham 123
16:15 Independence Day
18:45 127 Hours
20:45 Big Fish
23:00 Blood Diamond

Discovery Science

00:40 Mythbusters
01:30 How Do They Do It?
01:55 Food Factory
02:20 Strip The Cosmos
03:10 Powering The Future
04:00 Nextworld
04:48 Mythbusters
05:36 How Do They Do It?
06:00 Food Factory
06:24 Strip The Cosmos
07:12 Powering The Future
08:00 How Do They Do It?
08:26 Nextworld
09:14 Mythbusters
10:02 Invisible Worlds
10:50 How Do They Do It?
11:14 Food Factory
11:38 Strip The Cosmos
12:26 Nextworld
13:14 Mythbusters
14:02 How Do They Do It?
14:26 Food Factory
14:50 Invisible Worlds
15:38 Nextworld
16:26 Strip The Cosmos
17:14 Mythbusters
18:02 Powering The Future
18:50 Nextworld
19:40 Mythbusters
20:30 Home Factory
20:55 Home Factory
21:20 How Do They Do It?
21:45 Food Factory
22:10 Powering The Future
23:00 Home Factory
23:25 Home Factory
23:50 Nextworld

CLASSIFIEDS

Kuwait Times
THURSDAY, APRIL 27, 2017

KNCC PROGRAMME FROM THURSDAY TO WEDNESDAY (27/04/2017 TO 03/05/2017)

SHARQIA-1
THE BOSS BABY 12:00 PM
THE BOSS BABY 2:00 PM
THE BOSS BABY 4:00 PM
THE BOSS BABY 6:00 PM
MONOLITH 8:00 PM
MONOLITH 10:00 PM
MONOLITH 12:05 AM

SHARQIA-2
THE BOSS BABY 11:30 AM
THE BOSS BABY 1:30 PM
THU
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Telugu 1:30 PM
FRI
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Hindi 1:30 PM
NO THU+FRI
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Telugu 4:45 PM
THU+FRI
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Hindi 4:45 PM
NO THU+FRI
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Hindi 8:00 PM
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Telugu 11:15 PM
THU
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Hindi 11:15 PM
NO THU

SHARQIA-3
FREE FIRE 12:00 PM
FREE FIRE 2:00 PM
FREE FIRE 4:15 PM
THE LOST CITY OF Z 6:15 PM
MOUSEM AL NISYAN (OBLIVION SEASON) 9:00 PM
FREE FIRE 11:00 PM
FREE FIRE 1:00 AM

MUHALAB-1
FREE FIRE 11:45 AM
FREE FIRE 1:45 PM
THU
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Telugu 1:45 PM
FRI
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Hindi 1:45 PM
NO THU+FRI
FREE FIRE 5:00 PM
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Hindi 7:00 PM
FREE FIRE 10:15 PM
FREE FIRE 12:15 AM

MUHALAB-2
THE LOST CITY OF Z 1:15 PM
FAST & FURIOUS 8 1:30 PM
FRI
THE LOST CITY OF Z 4:00 PM
FAST & FURIOUS 8 6:45 PM
FAST & FURIOUS 8 9:30 PM
THE LOST CITY OF Z 12:15 AM

MUHALAB-3
THE BOSS BABY 12:00 PM
NO FRI
THE BOSS BABY 2:00 PM
NO FRI
THE BOSS BABY 4:00 PM
NO THU+FRI
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Telugu 4:00 PM
THU
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Telugu 7:15 PM
THU
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Telugu 10:30 PM
THU
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Telugu 3:00 PM
FRI
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Telugu 6:30 PM
NO THU
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Telugu 9:45 PM
NO THU
FREE FIRE 1:00 AM
NO THU

FANAR-1
FAST & FURIOUS 8 12:15 PM
FAST & FURIOUS 8 3:00 PM
FAST & FURIOUS 8 5:45 PM
MOUSEM AL NISYAN (OBLIVION SEASON) 8:30 PM
MOUSEM AL NISYAN (OBLIVION SEASON) 10:30 PM
FAST & FURIOUS 8 12:30 AM

FANAR-2
THE BOSS BABY 1:00 PM
THE BOSS BABY 3:00 PM
THE BOSS BABY 5:00 PM
THE BOSS BABY 7:00 PM
FREE FIRE 9:00 PM
FREE FIRE 11:00 PM
FREE FIRE 1:00 AM

FANAR-3
FREE FIRE 12:45 PM
FREE FIRE 2:45 PM
MONOLITH 5:00 PM
MONOLITH 6:45 PM
MONOLITH 8:30 PM
MONOLITH 10:15 PM
MONOLITH 12:05 AM

FANAR-4
THE BOSS BABY 11:30 AM
THE BOSS BABY 1:30 PM
THU
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Telugu 1:30 PM
FRI
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Hindi 1:30 PM
NO THU+FRI
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Telugu 4:45 PM
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Telugu 8:00 PM
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Hindi 11:15 PM

FANAR-5
MINE 1:00 PM
SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE- Arabic 1:30 PM
FRI
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Hindi 3:30 PM
NO THU
SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE- Arabic 4:00 PM
THU
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Hindi 6:45 PM
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Telugu 10:00 PM
MINE 1:15 AM

MARINA-1
THE LOST CITY OF Z 12:15 PM
THE LOST CITY OF Z 3:00 PM
WELAANE -Lebanese 5:45 PM
WELAANE -Lebanese 8:00 PM
WELAANE -Lebanese 10:15 PM
THE LOST CITY OF Z 12:30 AM

MARINA-2
FAST & FURIOUS 8 12:30 PM
FREE FIRE 1:30 PM
FRI
FAST & FURIOUS 8 3:15 PM
THE LOST CITY OF Z 6:00 PM
FAST & FURIOUS 8 8:45 PM
FAST & FURIOUS 8 11:30 PM

MARINA-3
FREE FIRE 12:00 PM
THE BOSS BABY 2:00 PM
THE BOSS BABY 4:00 PM
THE BOSS BABY 6:00 PM
FREE FIRE 8:00 PM
FREE FIRE 10:00 PM
FREE FIRE 12:05 AM

AVENUES-1
MONOLITH 1:00 PM
MONOLITH 3:00 PM
NO THU+FRI
SAFRA 5 NJOOM 3:00 PM
THU+FRI
MONOLITH 5:00 PM
MONOLITH 7:00 PM
MONOLITH 9:00 PM
MONOLITH 11:00 PM
MONOLITH 1:00 AM

AVENUES-2
THE BOSS BABY -3D-4DX (2D+3D+4DX) 11:45 AM
THE BOSS BABY -3D-4DX 2:00 PM
THE BOSS BABY -3D-4DX 4:15 PM
THE BOSS BABY -3D-4DX 6:30 PM
FAST & FURIOUS 8-2D-4DX 9:15 PM
FAST & FURIOUS 8-2D-4DX 12:05 AM

AVENUES-3
FAST & FURIOUS 8 11:30 AM
FAST & FURIOUS 8 2:30 PM
THU
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Telugu 2:30 PM
FRI
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Hindi 2:30 PM
NO THU+FRI
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Hindi 5:45 PM
NO THU+FRI
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Telugu 5:45 PM
THU+FRI
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Hindi 9:00 PM
NO THU
Special Show "BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Telugu" 9:00 PM
THU
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Hindi 12:15 AM

AVENUES-4
FAST & FURIOUS 8 11:30 AM
FAST & FURIOUS 8 2:00 PM
THU
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Hindi 2:00 PM
NO THU
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Hindi 5:15 PM
NO THU+FRI
Special Show "THE BOSS BABY" 5:15 PM
THU+FRI
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Hindi 8:30 PM
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Hindi 11:45 PM

AVENUES-5
FREE FIRE 11:45 AM
THE BOSS BABY 1:45 PM
NO SUN
Special Show "THE BOSS BABY" 1:45 PM
SUN
THE BOSS BABY 3:45 PM
THE BOSS BABY 6:00 PM
NO THU
Special Show "THE BOSS BABY" 6:00 PM
THU
FAST & FURIOUS 8 8:15 PM
FAST & FURIOUS 8 11:00 PM

AVENUES-6
COLOSSAL 1:00 PM
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Telugu 3:30 PM
NO THU
COLOSSAL 4:00 PM
THU
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Telugu 6:45 PM
BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Telugu 10:00 PM
COLOSSAL 1:15 AM

AVENUES-7
MINE 12:00 PM
MOUSEM AL NISYAN (OBLIVION SEASON) 2:30 PM
WELAANE - Lebanese 4:45 PM
MOUSEM AL NISYAN (OBLIVION SEASON) 7:00 PM
WELAANE -Lebanese 9:15 PM
WELAANE -Lebanese 11:30 PM

AVENUES-8
SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE 11:30 AM
THE LOST CITY OF Z 1:30 PM
HEADSHOT 4:30 PM
THE LOST CITY OF Z 6:45 PM
HEADSHOT 9:45 PM
THE LOST CITY OF Z 12:05 AM

AVENUES-9
FAST & FURIOUS 8 12:30 PM
FAST & FURIOUS 8 3:15 PM
FAST & FURIOUS 8 6:00 PM
GHOST IN THE SHELL 8:45 PM
FAST & FURIOUS 8 11:15 PM

AVENUES-10
FREE FIRE 12:00 PM
BISTERI RAJEL - Arabic 2:15 PM
SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE 4:30 PM
FREE FIRE 6:30 PM
FREE FIRE 8:30 PM
FREE FIRE 10:30 PM
FREE FIRE 12:30 AM

AVENUES-11
THE BOSS BABY -CINESCAPE 11-2D 12:30 PM
THE BOSS BABY -CINESCAPE 11-2D 2:45 PM
THE BOSS BABY -CINESCAPE 11-2D 5:00 PM
THE BOSS BABY -CINESCAPE 11-2D 7:15 PM
FAST & FURIOUS 8 -CINESCAPE 11-2D 9:30 PM
FAST & FURIOUS 8 -CINESCAPE 11-2D 12:15 AM

360 ∞- 1
THE BOSS BABY 11:30 AM
THE BOSS BABY 1:45 PM
THE BOSS BABY 4:00 PM
THE BOSS BABY 6:15 PM
THE BOSS BABY 8:30 PM
THE BOSS BABY 10:45 PM
FREE FIRE 1:00 AM

360 ∞- 2
MONOLITH 12:15 PM
MONOLITH 2:15 PM
MONOLITH 4:15 PM
MONOLITH 6:00 PM
MONOLITH 8:00 PM
MONOLITH 10:00 PM
MONOLITH 12:05 AM

FOR RENT

Now renting in Jaber Al Ahmad Area

1) Brand a new apartment
With saloon
Three bedrooms
Two bathrooms
Servant room

2) Brand new floor
With big saloon and reception
Three bedrooms with four bathrooms and servant room

Please contact 99155775

FOR RENT
In Farwaniya Governorate
A deluxe Complex
- 3 bedrooms
- A big space between 90 - 108 m2
- Car park
- Security guards - 24 hours

Contact:
60900554 - 99412885

LOST

Original document policy No. 6330019031, Abdul Mohsen Khan, the State Life Insurance Corporation of Pakistan, Gulf Zone is reported to have been lost. Anyone finding the same or claiming any interest in it should communicate with the Manager Kuwait State Life Office - Ph: 22452208. **(C 5304)**
27-4-2017

Civil ID (No. 278051605719), Kuwait driving license, ATM card, name of Jogi Pratap Reddy, has been lost in Khaitan area. If anyone found please contact: 51310611.
25-4-2017

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Sajida Samir Kazi D/o Gulam Hussain holder of Indian Passport No. P7110390 & Civil ID No. 279093004633 has changed my name to Sajida Gulam Hussain hereinafter in all my dealings and documents. **(C 5303)**
27-4-2017

Flight Schedule

Directorate General of Civil Aviation Home Page (www.kuwait-airport.com.kw)

