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AUTHORITIES CALL FOR INFO ON ABSCONDING CONVICTS

TABTABAEI URGES EMERGENCY SESSION OVER PRO-IRAN CELL



Min 31°
Max 49°
High Tide 07:50 & 22:12
Low Tide 01:55 & 15:33

QUARTET SWAPS 13 QATAR DEMANDS WITH 6 PRINCIPLES

UNITED NATIONS: Four Arab nations that cut ties with Qatar urged the Gulf nation Tuesday to commit to six principles on combatting extremism and terrorism and negotiate a plan with specific measures to implement them - a step that could pave the way for an early resolution of the crisis. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Bahrain broke diplomatic relations with Qatar in early June largely over their allegations that it supports terrorist and extremist groups - a charge Qatar rejects. They initially made 13 demands, which Qatar also dismissed. Saudi Arabia's UN Ambassador Abdullah Al-Mouallimi told a briefing for a group of UN correspondents that the four nations are now committed to the six principles agreed to by their foreign ministers at a meeting in Cairo on July 5, and hope Qatar will support them as well. The principles include commitments to combat extremism and terrorism, prevent financing and safe havens for such groups, and suspend all acts of provocation and speeches inciting hatred or violence.

Continued on Page 11



Abdulridha Dahqan, Mustafa Khan, Mohammad Al-Husainy, Jaafar Jamal, Hussein Al-Bathar, Hassan Al-Attar, Hashem Ali, Essa Baqer, Ali Abdulrahim, Abbas Al-Mousawi, Abdulmohsen Dashti, Yousef Ghatanfari, Basel Dashti, Mohammad Haji, Hassan Jamal

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The Interior Ministry yesterday said that anyone withholding information on the whereabouts of convicts involved in the "Abdaly terror cell" should contact authorities immediately or face legal repercussions. A statement provided by the ministry urged anyone with information on the criminals to come forward and contact 112, after authorities "received evidence that some of the convicts are at large".

The interior ministry published the pictures of 14 members of the 26-member cell who are absconding. It also published the pictures of two of three other members who had been at large since the cell was busted in Aug 2015. The ministry said in a statement that according to its records, the 14 men had not left the country from regular exit terminals. Local newspapers had reported that the men fled to Iran by sea.

"We call on all citizens and residents to cooperate with security forces and provide any information they might have," the statement noted. The ministry warned "all those who conceal any information on the convicts or are complicit in helping them escape will face incarceration for two years and/or a fine of no more than KD 1,000". In Sept 2015, the public prosecution indicted a number of individuals for acts that threatened national security and unity. The defendants were accused of providing intelligence to Iran and Hezbollah as well as housing weapons, ammunition and communication devices.

Continued on Page 11

FRENCH MILITARY CHIEF RESIGNS

PARIS: France's top military chief resigned yesterday after a war of words with Emmanuel Macron over budget cuts that posed the biggest test yet of the new president's authority. The row between Macron and General Pierre de Villiers erupted last week when the chief of staff told a parliamentary committee he would not allow the armed forces to be "screwed" by the government's plans to slash 850 million euros (\$980 million) from this year's budget. Macron, 39, slapped down the 60-year-old five-star general in front of army chiefs at their annual summer party, saying "I am the boss" and that he deeply regretted the budget dispute had been dragged into the "public sphere". In a Sunday newspaper interview, Macron said that if there was a difference of opinion, "it is the chief of the defense staff who will change his position". De Villiers, who had been in the job for three years and was highly popular with the rank and file, said he had no choice but to stand down.



Pierre de Villiers

the model of the armed forces that I think is necessary to guarantee the protection of France and the French people," he said in a statement. General Francois Leconte, 55, currently the top military adviser to the prime minister, was named as his replacement. At a weekly cabinet meeting Macron hailed de Villiers for his "remarkable service" and called Leconte a "hero, who was recognized as such in the army" for his service in the Balkans. The president promised to hike the defense budget again in 2018.

Seen as one of the finest officers of his generation, de Villiers' departure met with howls of indignation from the opposition. The leader of the hard-left France Unbowed, Jean-Luc Melenchon, called it an "enormous mistake" on Macron's part. De Villiers' leaked remarks about the budget had been made behind closed doors to a committee that expected him to "respond frankly", Melenchon argued. Far-right leader Marine Le Pen, whom Macron beat in the presidential run-off, said the French military

Continued on Page 11

CAN TRUMP SAVE HIS PRESIDENCY?

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump's first six months in the White House have been a riot of scandal, chaos and outrage that - absent a major course correction - could spell doom for his entire administration. All US presidents face crises that seem to sweep the White House from its moorings. Abraham Lincoln struggled through a bloody Civil War. Bill Clinton was humiliated by muckraking investigations. Barack Obama took five months to plug a devastating oil spill and even longer to right the economy.

But few presidents have caused such outrage or faced such a multitude of crises as Donald Trump has in his first six months. "To be consumed by scandal from day one is not good, no major legislation is not good, to have approval ratings that are so low and the potential for

Continued on Page 11



WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump leaves after speaking during the first meeting of the Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building next to the White House yesterday. — AFP

MINISKIRT VIDEO WOMAN FREED

DUBAI: Saudi police have released without charge a woman who was filmed in a miniskirt at a historic site in the ultraconservative kingdom