DIAL161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

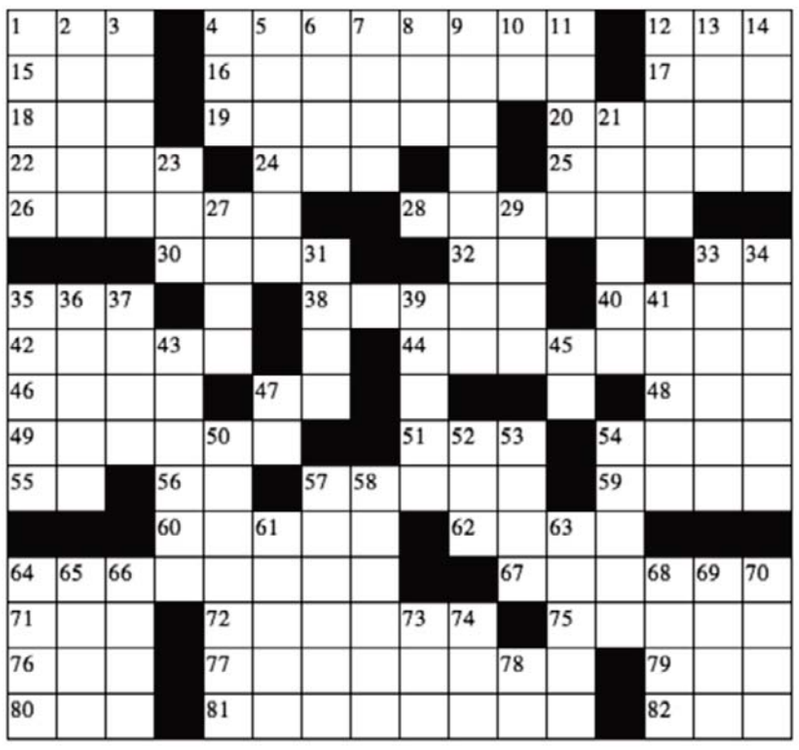
Arrival Flights on Thursday 27/4/2017

Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
MEA	410	Beirut	00:05
MSC	501	Alexandria	00:05
THY	772	Istanbul	00:10
KAC	102	London	00:15
SVA	502	Jeddah	00:20
SVA	514	Riyadh	00:25
KAC	786	Jeddah	00:30
MSC	411	Asyut	00:30
JZR	267	Beirut	00:35
KAC	504	Beirut	00:45
DLH	635	Doha	01:00
JZR	539	Cairo	01:25
SAI	441	Lahore	01:30
UAE	853	Dubai	01:40
RJA	642	Amman	01:45
QTR	1076	Doha	03:40
KAC	1544	Cairo	03:50
LMU	510	Cairo	04:00
UAE	873	Dubai	04:15
KAC	358	Kochi	04:50
KAC	784	Jeddah	05:00
FEG	931	Alexandria	05:00
THY	770	Istanbul	05:05
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:10
KAC	344	Chennai	05:30
JZR	529	Asyut	05:35
KAC	332	Trivandrum	05:40
KAC	362	Colombo	05:50
BAW	157	London	06:05
KAC	204	Lahore	06:20
KAC	284	Dhaka	06:35
QTR	8511	Doha	06:35
KAC	206	Islamabad	06:40
KAC	302	Mumbai	06:55
KAC	156	Istanbul	07:05
JZR	503	Luxor	07:25
KAC	524	Al Najaf	07:30
KAC	354	Bangalore	07:50
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50
KAC	384	Delhi	08:00
UAE	855	Dubai	08:25
IRA	673	Ahwaz	08:35
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	08:55
MEA	406	Beirut	09:00
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:00
IRA	667	Esfahan	09:05
QTR	1070	Doha	09:20
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40
SVA	512	Riyadh	10:00
FDK	803	Damascus	10:00
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40
FDB	8063	Dubai	10:45
KAC	774	Riyadh	10:45
MEA	404	Beirut	10:55
PAL	668	Manila	11:00
SYR	341	Damascus	11:00
JZR	561	Sohag	11:10
KAC	614	Bahrain	11:15
MSC	403	Asyut	11:15
RBG	553	Alexandria	11:30
JZR	165	Dubai	11:50
JZR	239	Amman	12:20
UAE	871	Dubai	12:45
THY	766	Istanbul	12:50
FEG	933	Sohag	12:55
MSR	610	Cairo	13:00
KAC	514	Tehran	13:10
AXB	393	Kozhikode	13:10
KAC	522	Al Najaf	13:40
KAC	672	Dubai	13:55
KAC	792	Madinah	13:55
QTR	1078	Doha	14:05
KNE	231	Riyadh	14:10
GFA	221	Bahrain	14:15
SVA	500	Jeddah	14:15
KAC	618	Doha	14:20
KAC	352	Kochi	14:20
FDB	059	Dubai	14:20
JZR	779	Jeddah	14:25
KAC	788	Jeddah	14:55
KAC	692	Muscat	14:55
KNE	529	Jeddah	14:55
ETD	303	Abu Dhabi	15:05
KAC	562	Amman	15:10
OMA	645	Muscat	15:10
KAC	502	Beirut	15:25
ABY	127	Sharjah	15:35
BBC	043D	Dhaka	15:45
UAE	857	Dubai	15:45
SAW	705	Damascus	15:50
RJA	640	Amman	16:00
FDB	051	Dubai	16:15
QTR	1072	Doha	16:15
JZR	535	Cairo	16:20
JZR	787	Riyadh	16:35
KNE	531	Jeddah	16:35
NIA	361	Alexandria	16:50
KAC	118	New York	16:55
KAC	542	Cairo	17:05
SVA	510	Riyadh	17:15
GFA	215	Bahrain	17:30
JZR	777	Jeddah	17:35
JZR	177	Dubai	17:45
QTR	1080	Doha	18:05
JZR	483	Istanbul	18:30
MSR	620	Cairo	18:30
KAC	744	Dammam	19:05
UAE	875	Dubai	19:05
GFA	217	Bahrain	19:05
FDB	063	Dubai	19:10
ABY	123	Sharjah	19:20
KAC	154	Istanbul	19:30
KAC	616	Bahrain	19:40
KAC	674	Dubai	19:40
KAC	776	Riyadh	19:45
KAC	620	Doha	19:50
FDB	057	Dubai	19:50
OMA	647	Muscat	20:05
KNE	381	Taif	20:10
DLH	634	Frankfurt	20:15
MEA	402	Beirut	20:15
KAC	662	Abu Dhabi	20:20
JZR	189	Dubai	20:25
QTR	1088	Doha	20:35
KAC	564	Amman	21:00
KAC	168	Paris	21:05
ETD	307	Abu Dhabi	21:10
KLM	445	Amsterdam	21:15
ALK	229	Colombo	21:15
UAE	859	Dubai	21:15
FDB	8053	Dubai	21:25
KAC	676	Dubai	21:35
GFA	219	Bahrain	21:50
QTR	1082	Doha	22:00
NIA	161	Cairo	22:10
ETD	309	Abu Dhabi	22:10
JZR	125	Bahrain	22:15
AIC	981	Chennai/Ahmedabad	22:25
JZR	241	Amman	22:55
JZR	185	Dubai	22:55
JAI	574	Mumbai	23:00
FDB	071	Dubai	23:35
THY	764	Istanbul	23:45

Departure Flights on Thursday 27/4/2017

Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
AIC	976	Goa/Chennai	00:05
JAI	573	Mumbai	00:30
FDB	072	Dubai	00:30
PIA	240	Sialkot	00:40
MSC	502	Alexandria	01:05
MEA	411	Beirut	01:05
JZR	502	Luxor	01:15
SVA	503	Jeddah	01:20
SVA	515	Riyadh	01:25
MSC	412	Asyut	01:30
THY	773	Istanbul	01:40
DLH	635	Frankfurt	02:00
SAI	442	Lahore	02:30
ETH	621	Addis Ababa	02:50
KKK	6505	Istanbul	02:55
AXB	396	Kozhikode	02:55
KAC	351	Kochi	03:05
PGT	831	Istanbul	03:10
UAE	854	Dubai	03:30
KLM	446	Amsterdam	03:30
KAC	523	Al Najaf	03:40
MSR	607	Luxor	04:05
OMA	644	Muscat	04:05
QTR	1087	Doha	04:10
ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:10
MSR	613	Cairo	04:15
KAC	417	Manila	04:20
JZR	560	Sohag	04:45
LMU	511	Cairo	05:00
QTR	1077	Doha	05:35
FEG	934	Sohag	05:55
UAE	874	Dubai	06:15
RJA	643	Amman	06:25
THY	771	Istanbul	06:25
KAC	773	Riyadh	06:35
GFA	212	Bahrain	06:50
JZR	238	Amman	06:55
FDB	070	Dubai	07:05
KAC	167	Paris	07:15
JZR	164	Dubai	07:15
KAC	501	Beirut	07:50
KAC	613	Bahrain	07:55
BAW	156	London	08:20
FDB	054	Dubai	08:30
QTR	8512	Doha	08:35
KAC	791	Madinah	08:35
KAC	513	Tehran	08:45
JZR	778	Jeddah	08:50
AAG	148	IQA	09:00
KAC	117	New York	09:00
KAC	671	Dubai	09:15
KAC	787	Jeddah	09:15
KAC	561	Amman	09:30
KAC	691	Muscat	09:30
JZR	534	Cairo	09:30
IRA	672	Ahwaz	09:35
ABY	126	Sharjah	09:40
JZR	482	Istanbul	09:40
KAC	101	London	09:45
UAE	856	Dubai	09:50
ETD	302	Abu Dhabi	10:00
MEA	407	Beirut	10:00
KAC	521	Al Najaf	10:00
KAC	541	Cairo	10:00
IRA	668	Mashhad	10:05
KAC	617	Doha	10:15
VIZ	205	IQA	10:30
KAC	153	Istanbul	10:30
QTR	1071	Doha	10:35
FDB	056	Dubai	10:35
FDK	804	Damascus	11:00
SVA	513	Riyadh	11:00
FDB	8064	Dubai	11:30
GFA	214	Bahrain	11:35
MEA	405	Beirut	11:55
SYR	342	Damascus	12:00
JZR	776	Jeddah	12:00
RBG	554	Alexandria	12:10
MSC	404	Asyut	12:15
PAL	669	Manila	13:10
JZR	786	Riyadh	13:10
JZR	176	Dubai	13:10
THY	767	Istanbul	13:45
FEG	932	Alexandria	13:55
MSR	611	Cairo	14:00
KAC	413	Bangkok	14:05
AXB	394	Kozhikode	14:10
UAE	872	Dubai	14:15
KNE	382	Taif	15:00
GFA	222	Bahrain	15:00
KAC	673	Dubai	15:00
FDB	060	Dubai	15:05
QTR	1079	Doha	15:15
KAC	563	Amman	15:40
SVA	501	Jeddah	15:45
KAC	775	Riyadh	15:50
JZR	188	Dubai	15:50
KNE	530	Jeddah	15:55
KAC	661	Abu Dhabi	15:55
KAC	743	Dammam	16:00
KAC	619	Doha	16:00
OMA	646	Muscat	16:10
ABY	128	Sharjah	16:15
ETD	304	Abu Dhabi	16:20
KAC	615	Bahrain	16:30
SAW	706	Damascus	16:50
RJA	641	Amman	16:55
KAC	675	Dubai	17:00
FDB	052	Dubai	17:05
BBC	044D	Dhaka	17:15
KAC	503	Beirut	17:15
JZR	266	Beirut	17:15
QTR	1073	Doha	17:25
KNE	532	Jeddah	17:25
JZR	240	Amman	17:30
UAE	858	Dubai	17:40
KAC	357	Kochi	17:40
NIA	362	Alexandria	17:50
KAC	381	Delhi	17:50
KAC	283	Dhaka	18:00
KAC	343	Chennai	18:00
SVA	511	Riyadh	18:15
GFA	216	Bahrain	18:20
JZR	184	Dubai	18:20
JZR	538	Cairo	18:35
KAC	785	Jeddah	18:45
QTR	1081	Doha	19:15
KAC	345	Ahmedabad	19:20
JZR	124	Bahrain	19:20
MSR	621	Cairo	19:30
GFA	218	Bahrain	19:50
FDB	064	Dubai	19:50
ABY	124	Sharjah	20:00
FDB	058	Dubai	20:30
UAE	876	Dubai	20:35
KAC	353	Bangalore	20:55
DLH	634	Doha	21:00
OMA	648	Muscat	21:05
KNE	232	Riyadh	21:10
MEA	403	Beirut	21:15
JZR	554	Alexandria	21:15
KAC	1543	Cairo	21:30
KAC	301	Mumbai	21:40
QTR	1089	Doha	21:45
KAC	203	Lahore	21:45
DHX	171	Bahrain	21:50
ETD	308	Abu Dhabi	22:00
KAC	155	Istanbul	22:15
ALK	230	Colombo	22:20
KLM	445	Bahrain	22:25
FDB	8054	Dubai	22:25
UAE	860	Dubai	22:35
KAC	383	Delhi	22:35
GFA	220	Bahrain	22:50
ETD	310	Abu Dhabi	23:00
NIA	162	Cairo	23:10
KAC	783	Jeddah	23:10
QTR	1083	Doha	23:20

CROSSWORD 1591



CROSS

1. A police officer who investigates crimes.
4. A mass of undifferentiated cells from with an organ or body part develops.
12. A diagrammatic representation of the earth's surface (or part of it).
15. A Kwa language spoken by the Yoruba people in southwestern Nigeria.
16. 15th President of the United States (1791-1868).
17. A strong emotion.
18. The rate at which energy is drawn from a source that produces a flow of electricity in a circuit.
19. The world's largest desert (3,500,000 square miles) in North Africa.
20. Type genus of the Gadidae.
22. A spar rising aft from a mast to support the head of a quadrilateral fore-and-aft sail.
24. Not of long duration.
25. The mission in San Antonio where in 1836 Mexican forces under Santa Anna besieged and massacred American rebels who were fighting to make Texas independent of Mexico.
26. (used of certain religious orders) Barefoot or wearing only sandals.
28. Drooping of the upper eyelid caused by muscle paralysis and weakness.
30. South American armadillo with three bands of bony plates.
32. A hemoprotein composed of globin and heme that gives red blood cells their characteristic color.
35. Gear (including necessary machinery) for a particular enterprise.
38. Red pear-shaped tropical fruit with poisonous seeds.
40. United States writer (born in Poland) who wrote in Yiddish (1880-1957).
42. (Old Testament) The second patriarch.
44. An almond-shaped neural structure in the anterior part of the temporal lobe of the cerebrum.
46. Distinguished from Bovidae by the male's having solid deciduous antlers.
48. (British) Your grandmother.
49. The father of your father or mother.
51. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
55. The branch of engineering science that studies the uses of electricity and the equipment for power generation and distribution and the control of machines and communication.
56. The branch of computer science that deal with writing computer programs that can solve problems creatively.
59. Swift timid long-eared mammal larger than a rabbit having a divided upper lip and long hind legs.
60. The friend of Phintias who pledged his life that Phintias would return (4th century BC).
62. A member of the Siouan people formerly living in the Missouri river valley in NE Nebraska.
64. A skilled worker who can live in underwater installations and participate in scientific research.
67. Capital and largest city of Iraq.
71. The network in the reticular formation that serves an alerting or arousal function.
72. Accuse formally of a crime.
75. A Bantu language spoken by the Kamba people in Kenya.
76. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
77. A headlong rush of people on a common impulse.
79. In or of the month preceding the present one.
80. Sexually transmitted urethritis (usually caused by chlamydia).
81. A great raja.
82. Relating to or characteristic of or occurring on the sea or ships.

DOWN

1. A city in southeastern South Korea.
2. Swedish oceanographer who recognized the role of the Coriolis effect on ocean currents (1874-1954).
3. Shackle that consists of a metal loop that can be locked around the wrist.
4. (computer science) A computer that is running software that allows users to leave messages and access information of general interest.
5. Port city on Atlantic coast.
6. A dull persistent (usually moderately intense) pain.
7. United States humorist who wrote about rural life (1818-1885).
8. Any of various dark heavy viscid substances obtained as a residue.
9. Eruption on a mucous membrane (as the inside of the mouth) occurring as a symptom of a disease.
10. Informal terms for a mother.
11. A Chadic language spoken in northern Nigeria and closely related to Hausa.
12. (Greek legend) The greedy king of Phrygia who Dionysus gave the power to turn everything he touched into gold.
13. Starch resembling sago that is obtained from cuckoopint root.
14. The basic unit of money in Uruguay.
21. Surveying instrument consisting of the upper movable part of a theodolite including the telescope and its attachments.
23. The federal agency that insures residential mortgages.
27. An organization of countries formed in 1961 to agree on a common policy for the sale of petroleum.
29. Be obedient to.
31. A sudden short attack.
33. Oblong cream puff.
34. Occurring or appearing or singled out by chance.
36. A river in southeastern France.
37. (Greek mythology) Goddess of the earth and mother of Cronus and the Titans in ancient mythology.
39. A small canoe consisting of a light frame made watertight with animal skins.
41. The capital and largest city of Yemen.
43. A large fleet.
45. A unit of magnetomotive force equal to 0.7958 ampere-turns.
47. A very poisonous metallic element that has three allotropic forms.
50. Performance by or technique of a pianist.
52. A crystalline rock that can be cut and polished for jewelry.
53. An Arabic speaking person who lives in Arabia or North Africa.
54. God of wealth and love.
57. A (usually canopied) seat for riding on the back of a camel or elephant.
58. The innermost membrane of an organ (especially the inner lining of an artery or vein or lymphatic vessel).
61. A blanket that is used as a cloak or shawl.
63. Australian shrubs and small trees with evergreen usually spiny leaves and dense clusters of showy flowers.
65. 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.
66. (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.
68. A doctor's degree in music.
69. (usually followed by `to') Having the necessary means or skill or know-how or authority to do something.
70. A collection of facts from which conclusions may be drawn.
73. An emergency procedure consisting of external cardiac massage and artificial respiration.
74. A beverage made by steeping tea leaves in water.
78. A person who announces and plays popular recorded music.

Yesterday's Solution

K	E	A		P	A	C	H	I	S	I		S	C	O	T
A	D	P		S	T	R	I	A	T	E		C	A	P	E
M	A	R	A	T	H	I		M	E		R	A	V	E	R
A	M		C		A	M	E	B	A		E	R	I	C	A
			E	A	R	E	D		M	E	D	A	L		
P	A	S	T	A		A	D			N	E	B		B	S
U	N	E	A	S	Y		A	M	I	T	Y		L	E	I
G	N	A	T		O	B		A	M	O	E	B	I	D	A
L	U	B	E	C	K		S	L	A	M		R	I	L	L
I	A	A		R	E		L	A	M	B	D	A		A	I
A	L	G	A	E		J	O	B			A	G	A	M	A
			D	A		A	P	O	G	A	M	I	C		
D	Y	N	A	M	I	C	S			K	A		A	G	A
E	A	R	L	Y		K	H	A	M	A		A	C	I	D
E	L	L	I		B	A	O	B	A	B		L	I	R	A
P	E	B	A		A	L	P	A	C	A		B	A	L	D

STAR TRACK

Aries (March 21-April 19)

You may still be out of step concerning your ideas. Go ahead and work on your ideas apart from work and then make your presentation. Be ready to change or adapt but know that rewards are in the making and the last-minute revealing of your idea to co-workers is the witness to your hard work. There is a new phase now that pushes you in the social and political world. This is a special status and has a way of seeming necessary. It starts out small but can become quite ambitious and full of community responsibilities. Your energies may be focused on personal achievements and the love of animals as well. A social affair will show off your elegant side this evening. If possible, use this opportunity to carefully and cautiously network.

Taurus (April 20-May 20)

A few things come to your attention this morning but one of the most important things to catch your eye is a way for you to express your talents in helping people. Problem solving, conflict resolution and all sorts of opportunities to help heal a nation are yours for the asking. A little more education or credentials will be of no matter as you excel in your efforts to help a group, help a country, city or people to come back from difficult times. Surviving abilities and knowledge into the ways of communication will move you to the front of the pack that seeks to make a difference. Politics or teaching will be your new calling. You have the incentive and the positive attitude that everyone would like to have-an inner light. Happy birthday!

Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Someone could challenge you or say something that does not seem quite right-a very sensitive issue. This may touch you in some emotional ways. Perhaps this is a young person that is difficult to understand. Whether this is your co-worker friend or a customer, a friendly attitude may be all that is needed. Acceptance and reassurance may be the key to a better understanding. Your taste in art and appreciation in general are heightened later today. Perhaps this is a good time to set up a time to visit a museum or perhaps a model home. You can recognize a good investment; whether it is a painting or the type of floor you may want to put in. You are wise to keep away from speculation and money risks just now. Your sense of value is to the fore.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Be careful of procrastination today. True procrastination is not the result of simple laziness-it is trying to delay what will really become the end result or outcome. Perhaps there is a challenge that is teasing you and you are not sure how you want to proceed. This may not be the clearest of times. There is the danger of foggy thinking and of your being misled or getting too carried away with some plan or idea. You may want to break that routine and try something new or different today. You will discover new ideas that will be of great value later. You are coming into a creative and competitive phase, one in which you want to be admired and appreciated. Romance and such creative pursuits as hobbies are outlets for much of your energy this evening.

Leo (July 23-August 22)

Decisive action is the main order of business now: how you respond to change and maintain your independence is a major focus. There is no time to coast. You look for new and innovative ways to handle your job. During your lunch break you work in some research time and find that there is more than one way to handle the requests that are upon you in the work place now. You are enthusiastic with your new information. Your concentration may be focused on your parents this afternoon. The opinion and methods of yesterday versus today may be the topic of conversation. Understanding comes from working through and accepting some of the disappointments you may have experienced from the past. Remaining true to your roots may be a matter you ponder.

Virgo (August 23-September 22)

A hot discussion may take place today but you enjoy the debate. Through your ability to listen and to solve problems, you teach others. There is a vast amount of intelligent energy available to you. If you remember your priorities, a midweek crisis can be averted and changed into a very productive day. You may have a clear understanding of your position in the world these days. Communal activities that take place this afternoon and evening should be both well-attended and successful. Relationships are intensified and this tends to make you love everybody. Self-confidence is good, not pompous-congratulations! There is a fabulous romantic trend coming up and it begins this evening. If you have a mate, a deepening of relationship can be enjoyed.

Libra (September 23-October 22)

A new forum could be a turning point in a meeting this morning. A group meeting on the sales floor is exciting as well as frustrating. Give this time to unwind-there is more to discover. Obtaining and exchanging information takes on more emotional significance for you now. Being more involved with co-workers and reports from other business bring about an interesting satisfaction. Communicating feelings becomes important. Another meeting is planned for tomorrow . . . Be ready with questions. The time is ripe for sudden and unexpected change in the family or personal routine. This certainly does not have to mean negative. Some of the greatest experiences come with the little surprises that happen from time to time in our life.

Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You are supportive of a loved one's ideas this morning and may find yourself in deep conversation. You do not forget your various responsibilities however, and may find yourself working a little late this afternoon to make sure you have completed all the necessary work on your agenda. You may be planning a garage sale for this weekend and tonight you and a mate or friend will be marking prices and cleaning the clothes. In your quest for independence this week, do not go too far-friends will be including you in some fun activity that you will not want to miss for this weekend. There should be no conflict of activities this coming weekend as you will be through with a successful garage sale by sunday and can join your friends in fun activities.

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Do not worry too much about what others think about your work or abilities. You will be able to achieve quite a lot today. An emphasis on business is positive and you will find the day moving along rather quickly. The intellectual and communicative talents of those close to you take on greater importance; any shortcomings of this kind stick out like a sore thumb. There is a great deal of communication with media friends regarding education or the lack of education in your community. There could be some great suggestions as you gather with your friends to create a few inspirations. Do not hesitate to write the editor of your paper when you realize you have some great ideas. You make a wonderful teacher and excel at encouraging others.

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

In a business meeting today you should not become preoccupied with one idea and accept it as gospel. Consider all sides of an issue. This could be your most beneficial move now, yet it may be hard to hold yourself back in order to hear all the sides. Be cautious in your expenditures this afternoon; most any enterprise would increase your debts. You are intuitive, considerate and imaginative and will include your loved ones in some problem-solving ideas before making a final decision today. While visiting parents or grandparents this afternoon, you experience a feeling of pride and accomplishment as you show off a new talent. This may mean that you have learned to play the piano, perform some special magic trick or tell a new joke.

Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

There is an emphasis on close relationships, and a preoccupation with ideas of fairness and harmony is part and parcel of the cycle you have begun. You want what you want and many of your friends are not surprised to see results that are just the way you visualize them. Your friends commend you on your ability to create end results to your plans so quickly. Today may be the day you take a day off from your work to sign papers on a house or attend a birth or any number of other life-changing things. Yes, you are conscientious about your work but you have written instructions for the underling that will be stepping in to help. Have a camera and phone at the ready. Tonight you may be in a group exercise program for relief of stress or boredom.

Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You can bring an attitude of common sense, positive energy and warmth to a frustrated person today, enabling the creation of more positive thinking. You have a calm way about you and you take the time to listen. You may visit a bookstore later today and gather some books that will be helpful for this person. Be careful that you do not go on a spending spree this afternoon, for you may appreciate the beauty and value of everything you encounter today. You are most successful in constructing a project and may enjoy making changes to your home. Water flowing in or near your home can aid in everyone's ability to relax and have creative, intuitive thoughts. A waterfall can be designed in an entrance hall or outside birdbath area-perhaps a fish pond.

WORD SEARCH

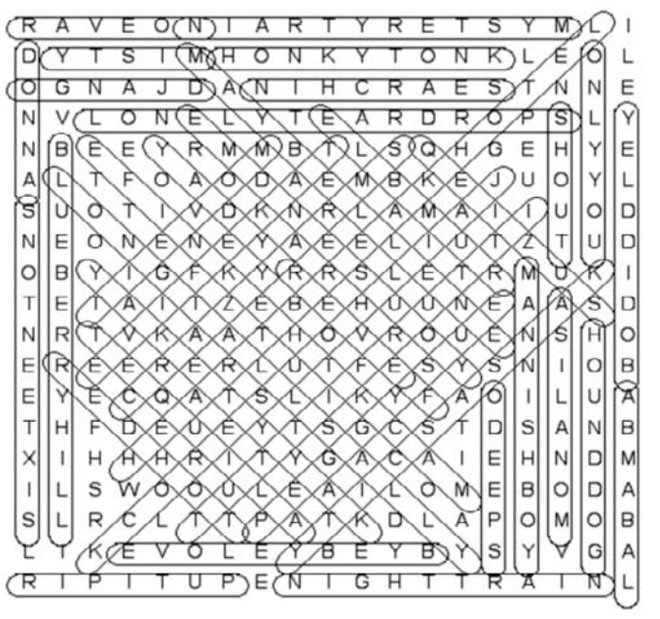
60's Songs

Find and circle all of the 1960's song titles that are hidden in the grid.
The remaining letters spell the title of an additional 1960's song.

BABY LOVE
BLUE MOON
BLUE VELVET
BUS STOP
CARA MIA
CHAIN GANG
CHERISH
CRAZY
CRYING
DIZZY
DOWNTOWN
EL PASO
ELENORE
FINGERTIPS
FIRE
GALVESTON
GOOD LOVIN'
GROOVIN'
HAIR
HEATWAVE
HEY JUDE
HOLIDAY
ITCHYCOO PARK
LAST KISS
MEMPHIS
MY GIRL
MY GUY
PEOPLE
PUPPY LOVE
RESPECT
RUNAWAY
SHERRY
SOUL MAN
SPOOKY
STAY
SURF CITY
TEEN ANGEL
THE BOXER
THE TWIST
THESE EYES
VALLERI
VOLARE
WHITE RABBIT
WILD THING
WINDY
WIPEOUT
WORDS
YESTERDAY

Yesterday's Solution

1950's Songs



BLUEBERRY HILL
BO DIDDLEY
BYE BYE LOVE
CRAZY ARMS
DJANGO
DONNA
EVERYDAY
FEVER
HEARTBREAK HOTEL
HONKY TONK
HOUND DOG
JAILHOUSE ROCK
KANSAS CITY
LA BAMBA
LONELY TEARDROPS
LONG TALL SALLY
MACK THE KNIFE
MANNISH BOY
MAYBELLENE
MISTY
MONA LISA
MOVE IT
MYSTERY TRAIN
NIGHT TRAIN
ONLY YOU
PEGGY SUE
RAVE ON
RED HOT
RIP IT UP
RUMBLE
SEARCHIN'
SHOUT
SIXTEEN TONS
SPEEDO
SUZIE Q
TAKE FIVE
TEQUILA
TUTTI FRUTTI
YAKETY YAK
YOU SEND ME

The hidden sentence is: I'LL NEVER GET OUT OF THIS WORLD ALIVE

Daily SuDoku

					4	2		5
3	5							
1			5					
	7			2			5	
	3		8		9		1	
	4			7			9	
					1			7
							4	9
6		8	9					

Yesterday's Solution

7	4	8	9	2	3	6	5	1
1	3	6	4	7	5	8	2	9
5	9	2	6	8	1	3	7	4
6	1	3	2	9	7	4	8	5
4	5	9	3	1	8	2	6	7
8	2	7	5	4	6	9	1	3
9	7	4	8	5	2	1	3	6
2	6	5	1	3	9	7	4	8
3	8	1	7	6	4	5	9	2

For labor-related inquiries and complaints:
Call MSAL hotline 128

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401
Jabriya	25316254
Maidan Hawally	25623444
Bayan	25388462
Mishref	25381200
W Hawally	22630786
Sabah	24810221
Jahra	24770319
New Jahra	24575755
West Jahra	24772608
South Jahra	24775066
North Jahra	24775992
North Jleeb	24311795
Ardhiya	24884079
Firdous	24892674
Omariya	24719048
N Khaitan	24710044
Fintas	23900322

PHARMACIES
ON 24 HRS DUTY

GOVERNORATE	PHARMACY	ADDRESS	PHONE
Ahmadi	Sama Safwan	Fahaeel Makka St	23915883
	Abu Halaifa	Abu Halaifa-Coastal Rd	23715414
	Danat Al-Sultan	Mahboula Block 1, Coastal Rd	23726558
Jahra	Modern Jahra	Jahra-Block 3 Lot 1	24575518
	Madina Munawara	Jahra-Block 92	24566622
Capital	Ahlam	Fahad Al-Salem St	22436184
	Khaldiya Coop	Khaldiya Coop	24833967
Farwaniya	New Shifa	Farwaniya Block 40	24734000
	Ferdous Coop	Ferdous Coop	24881201
	Modern Safwan	Old Kheitan Block 11	24726638
Hawally	Tariq	Salmiya-Hamad Mubarak St	25726265
	Hana	Salmiya-Amman St	25647075
	Ikhlas	Hawally-Beirut St	22625999
	Hawally & Rawdha	Hawally & Rawdha Coop	22564549
	Ghadeer	Jabriya-Block 1A	25340559
	Kindy	Jabriya-Block 3B	25326554
	Ibn Al-Nafis	Salmiya-Hamad Mubarak St	25721264
	Mishrif Coop	Mishrif Coop	25380581
	Salwa Coop	Salwa Coop	25628241

STATE OF KUWAIT
DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION
METEOROLOGICAL DEPARTMENT

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www.met.gov.kw

DAY: Wednesday 26/04/2017 Valid From 7 AM To 7 PM

Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

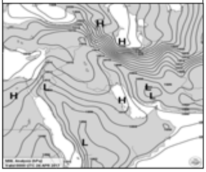
BY DAY: Partly cloudy with light to moderate freshening gradually at times north westerly to northerly wind, with speed of 15 - 40 km/h with a chance for scattered light rain

BY NIGHT: Partly cloudy with light to moderate freshening gradually at times north westerly wind, with speed of 15 - 40 km/h

WEATHER WARNING	No Current Warnings

STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	34 °C	24 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	35 °C	23 °C
ABDALY	36 °C	21 °C
BUBYAN	36 °C	22 °C
JAHRA	35 °C	23 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	33 °C	22 °C
SALMIYAH	32 °C	24 °C
AHMADI	32 °C	24 °C
NUWAISIB	35 °C	23 °C
WAFRA	35 °C	22 °C
SALMY	33 °C	19 °C

SFC. CHART 26/04/2017 0000 UTC



4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures MAX.	Temperatures MIN.	Wind Direction	Wind Speed
Thursday	04/27	Mostly Sunny	36 °C	23 °C	NW-N	15 - 35 km/h
Friday	04/28	Partly cloudy + scattered light rain	34 °C	24 °C	VRB-SE	08 - 30 km/h
Saturday	04/29	P.cloudy/cloudy+Scattered rain thundry at times	35 °C	24 °C	SE	20 - 45 km/h
Sunday	04/30	Cloudy/ p.cloudy + scattered rain, thundery at times	34 °C	26 °C	SE-SW	15 - 40 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	03:45
Sunrise	05:10
Zuhr	11:46
Asr	15:21
Sunset	18:21
Isha	19:43

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT		
MAX. Temp.		33 °C
MIN. Temp.		23 °C
MAX. RH		60 %
MIN. RH		19 %
MAX. Wind	N	71 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.		0 mm

All times are local time unless otherwise stated. UP.0 2017/04/26 03:04 UTC V1.00 T2.4 ق.ت.خ.ع/1-2

INTERNATIONAL CALLS

Afghanistan	0093
Albania	00355
Algeria	00213
Andorra	00376
Angola	00244
Anguilla	001264
Antiga	001268
Argentina	0054
Armenia	00374
Australia	0061
Austria	0043
Azerbaijan	00994
Bahamas	001242
Bahrain	00973
Bangladesh	00880
Barbados	001246
Belarus	00375
Belgium	0032
Belize	00501
Benin	00229
Bermuda	001441
Bhutan	00975
Bolivia	00591
Bosnia	00387
Botswana	00267
Brazil	0055
Brunei	00673
Bulgaria	00359
Burkina	00226
Burundi	00257
Cambodia	00855
Cameroon	00237
Canada	001
Cape Verde	00238
Cayman Islands	001345
Central African	00236
Chad	00235
Chile	0056
China	0086
Colombia	0057
Comoros	00269
Congo	00242
Cook Islands	00682
Costa Rica	00506
Croatia	00385
Cuba	0053
Cyprus	00357
Cyprus (Northern)	0090392
Czech Republic	00420
Denmark	0045
Diego Garcia	00246
Djibouti	00253
Dominica	001767
Dominican Republic	001809
Ecuador	00593
Egypt	0020
El Salvador	00503
England (UK)	0044
Equatorial Guinea	00240
Eritrea	00291
Estonia	00372
Ethiopia	00251
Falkland Islands	00500
Faroe Islands	00298
Fiji	00679
Finland	00358
France	0033
French Guiana	00594
French Polynesia	00689
Gabon	00241
Gambia	00220
Georgia	00995
Germany	0049
Ghana	00233
Gibraltar	00350
Greece	0030
Greenland	00299
Grenada	001473
Guadeloupe	00590
Guam	001671
Guatemala	00502
Guinea	00224
Guyana	00592
Haiti	00509
Holland (Netherlands)	0031
Honduras	00504
Hong Kong	00852
Hungary	0036
Ibiza (Spain)	0034
Iceland	00354
India	0091
Indian Ocean	00873
Indonesia	0062
Iran	0098
Iraq	00964
Ireland	00353
Italy	0039
Ivory Coast	00225
Jamaica	001876
Japan	0081
Jordan	00962
Kazakhstan	007
Kenya	00254
Kiribati	00686
Kuwait	00965
Kyrgyzstan	00996
Laos	00856
Latvia	00371
Lebanon	00961
Liberia	00231
Libya	00218
Lesotho	00266

Lithuania	00370
Luxembourg	00352
Macau	00853
Macedonia	00389
Madagascar	00261
Majorca	0034
Malawi	00265
Malaysia	0060
Maldives	00960
Mali	00223
Malta	00356
Marshall Islands	00692
Martinique	00596
Mauritania	00222
Mauritius	00230
Mayotte	00269
Mexico	0052
Micronesia	00691
Moldova	00373
Monaco	00377
Mongolia	00976
Montserrat	001664
Morocco	00212
Mozambique	00258
Myanmar (Burma)	0095
Namibia	00264
Nepal	00977
Netherlands	0031
Netherlands Antilles	00599
New Caledonia	00687
New Zealand	0064
Nicaragua	00505
Nigar	00227
Nigeria	00234
Niue	00683
Norfolk Island	00672
N. Ireland (UK)	0044
North Korea	00850
Norway	0047
Oman	00968
Pakistan	0092
Palau	00680
Panama	00507
Papua New Guinea	00675
Paraguay	00595
Peru	0051
Philippines	0063
Poland	0048
Portugal	00351
Puerto Rico	001787
Qatar	00974
Romania	0040
Russian Federation	007
Rwanda	00250
Saint Helena	00290
Saint Kitts	001869
Saint Lucia	001758
Saint Pierre	00508
Saint Vincent	001784
Samoa US	00684
Samoa West	00685
San Marino	00378
Sao Tome	00239
Saudi Arabia	00966
Scotland (UK)	0044
Senegal	00221
Seychelles	00284
Sierra Leone	00232
Singapore	0065
Slovakia	00421
Slovenia	00386
Solomon Islands	00677
Somalia	00252
South Africa	0027
South Korea	0082
Spain	0034
Sri Lanka	0094
Sudan	00249
Suriname	00597
Swaziland	00268
Sweden	0046
Switzerland	0041
Syria	00963
Serbia	00381
Taiwan	00886
Tanzania	00255
Thailand	0066
Togo	00228
Tonga	00676
Tokelau	00690
Trinidad	001868
Tunisia	00216
Turkey	0090
Tuvalu	00688
Uganda	00256
Ukraine	00380
United Arab Emirates	00976
United Kingdom	0044
Uruguay	00598
USA	001
Uzbekistan	00998
Vanuatu	00678
Venezuela	00582
Vietnam	0084
Virgin Islands UK	001284
Virgin Islands US	001340
Wales (UK)	0044
Yemen	00967
Yugoslavia	00381
Zambia	00260
Zimbabwe	00263

PRIVATE CLINICS

Ophthalmologists

Dr. Abidallah Al-Mansoor	25622444
Dr. Samy Al-Rabeea	25752222
Dr. Masoma Habeeb	25321171
Dr. Mubarak Al-Ajmy	25739999
Dr. Mohsen Abel	25757700
Dr Adnan Hasan Alwayl	25732223
Dr. Abdallah Al-Baghly	25732223

Ear, Nose & Throat (ENT)

Dr. Ahmed Fouad Mouner	24555050 Ext 510
Dr. Abdallah Al-Ali	25644660
Dr. Abd Al-Hameed Al-Taweel	25646478
Dr. Sanad Al-Fathalah	25311996
Dr. Mohammad Al-Daaory	25731988
Dr. Ismail Al-Fodary	22620166
Dr. Mahmoud Al-Booz	25651426

General Practitioners

Dr. Mohamme Y Majidi	24555050 Ext 123
Dr. Yousef Al-Omar	24719312
Dr. Tarek Al-Mikhazeem	23926920
Dr. Kathem Maarafi	25730465
Dr. Abdallah Ahmad Eyadah	25655528
Dr. Nabeel Al-Ayoobi	24577781
Dr. Dina Abidallah Al-Refae	25333501

Urologists

Dr. Ali Naser Al-Serfy	22641534
Dr. Fawzi Taher Abul	22639955
Dr. Khaleel Abidallah Al-Awadi	22616660
Dr. Adel Al-Hunayan FRCS (C)	25313120
Dr. Leons Joseph	66703427

Plastic Surgeons

Dr. Mohammad Al-Khalaf	22547272
Dr. Abdal-Redha Lari	22617700
Dr. Abdel Quttainah	25625030/60

Family Doctor

Dr Divya Damodar	23729596/23729581

Psychiatrists

Dr. Esam Al-Ansari	22635047
Dr Eisa M. Al-Balhan	22613623/0

Gynaecologists & Obstetricians

DrAdrian arbe	23729596/23729581
Dr. Verginia s.Marin	2572-6666 ext 8321
Dr. Fozeya Ali Al-Qatan	22655539
Dr. Majeda Khalefa Aliytami	25343406
Dr. Ahmad Al-Khooly	25739272
Dr. Salem soso	22618787

General Surgeons

Dr. Amer Zawaz Al-Amer	22610044
Dr. Mohammad Yousef Basher	25327148

Internists, Chest & Heart

Dr. Adnan Ebil	22639939
Dr. Mousa Khadada	22666300
Dr. Latefa Al-Duweisan	25728004
Dr. Nadem Al-Ghabra	25355515
Dr. Mobarak Aldoub	24726446
Dr Nasser Behbehani	25654300/3

Paediatricians

Dr. Khaled Hamadi	25665898
Dr. Abd Al-Aziz Al-Rashed	25340300
Dr. Zahra Qabazard	25710444
Dr. Sohail Qamar	22621099
Dr. Snaa Maaroof	25713514
Dr. Pradip Gujare	23713100
Dr. Zacharias Mathew	24334282

Dermatology

Dr. Mohammed Salam Bern University	23845955

Dentists

Dr Anil Thomas	3729596/3729581
Dr. Shamah Al-Matar	22641071/2
Dr. Anesah Al-Rasheed	22562226
Dr. Abidallah Al-Amer	22561444
Dr. Faysal Al-Fozan	22619557
Dr. Abdallateef Al-Katrash	22525888
Dr. Abidallah Al-Duweisan	25653755
Dr. Bader Al-Ansari	25620111

Neurologists

Dr. Sohal Najem Al-Shemeri	25633324
Dr. Jasem Mola Hassan	25345875

Gastrologists

Dr. Sami Aman	22636464
Dr. Mohammad Al-Shamaly	25322030
Dr. Foad Abidallah Al-Ali	22633135

Endocrinologist

Dr. Abd Al-Naser Al-Othman	25339330
Dr. Ahmad Al-Ansari	25658888
Dr. Kamal Al-Shomr	25329924

Physiotherapists & VD

Dr. Deyaa Shehab	25722291
Dr. Musaed Faraj Khamees	22666288

Rheumatologists:

Dr. Adel Al-Awadi	25330060
Dr. Khaled Al-Jarallah	25722290

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With 'Alien,' 'Blade Runner' sequels, Scott looks forward

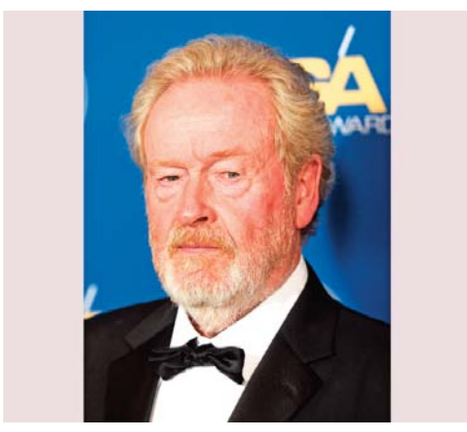
Ridley Scott insists he is not a nostalgic person, but you wouldn't know that looking at the 2017 movie calendar. Not only are audiences getting another "Alien" movie, "Alien: Covenant," on May 19, but also a long-time-coming "Blade Runner" sequel in October. Scott made his name in Hollywood with "Alien" in 1979. It was the kind of genre-busting horror that continues to inspire pale imitations to this day. (Including one this year's Jake Gyllenhaal and Ryan Reynolds space pic "Life.") And then, in 1982, his futuristic neo-noir "Blade Runner" gave a new aesthetic to our dystopian future. It may have confounded most upon its release, but the sublime mind-bender has gained a cult and eventually popular following over the years.

While the titles might suggest otherwise, Scott says he's more interested in "what's next." "I never look back," Scott said recently by phone. "I only look forward and think I'm very lucky to be able to do that." In fact, he's so focused on what's next that even while talking big ideas about creation and "Alien: Covenant," Scott was doodling an image for scene 103 of his upcoming John Paul Getty kidnapping film, "All the Money in the World." "I can do very good telephone doodles and they actually turn out as storyboards," Scott said matter-of-factly. "I'm storyboarding as we speak. I'm able to do that. It's all in my mind. I think I've got a kind of photographic memory. I was born with it. You either have it or you don't. So that's been quite useful."

"Alien: Covenant" is intended to be a sort of bridge between Scott's original "Alien" and the 2012 prequel "Prometheus." Scott has wanted to explore the origins of how that creature breathing down Ripley's neck came to be and ask the question that "Alien" didn't: Why would anyone make such a monster?

The question is brought up in "Prometheus," technically the fifth film in the "Alien" universe, but most people who saw the 2012 prequel left feeling deeply confused. Scott is well-aware of this and promises there will be some clarity in "Covenant." "'Prometheus' leaves us with a lot of questions and 'Covenant' answers a lot of those questions," he said. "Alien: Covenant" brings in a new team, the crew of a colony ship, including Katherine Waterston, Billy Crudup and Danny McBride, who believe they've found a paradise. Of course that turns out not to be the case. Michael Fassbender's "Lawrence of Arabia"-loving android David is back too, as is a new android, Walter, also played by Fassbender, and the monster itself.

This image released by Twentieth Century Fox shows Katherine Waterston in a scene from 'Alien: Covenant,' in theaters on May 19.



File photo shows Ridley Scott, recipient of the Lifetime Achievement in Feature Film Direction Award, poses at the 69th Annual Directors Guild of America Awards in Beverly Hills, Calif. — AP photos

Philosophizing and spectacular visuals

"We found out that the good old beast was still very popular with the audience, so I decided to reinject some of his presence back into it," Scott said. "It gets pretty gnarly. I'm very pleased with it actually." Scott says audiences can expect some philosophizing and spectacular visuals, including an idea he came up with to solve the problem of how the ship would continue getting and storing power in deep space: Massive sails, about the size of six football fields that can soak up the radiance in space and store it as power. "I discovered recently that's exactly what NASA are doing," Scott said. "You can make a fabric that is stronger than metal and you can fold it up into a massive box and it will fold away like a good sail on a sailing ship so I apply that kind of thinking and there we have it. It works. And then you get it in the hands of the visual effects people and it all looks pretty good. So we're going to send it to NASA to see if I can speed up the process for them."

That the film is being promoted as an "Alien" film rather than a "Prometheus" sequel is confounding to some, including Forbes' box office writer Scott Mendelson, who points out that "Prometheus" was rather successful. It made over $400 million worldwide against a $130 million budget. "They're selling its relationship to a franchise that is well-known but isn't insanely beloved. It's a geek franchise," Mendelson said. Mendelson added that while nostalgia might sell for some, it's not going to bring in a younger audience with its hard R rating.

Still, Scott has ideas for at least a few more "Alien" installments. "In answering the question 'who, why and when was this thing made and for what reason,' it presents a whole different universe, so the universe starts expanding, which I think is healthy. Why switch it off?" Scott said. "What it's leading to is the question of creation. And creation, I don't care who you are, is on everyone's mind." Whether or not audiences will see that expanded universe will depend on how well "Covenant" does. Closer on the horizon is "Blade Runner 2049," which is set 30 years after the original. Scott helped the screenplay and produce, but ceded directing responsibilities over to "Arrival" helmer Denis Villeneuve. And while Scott might not consider himself nostalgic, he is at least a little excited about one crossover moment: The second "Blade Runner 2049" trailer is supposed to play in front of "Alien: Covenant" showings, which, Scott says drolly, "will be cool."— AP

In this image released by Sony Pictures shows, from left, Kevin Hart, Dwayne Johnson, Karen Gillan and Jack Black from the film, 'Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle,' in theaters Dec 20.— AP photos

This image released by Paramount Pictures shows Dwayne Johnson, Left, and Zac Efron in a scene from, "Baywatch," in theaters May 25.

BAYWATCH'S DWAYNE JOHNSON JUST WANTS TO ENTERTAIN YOU

In 2000, Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson was trying to break into Hollywood. He was off to an OK start. The pro-wrestler already had a following, a role in "The Mummy Returns" and high-wattage charm. He also had no acting experience, no idea how Hollywood worked, and, besides a few idols in Harrison Ford, Clint Eastwood and Arnold Schwarzenegger, no blueprint for success. "I couldn't say, 'Oh, let me just follow the half-black and half-Samoan actor who was also a wrestler. Let me follow his path.' That wasn't an option, that wasn't there. So I was forced to create my own," Johnson said recently. "I have an ideology that I always like to share with the inner group, and with some people on the outside, and I'll share it with you: I don't just want to play the game. I want to change the way the game is played."

And he did, becoming one of the world's biggest movie stars in the process, with a booming production company, a year-round filming schedule, 84.4 million followers on Instagram, 11.2 million on Twitter and a reported $64.5 million salary in 2016 that put him at the top of Forbes' highest-paid actors list. "Alone among his generation, Dwayne Johnson has aimed for middle of the road, broad, appealing, leading man status," said Richard Rushfield, who runs the Hollywood newsletter The Ankler. "While his peers have carved out more edgy, cool, of-the-moment profiles, Johnson has assiduously whittled down the rough edges of his early 'The Rock' wrestling persona."

Simply, the 44-year-old superstar is an entertainment machine and, like Schwarzenegger before him, summer is his main stage. There's his pre-summer "Fast and the Furious" movies, which Johnson is credited as helping to revitalize. The latest is expected to cross $1 billion globally this week. But Johnson has also proven himself to be a summer draw on his own in leading roles in the disaster pic "San Andreas" in 2015 and the buddy comedy "Central Intelligence" in 2016. This summer, he's betting on "Baywatch," out May 25, as a potential new franchise.

'He thinks globally'

"I love being able to create big movies or TV shows that entertain people, that make them happy. I know what it's like to earn a dollar. I know what it's like to live paycheck to paycheck and wonder how you're going to pay the rent. I know what it's like to be evicted. Money doesn't fall out of the sky. So if you're going to pay for your ticket, that inspires me to want to make a great movie," said Johnson, who remembers being evicted at age 14. "I always say to everyone, 'Hey, around the corner we're getting evicted. Get to work!' I drive everyone crazy with that."

Johnson, who heads up the production company Seven Bucks with his ex-wife Dany Garcia, may be the purest expression of a global entertainer there is, aside from Tom Cruise or Will Smith. He thinks big. He thinks globally. The audience is king. And he's going to put in the work to make sure they're smiling. It's that thinking that led him to the "Baywatch" movie. Johnson was a teenager when the show was at the height of its popularity. He appreciated the "sexiness" of it, but also considered it kind of cheesy. Then, about five years ago, he was told it was the most successful television show of all time - an unparalleled global hit. And that settled it. Johnson would have to don the red trunks.

The film is not the television show, nor is it trying to be. There are still red suits, and the babes and the bodies and some of the same names (Johnson is Mitch Buchannon, the role originated by David Hasselhoff), but he says their movie is funnier, raunchier, more action-packed and, well, more self-aware. The cast includes Zac Efron, Alexandra Daddario and Priyanka Chopra. "I always say, I have one boss. Not the movie studios ... The audience. The people. They'll dictate if there's another one," Johnson said. "I think we have a good shot."

His philosophy for what works is pretty simple, too. Balance great action with genuine humor and you will usually send the audience home not just happy, but "floating." "You know that cool feeling that you feel when you walk out of the theater thinking, 'That was the greatest movie!' And you're kind of floating and talking about it in the car? I like that kind of thing," he said. And he'll do whatever it takes to achieve that, even if it means 4 am wake up calls, promoting projects with the vigor of P.T. Barnum and working a 12-month shooting schedule two years in a row all while maintaining a personal life with his partner, Lauren Hashian, and 1-year-old daughter, Jasmine. He's already filming the arcade game pic "Rampage" and will go straight on to "Skyscraper," a hostage thriller from his "Central Intelligence" director. Suddenly, it'll be December and time to promote his big Christmas release "Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle." "What is this 'break' thing you speak of," Johnson said with a chuckle. "But it's a good time for me. There's a lot of good things going around."— AP

'Basic Instinct' director Verhoeven to make film about lesbian nuns

Dutch director Paul Verhoeven posing for photographers during a photocall for the Berlinale jury at the start of the Berlinale film festival in Berlin. — AP

"Basic Instinct" director Paul Verhoeven is making a film about a lesbian nun with miraculous powers who falls in love with another sister, his producers said yesterday. The veteran Dutch film-maker-whose controversial twisted rape thriller "Elle" starring Isabelle Huppert was a huge critical hit-is working on a drama called the "Blessed Virgin". The producers said it is based on the life of 17th-century Italian nun Benedetta Carlini, who caused a sensation when she claimed to see visions of Jesus Christ.

Verhoeven will present the project at the Cannes film festival next month, production company SBS International told AFP. Verhoeven premiered "Elle" at the festival last year. It has since won nearly 60 international awards as well as an Oscar nomination for French star Huppert. The new film, adapted from "Immodest Acts-The Life of a lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy" by the American historian Judith Brown, will star Belgian actress Virginie Efira. — AFP

'Guardians' returns and it's better than the first

In James Gunn's sequel to his swashbuckling space Western, the Guardians of the Galaxy do their version of "The Empire Strikes Back," complete with daddy issues but with a considerably more anarchic spirit and enough acerbic interplay among its interstellar gang to make Obi-Wan blush. The wild whiz-bang of the first "Guardians" and its gleeful upending of superhero conventions was, I thought, not the second-coming others felt it was. Having sat through a meteor shower of imposingly well-made Marvel products, the too-pleased-with-itself "Guardians" felt to me like an intensely scripted politician trying to smugly crack wise.

When the motley crew of scavengers reunites in "Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2," many of its tricks - the anachronistic '70s hits, the exotically foul-mouthed creatures - are not the sneak attack they were in 2014. But that turns out to be a good thing. No longer so busy advertising his movie's genre transgressions, Gunn, who wrote and directed the sequel, is free to swim backstrokes through his cosmic, CGI-spiced gumbo. It's a soupy, silly spectacle that recalls, if nothing else, the weird, kaleidoscopic design of a Parliament-Funkadelic album cover. Gunn's film also shares George Clinton's goofy extravagance (and includes his song "Flashlight"), and a neon-colored cast with its own Mothership.

There are two types in the universe, Dave Bautista's muscle-mound Drax declares early on. "Those who dance and those who do not." In the "Guardians" universe, which blithely mocks just about everything, this is close to a mission statement. Whereas the first film featured Chris Pratt's Peter Quill on a far-away planet bopping to Redbone's "Come and Get Your Love," the early scenes of "Vol. 2" find the Guardians battling some giant monster while Baby Groot - the extraterrestrial tree turned sapling (voiced by Vin Diesel) - grooves to ELO's "Mr. Blue Sky."

The "Guardians" universe, made up of such ironies and oddities, worships at the altar of incongruity. Referenced within are "Cheers," Mary Poppins, Looking Glass' "Brandy (You're a Fine Girl)," David Hasselhoff and Fleetwood Mac's "The Chain." It's the kind of wacked-out tapestry that even Lindsey Buckingham would find head-spinning. While Quill resembles a classic Han Solo-like hero, his fellow Guardians - Zoe Saldana's green-skinned Gamora, the caustic, Bradley Cooper-voiced raccoon Rocket, Drax and Groot - are a multi-species band of outsiders. No two are alike in temperament or genetics.

Marvel movie

Though they bicker endlessly, they're a cobbled-together, multi-species family, just one more likely to trade insults than hugs. And the nature of family is at the center of "Vol. 2." Quill, having lost his mother as a young child in the first film, learns that his father is a "celestial," or deity, named Ego (Kurt Russell), with a planet of his own creation. The Guardians meet him after fleeing the remote-controlled pods that pursue them when Rocket steals batteries from Ayesha (Elizabeth Debicki), the High Priestess of the golden-hued Sovereign race.

Returning is Michael Rooker's excellent Yondu Udonta, who resembles a rejected audition to the Blue Man Group and controls a lethal arrow with a whistle. He's hired to capture the Guardians, but his character - who raised the orphaned Quill - plays an unexpectedly emotional role in Quill's journey into his past. The effect is similar for Gamora's sister Nebula, the Guardians' furious prisoner. Others are in the mix, too, including a brief cameo by Sylvester Stallone and, more impressively, Chris Sullivan's mutinying, unfortunately named pirate Taserface.

All of the names, though, are kind of joke, as is much of the plot (batteries?), the planets and, well, the whole operation. In one scene, an escaping ship shoots through so many hyperspeed portals that their faces go bug-eyed like Looney Tunes characters, maybe revealing the films' underlying DNA. But while this "Guardians of the Galaxy" has no earnest belief in its sci-fi theatrics (the credits action scene is largely just blurry background to Baby Groot's dancing), it believes surprisingly sincerely in its characters' inner lives, the ones buried beneath their sarcastic exteriors. "Guardians" takes place further in the reaches of the galaxy than any other Marvel movie, yet it's the most earthbound. In the words of David Bowie, another space oddity, let's dance. "Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2," a Walt Disney Co. release, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association of America for "intense sequences of sci-fi violence, and brief suggestive content." Running time: 136 minutes. Three stars out of four. — AP

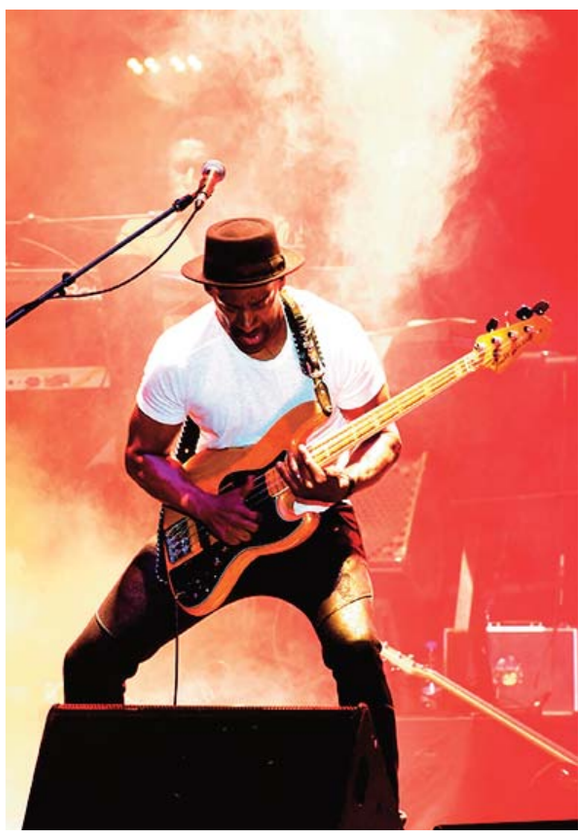
Rock Hall of Fame induction to return to Cleveland

The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame announced yesterday that it will move its annual induction gala back to Cleveland next year from New York. The Hall of Fame opened a museum in 1995 in Cleveland, where it has become a leading tourist draw, but it has only held the star-studded ceremony four times before in the Midwestern city. Next year's induction-which typically includes performances by honorees and speeches by artists who admire them-will take place on April 14 in downtown Cleveland's Public Hall.

While the Hall of Fame is not expected to announce nominees until late this year, speculation is already rife online over the makeup of the 2018 class. Experimental rock icons Radiohead will notably be eligible next year as, per the Hall of Fame's rules, 25 years will have passed since the release of the band's first album "Pablo Honey." Other artists who released debut albums in 1993 include alternative rock favorite Beck, jam rockers Dave Matthews Band and indie rocker Liz Phair who put out her influential feminist opus "Exile in Guyville."

The 2017 Hall of Fame class included grunge rockers Pearl Jam and slain hip-hop legend Tupac Shakur, who were both inducted in their first year of eligibility. Also inducted this year were folk protest singer Joan Baez, progressive rock pioneers Yes, symphonic rockers Electric Light Orchestra and arena-packers Journey. The latest gala, held for the second straight year at the Barclays Center in Brooklyn, took place on April 7 and will be broadcast Saturday on HBO. — AFP

Pearl Jam played 'Alive' 'Given to Fly,' and 'Better Man' during their Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction ceremony. — AFP



One of the headliners, the American Marcus Miller performs on the second day of the 25th edition of the Saint Louis Jazz Festival in Saint Louis, Senegal. — AFP

Marcus Miller pays tribute to Senegal's past at jazz fest

American star Marcus Miller has made soulful amends to the Senegalese jazz festival he skipped a year ago, stirring emotion with a musical tribute to west Africa's historic links with his homeland. Miller, 57, was the headline act Tuesday during the weeklong Saint Louis Jazz Festival, Africa's largest event dedicated to the genre, and was eagerly awaited after sitting out his performance in 2016 amid heightened security fears.

"Goree", a sombre, reflective piece dedicated to the Senegalese island where slaves were held in harrowing conditions before they were shipped to the New World, touched the audience at Place Faidherbe in the heart of the city. "It was really tough, visiting Goree," he told the crowd, recounting how he composed the song on his first visit to Senegal seven years ago. The song shows that "the soul can transcend terrible things," he added, speaking in French. Miller composed the track after visiting the "Door of No Return"-the last point before slaves boarded ships for the New World-a door that "also represented the beginning of our African-American experience too," he wrote in 2015.

The performance was not all downbeat: Miller danced, sang and smiled his way through a tour-de-force set, with the bass guitar specialist also at ease with a range of instruments. "Tutu", which he composed for trumpet virtuoso Miles Davis, brought rounds of applause and admiration from the crowd. Security was tight for the 25th edition of the festival, with armed police conducting searches at entrance points Tuesday. Senegal has so far escaped the jihadist attacks that regularly hit Mali and to a lesser extent Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast in recent years, but it remains on high alert.

Senegal showcase

The other standout performance was Lokua Kanza, the Congolese acoustic guitarist and singer, ahead of expected sets this week from bluesman Lucky Peterson and Lisa Simone, daughter of the legendary Nina Simone. Senegal is also showcasing its own stars, including Cheik Lo, known for his hybrid Senegalese "Mbalax" and reggae sound, and Baaba Maal. One spectator, Alpha Abdoulaye Sow, called the festival a "showcase for Saint Louis culture", adding that "thanks to the festival we can discover big names with international reputations like Marcus Miller."

The festival also paid tribute with a minute of silence to Issa Samb, better known as Joe Ouakam, a polymath Senegalese painter-sculptor-actor seen as an anti-conformist icon with the Agit-Art movement of the 1970s. "Joe Ouakam guided the festival with advice. A giant has left us," said Mamadou Diop, president of the Saint Louis Jazz association. — AFP

Congolese artist Lokua Kanza performs on the second day of the 25th edition of the Saint Louis Jazz Festival.

Dylan to headline Montreal Jazz Festival

Bob Dylan

Bob Dylan will headline this year's Montreal International Jazz Festival with a lineup that brings together both classic and emerging artists. The festival, one of the key events on the jazz calendar, will take place from June 28 to July 8 with Dylan playing June 30 in the 20,000-strong Bell Centre arena. While Dylan is one of the legends of folk and pioneers of rock, he has explored the jazz roots of pop with three straight albums that interpret classic songs. The lineup will be "eclectic and rich in styles and cultures" with artists from 17 nationalities and all continents, festival CEO Jacques-Andre Dupont said.

Other prominent acts include English progressive rock pioneers King Crimson, Philadelphia soul greats The O'Jays, storied funk singer Charles Bradley, rapper Joey Bada$$ and experimental electronic artist Squarepusher. Wax Taylor, the French DJ known for his trip-hop with electronic and jazz influences, will present from his latest album "By Any Beats Necessary" with video projections. The festival will give a prime spot to local rising star Charlotte Cardin, with the 22-year-old performing three straight nights as she sings to the warmth of a piano with electro-pop touches.

The festival will bring jazz greats including Charles Lloyd, John Pizzarelli and Stanley Clarke and the fusion group Pink Martini as well as newcomer Kandace Springs, a singer and pianist from Tennessee championed by the late Prince. "La La Land," the Hollywood revival musical, will also figure at the festival with the city's Orchestra Metropolitan playing the score to a screening. In a new feature, the festival will launch a series called "Re:Creation" in which artists including the Montreal pianist Jean-Michel Blais reinterpret other works. — AFP

Madonna expresses her displeasure about planned biopic

Madonna isn't happy with a new biopic planned on her pre-fame life. The Hollywood Reporter reported Monday that Universal had acquired the rights to "Blond Ambition," a script about the singer. Brett Ratner is expected to produce the film, which centers on her struggles in New York while making her first album.

On Tuesday, Madonna expressed her displeasure via an Instagram post. She said that only she was qualified to tell her story and "anyone else who tries is a charlatan and a fool." She likened it to "instant gratification" without doing the work and called it a disease of our society. — AP

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti sits in with the jazz band, playing music from the movie 'La La Land' at Los Angeles City Hall, movie 'La La Land,' suspended off the side of Los Angeles City Hall, during 'La La Land Day' festivities celebrating the movie and the city's many iconic locations Tuesday. — AP

Los Angeles declares 'La La Land Day' with abseiling dancers

Brightly-dressed dancers abseiled down the facade of Los Angeles City Hall as city officials declared Tuesday as "La La Land Day", in honor of the Oscar-winning film. The romantic musical, about a struggling actress who falls in love with a jazz musician against the backdrop of a dreamy Los Angeles, won six Oscar awards, including best director.

"A day when you can celebrate your dreams," said Mayor Eric Garcetti, presenting a framed declaration to writer and director Damien Chazelle. "You can dance safely somewhere near your car, preferably not in traffic, take a date up to Griffith Park, fall in love with somebody, or just with your city all over again," Garcetti said, referring to a famed recreational area that sprawls over 4,200 acres (1,700 hectares). — Reuters

Aretha blasts Dionne Warwick but she declines to fire back

The Queen of Soul is coming out swinging against fellow legend Dionne Warwick, accusing her of making up a story that she was Whitney Houston's godmother, even though the alleged offense happened five years ago at Houston's funeral. "She blatantly lied on me ... fully well knowing what she was doing," Aretha Franklin said in a phone interview. Franklin called The Associated Press on Tuesday, after sending a lengthy fax the day before, to address what she claimed was a "libelous" statement against her made five years ago at Houston's funeral. At the time, Warwick told funeral-goers that Franklin was there and introduced her, but then realized she wasn't in attendance.

"'Ree's not here, but she is here," Warwick said, referring to Franklin by a nickname. "She loves Whitney as if she were born to her. She is her godmother." At the time, Franklin said she was suffering from swollen feet and had to skip the funeral so she could perform later that night at Radio City Music Hall in New York, which she said she was contractually obligated to do. Though Cissy Houston, Whitney Houston's mother, said in the days afterward that Franklin wasn't Houston's godmother (it was Darlene Love), Franklin felt the comment was damaging to her and planned to address it at a later date.

"There's been so much going on around her (Houston), around the service, around the drugs, around her and Bobby (Brown) supposed to be fighting, I didn't want to add anything to that and I didn't want to be a part of that," she said. Five years later, Franklin feels that time is now. While the story that Houston was Franklin's goddaughter has been part of her story for decades, Franklin said she first met Houston when Houston was a child - and she was far too busy to be anyone's godmother. Franklin saw Warwick last week at the Tribeca Film Festival's premiere of mentor Clive Davis' documentary, "Clive Davis: The Soundtrack of Our Lives," and she also performed. Franklin said Warwick tried to talk to her backstage.

"She said, 'Give me a hug.' I said, 'Oh hell no. You couldn't be serious,'" Franklin said. When asked if she wanted an apology from Warwick, she said: "I don't care about her apology, at this point it isn't about an apology, it's about libel." She added: "We've never been friends and I don't think that Dionne has ever liked me." Franklin once covered Warwick's hit "Walk on By," and, more famously, "I Say A Little Prayer." When asked for comment, Warwick's representative Angelo Ellerbee said: "She will not dignify a response to the statement made by Aretha Franklin."-AP

In this combination photo, singer Dionne Warwick arrives at the 56th annual GRAMMY Awards on Jan 26, 2014, in Los Angeles, left, and Aretha Franklin attends the 39th Annual Kennedy Center Honors on Dec 4, 2016, in Washington, DC. — AP

Srishti Kaur of India is crowned Miss Teen Universe.

Srishti Kaur from India cries during her celebration after winning the Miss Teen Universe Pageant in Managua.

Srishti Kaur of India reacts as she hears being winner of best typical dress in the Miss Teen Universe Pageant in Managua. — AFP photos

Finalists Srishti Kaur of India (center), Ary Trava (right) of Mexico and Samantha Pierre (left) of Canada (left) stand on stage before hearing the winner of the Miss Teen Universe Pageant in Managua.

India's Srishti Kaur wins Miss Teen Universe pageant

Srishti Kaur from India on Tuesday was crowned Miss Teen Universe 2017, beating out 25 other contestants from around the world in the annual beauty pageant. Samantha Pierre from Canada and Ary Trava from Mexico were the runners-up in the event held at the Ruben Dario National Theater in Nicaragua's capital Managua. Kaur also won the prize for best national costume. Xirelle Agustin from the Philippines won in the Teen Popularity category, while Nicole Obando from Costa Rica won the award for Teen Charm.

The six-year-old beauty pageant for teens aged 15 to 19 is held by the Miss Universe Organization. Pageant contestants came mostly from Latin America and the Caribbean, though two came from Africa and one from Europe. — AFP

Tourists gather on a temple to watch the sunset in the ancient Myanmar city of Bagan.

Hot air balloons are seen just after takeoff to fly over the ancient Myanmar city of Bagan.

A tourist climbs into a hot air balloon as it readies to fly over temples in the ancient Myanmar city of Bagan.

Hot air balloons carrying tourists are silhouetted against the rising sun as they fly over the ancient Myanmar city of Bagan.

Myanmar bird's eye view: Bagan's Buddhist temples by balloon

The moment of takeoff was silent, and mesmerizing. Within seconds, our hot air balloon was floating above the treetops, gliding toward what Marco Polo called "one of the finest sights in the world" when he saw it 700 years ago: the ancient Myanmar city of Bagan. Below us, the baked brick spires of hundreds of 11th and 12th century Buddhist temples poked skyward through the purple-red horizon of dawn, graceful and serene. When I spotted the giant golden dome of the Dhammayazika Pagoda, glittering like a jewel in the first rays of light, my heart skipped a beat.

I had just spent several days exploring these iconic monuments and pagodas, walking through their dark stone corridors, climbing their steep exterior steps. But peering at them from the edge of a moving basket in the sky was an entirely different experience, at once thrilling and existential. Our pilot, a Belgian named Bart D'hooge who has flown here for nine years, described Bagan as "stunning ... even if you see it just from the ground."

"But once you take off in a balloon, you get a completely different perspective," he said. "It really gives you a bit of an idea of the size of the ancient kingdom" that flourished here a thousand years ago. The city is home to the largest concentration of Buddhist temples, stupas and monuments in the world. More than 2,200 are spread across a plain adjacent to rice fields and villages along the Irrawaddy River. Only from above can this vastness be fully appreciated.

The temples were built by a series of Burmese kings who ruled the region for roughly 250 years, until city was abruptly abandoned in the late 13th century for reasons that are not entirely clear. Although time and the elements have eroded many of the structures' once ornate exteriors, the buildings themselves are still largely intact. On Aug 24, 2016, a magnitude 6.8 earthquake shook central Myanmar, damaging at least 389 of them, according to the country's Department of Archaeology. Some have been closed to the public fully or partially. Others are in various states of repair, covered in elaborate arrays of bamboo and wood scaffolding.

Winds are calmer

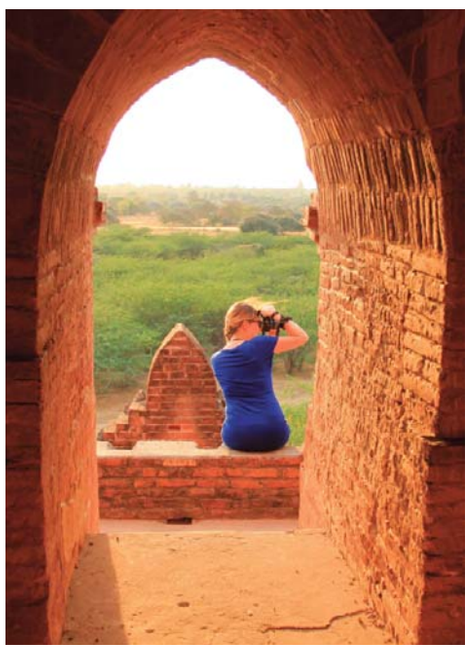
Overall though, the most iconic temples remain accessible to visitors. Local residents still flock here to pray before the colossal Buddha statues, many lit by bright beams of sunlight inside. And foreign tourists still arrive en masse, their numbers having grown steadily since the military, which ruled for half a century, began opening the Southeast Asian nation up to the rest of the world in 2011.

Despite the influx, authorities have capped the number of balloons permitted in the skies here at 21, for safety reasons. With an average a passenger capacity of eight to 16 on each balloon, space is limited and seats can sell out. For that reason, it's best to plan your trip well in advance. Bagan's balloon flight season runs only from October to March, when winds are calmer and the weather is cooler and more predictable.

Cancelled flights are rare, but balloons do get grounded several times a year. On what was supposed to be a clear day in March when I was scheduled to fly, a thick blanket of white fog unexpectedly enveloped the entire city, even shutting down the airport. Fortunately, I was able to get a spot the next day.

Flights are not cheap, averaging $320 to $380 US for a roughly 45-minute ride. But for those willing to pay, it's a once-in-lifetime experience. Asked if he ever gets tired of flying in Bagan, D'hooge - who has flown everywhere from Kenya to New Zealand - shook his head in the negative.

"With the sunrise, sometimes when you get the light right, it's just stunning," said the pilot, who works for Balloons Over Bagan, which was the first company to pioneer flights here 17 years ago. "I don't think there are many places in the world that get to this point." — AP



A tourist takes a photo from a temple in the ancient Myanmar city of Bagan.

Carcassonne, France, offers castle-on-the-hill getaway

A reproduction bust of the mythical Lady Carcas greets tourists at the gate of Carcassonne's medieval Cite.

Tourists walk along the ramparts in the medieval city of Carcassonne.

Visitors walk through a gauntlet of tourist shops in the medieval city of Carcassonne.

Guide Nathalie Coroner tells a tour group about Carcassonne's long and bloody history.

Somewhere at the intersection of fantasy and history stands the medieval city of Carcassonne, a castle-on-the-hill getaway in the south of France. The Cite, as the walled-off hilltop section of Carcassonne is known, has been a strategically important hub for millennia. It was the stomping ground of Romans, Visigoths and Saracens and saw long bloody battles as borders and allegiances shifted.

Tourists streaming into the Cite get a taste of the mythology at the gate, where a reproduction bust of the Carcassonne's purported namesake, Lady Carcas, stands. The eighth century figure is said to have ended a years-long siege by hurling a fat pig over the city's walls to convince the invaders that the food-starved city could afford to waste such an animal. When the ploy paid off, the overjoyed Lady Carcas rang the city's bells. Sonne means sound in French, so the city was named Carcassonne.

That tale is as tall as Carcassonne's towering Roman walls (the name actually dates back to Roman times, its earliest known use came in 70 BC). The bust is a stone-faced reminder that the "Sleeping Beauty" castle look-alike has picked up some embellishment over time. Despite some of the kitschy throwbacks to knights in suits of armor, there are plenty of reasons to visit this UNESCO World Heritage Site and its 52 towers. Here are just a few.

The history

Carcassonne's Cite was bedeviled by slums in the 18th century when a historian and architect partnered to save it from demolition. Since then, some of the rebuilding of its ancient walls was painstaking in its attention to detail, while other revamping strayed from the textbooks. The result is a mix of hardcore history alongside tourist shops hawking plastic swords. The Cite's two concentric ramparts feature arrow holes and deadfalls, where defenders could hurl rocks and pour boiling sap on invaders. City-led tours wind through ancient streets and reveal centuries of blood-soaked history between warring families and religious factions.

Some highlights include the Gothic Basilica of Saint-Nazaire, which features 700-year-old stained glass that was disassembled and hidden from the Nazis in the surrounding mountains. A church has existed on the site for at least a millennium and traces of its Roman-era past still exist. The Cite's Comtal Chateau is a fortification within a fortification, a last line of defense guarded by high towers and a trench. The museum there offers historical insights paired with a view that on a clear day stretches to the Pyrenees. It tells the tale of the Cite's rebirth after it slid into disrepair and also offers the only access to some of the ramparts, including a stretch that overlooks the Cite's century-old theater. There are a smattering of other sites throughout the Cite, including centuries-old wells and the Museum of Torture.

The countryside

A visit to the city in the south of France is incomplete without a jaunt into its vineyard-strewn countryside. The Languedoc region is famous for its wine, but also sprouting up from that fertile soil are the remains of ancient castles.

The most famous of the so-called Cathar Castles, named after a religious sect that was the target of one pope's crusade, is Las Tours. The site is a short and charming car ride away from Carcassonne. The oldest settlement there dates back 1,500 years and four castles remain today.

An expansive view of the French countryside can be seen from the Comtal Chateau, a fortification within the walls of the medieval city of Carcassonne.

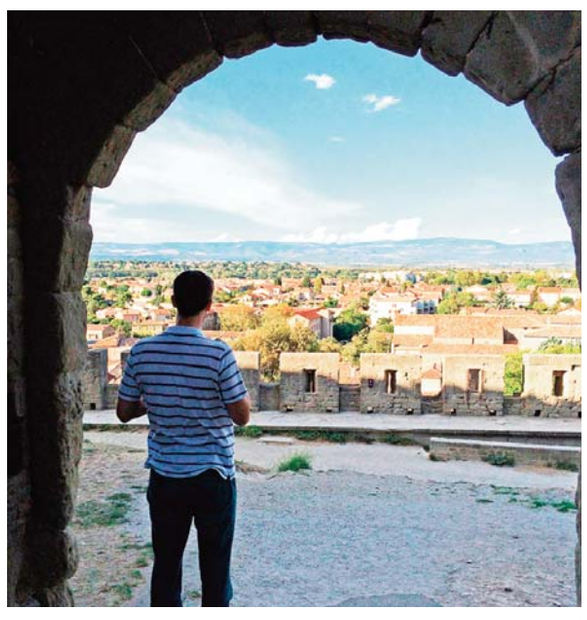
A trail leads to each tower, which resemble rook chess pieces set atop a steep hill. While on high, it's easy to understand why the site was chosen: It offers 360-degree views of the valley below. The remnants of a village wait at the end of the hike, where short stone walls mark the footprints of former homes and workshops.

The food

Don't let the gauntlet of tacky souvenir shops fool you. Carcassonne is home to some sophisticated French fare. The region is known for its hearty cassoulet, a stew of white beans and meat. The dish is featured on most of the menu boards throughout the Cite. Also on those multi-course menus are decadent foie gras-based dishes and elaborate chocolate desserts (one such concoction includes a chocolate ball that opens up to reveal a chocolate mousse as melted chocolate is poured over it).

Even the ubiquitous gelato shops are worth a coneful - there's nothing like lapping up a cassis-flavored treat while lapping up the sights. Eating within the Cite's walls does come at a price, however. Better bargains can be found just beyond in the town center. — AP

Tourists enter the Comtal Chateau, a fortification within the walls of the medieval city of Carcassonne, France.



A tourist takes the view in the medieval city of Carcassonne, France.

Travel with a class value with Al-Nasser Class

Al-Nasser has recently launched a wide range of VERAGE travel bags for the 2017 travel season. A line that is very distinguished by its different colors ranging from the classic lines, to the fashionable ones to suit all tastes. VERAGE is designed in a very practical scientific method and characterized by its light weight, and sold in four different sizes, 19 inches, 24 inches, 28 inches & 32 inches.

VERAGE comes with different sizes suitable for your travel needs with a four-wheel base or six wheels moving all in a circular way to reach a 360 degrees to facilitate the process of movement even in crowded places making from travelling a pleasurable experience.

The new VERAGE lines feature attractive colors that are suitable for men and women from black, blue, green, red, fuchsia and Pink, to complement the pleasure of safe travel & high quality fabric. Worth mentioning that upon buying from the VERAGE Collection, a 3 year warranty is being granted to your purchase.

VERAGE travel bags are now available in all branches of Al-Nasser.

Available at the following Showrooms:

Hawalli Society - Rai showroom - Awtad Complex / Aqeelah - Orient (Al-Sharqiya) Complex / Khaitan - Al-Farwaniya showroom 2

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Lifestyle

THURSDAY, APRIL 27, 2017

India's Srishti Kaur wins Miss Teen Universe pageant

Photo shows the Spix's macaw, at a local market in Kuwait. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Islamic romance novels set hearts aflutter in Bangladesh

Kasem bin Abubakar was told nobody would buy his chaste romance novels about devout young Muslims finding love within the strict moral confines of Bangladeshi society. And yet his tales of lovers whispering sweet nothings between calls to prayer sold millions in the 1980s and proved a huge hit among young girls from Bangladesh's rural, conservative heartland. Now his work is undergoing something of a renaissance as Bangladesh slides from the moderate Islam worshipped for generations to a more conservative interpretation of the scriptures.

"Girls write me love letters with ink dipped in their own blood. Some were desperate to marry me" Abubakar told AFP, recounting his surprise at young women making a traditional gesture of intense devotion to a greying author. His debut novel "Futonto Golap" (Blossomed Rose), written more than three decades ago, has spawned an entire genre of fiction tinged with Islamic values. Abubakar was inspired to take up the pen in the late 1970s, when as a bookseller he lamented that most novels obsessed with the cosmopolitan lifestyles of modern, elite Bangladeshis. These secular tales were a world removed from the largely rural and pious village existence lived by the majority of Bangladesh's 160 million people, and Abubakar sensed a gap in the market ripe for his fiction.

'Mullah novels don't sell'

"He tapped into a new readership that nobody thought existed before," said Bangladeshi journalist Qadaruddin Shishir. "In rural villages, Abubakar's novels are the best gift a young lover can give to his fiancee." Abubakar wrote "The Blossomed Rose"-a story about two mismatched young Muslims seeking consent for marriage from their families-by hand in 1978, but it took almost a decade for a publisher to even look at it. "They told me 'mullah novels' don't sell," he said.

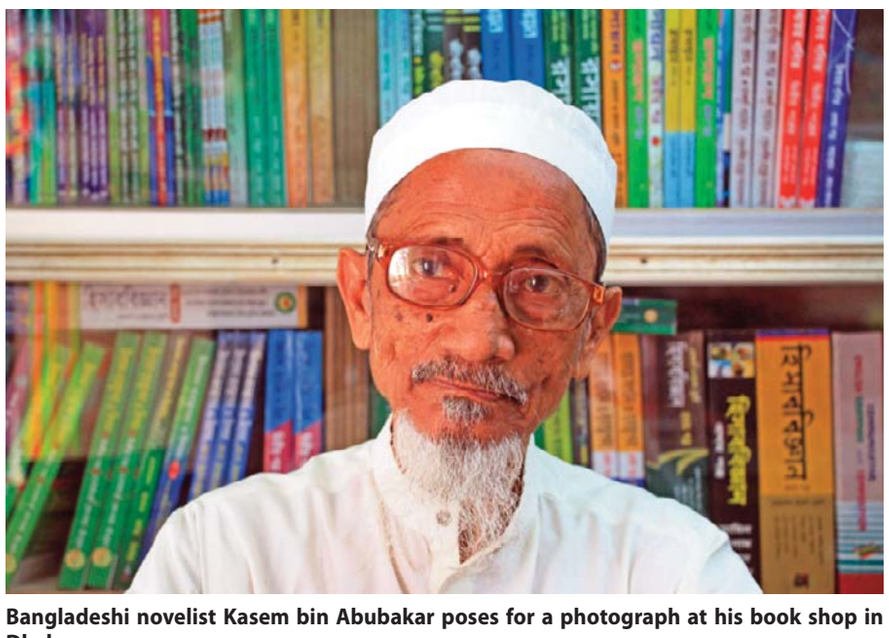
Eventually he sold the copyright to a publisher for a mere 1,000 Taka (USD$12.50), and became an overnight sensation. Since his breakthrough, Abubakar has written dozens of works, most revolving around the mosque, veiled women and wayward youth abandoning so-called corrupt lifestyles after finding religion. Secular activists fear creeping conservatism could unwind many of the gains made by the impoverished nation in improving school attendance and gender equality. An ever-increasing number of students attend madrassas, or religious boarding schools, in Bangladesh, where Abubakar's books have found "become a favorite", said fellow author Syed Mazharul Parvez. "They can relate to these stories and are comfortable with the settings and language their protagonists speak," he said.

Inspiring new writers

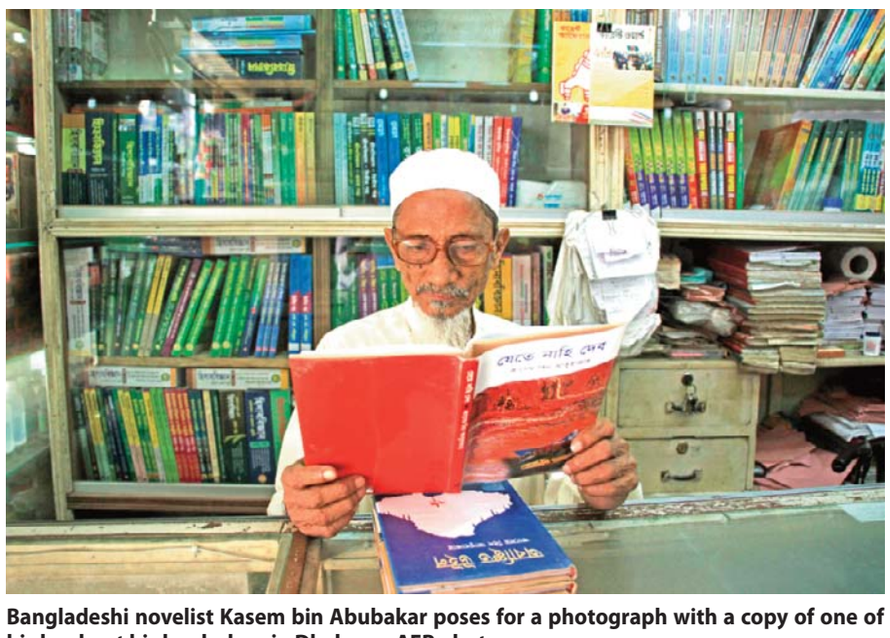
Abubakar has inspired a new generation of Bangladeshi writers who are finding success with their own contemporary brand of Islamic fiction. Popular writers like Abdus Salam Mitul, Kawser Ahmed and Abdul Alim ecohed Abubakar in their own tales of "piety, conservative attitudes and decency", said Abubakar's son Mohammad Saifullah, a Dhaka-based publisher. Mitul in particular shot to fame in the 2000s with his own story about a burqa-clad girl reminiscent of Abubakar's breakthrough "The Blossomed Rose". "I think a lot of people still think it was written by my father. But it was Mitul's work and it sold tens of thousands of copies," Saifullah joked.

Aspiring author Abdul Alim said Abubakar's works had motivated his own plotlines-moral tales that in the end showed "Islam has answers" for society's ills. "He is such a talented story teller. He showed us the way," Alim said of Abubakar. For Abubakar, his fans keep him busy even two years into retirement. At a bookstore recently the octogenarian signed autographs for his readers, many women in full-face veils clutching his titles. The fan mail keeps the postman busy, too. Apart from the marriage proposals and overtures of love, Abubakar has received confessions from corrupt bureaucrats thanking him for steering them down the honest path, he said. "Everyday the postman would arrive with hundreds of letters. He became a permanent member of our family," Abubakar said. — AFP

Bangladeshi novelist Kasem bin Abubakar signs an autograph for a relative at his book shop in Dhaka.



Bangladeshi novelist Kasem bin Abubakar poses for a photograph at his book shop in Dhaka.



Bangladeshi novelist Kasem bin Abubakar poses for a photograph with a copy of one of his books at his book shop in Dhaka. — AFP photos

Bizarre News

Flying machine to go on sale this year

A company has invented the first ever "personal flying machine" called the Kitty Hawk Flyer. Kitty Hawk unveiled the initial details for the new mode of transport on Monday and said the product will be on sale by the end of the year. They wrote on their Facebook page: "We're excited to share our first step towards making the future of personal flight more accessible and safer for everyone. Today we're announcing our first prototype of The Flyer, a personal flying machine that will become available for sale by the end of 2017 and will have a different look and feel. In the meantime, we invite you to join our Flyer Discovery Membership to meet others passionate about the future of flying. Sign-up to get exclusive behind-the-scenes content about The Flyer, attend meet-ups and industry events and be apart of our passionate community. (sic)" According to their website, buyers will not be required by law to obtain a pilot's license to use the aircraft. This is because it is limited to "uncongested areas" over lakes. The cost of the flyer is yet to be announced, but people can sign up to Kitty Hawk's Flyer Discovery Membership, which will given them a discount on buying it.

Commuters stunned by £10K train ticket

Commuters were left stunned after a 64-mile train journey was listed as costing £10,000. Social media users took screenshots of the journey listing on trainline.com of the trip from Taunton in Somerset to Trowbridge and it has since gone viral online. A user with the handle, Daravel-Fox, said: "£10,000 first class railway ticket. Sounds like standard prices for via London trains (sic)." Another Twitter user called Ryan Laird added: "I knew UK train prices were bad at times but £10,000 for a train ticket? (sic)" Great Western Railway have responded and claim a technical issue had occurred and reassured passengers that the journey would cost around £12.70. A representative for the network told the Wiltshire Times: "We are aware of an IT glitch which has published fares for a first class journey that does not exist. "We are working to remedy this as soon as possible. "Anytime single fares between Taunton and Trowbridge are available from £12.70."

Babysitter told to feed kids sugar and pizza

A babysitter was given a huge list of unconventional tips for looking after children. Some of the strangest bits of advice included not letting their neighbors borrow food and not picking up the house phone "unless they feel like paying bills". Sharing the extensive list on Twitter the child minder's boyfriend wrote: "My girl went to go babysit and this is what the parents left her. (sic)" But most shockingly, was the parent saying if their little ones need breastfeeding they should just watch a "how to" video on YouTube to learn how to do it. And that they should just let them watch the television and eat pizza and let them get on with it. The long list read: "Let the kids have as much sugar as they want, as long as they will go away. "I encourage the kids to watch as much TV as possible so they will leave you the hell alone. Feel free to do the same." "They do still breastfeed on demand, just download a video on YouTube. "Don't waste your time cooking or providing healthy snacks, just give them pizza and leave."

Elephants get their own knitted blankets

Women in Mumbai in India have hand-knitted blankets for elephants to get them through the tough winter months. 23 lucky mammoths were rescued and have been living in the Elephant Conservation and Care Centre in Mathura in northern India, and locals offered to make the bright-coloured knits for the adorable animals. Katrick Satyanaranyan, who founded the centre, told the Daily Mirror newspaper: "We work hard to give these elephants a life of dignity and protection while we also provide them ongoing treatment and care. "This winter we are making jumpers to give the jumbos in our care some warmth. "It costs us about £800 per elephant per month to provide them essential medical treatment, a nutritious diet and ongoing care. "They really took to their jumpers! I know in some countries it is a bit of a joke to wear the most outlandish one you can, particularly around Christmas time. "But the elephants care less about fashion and more about being warm."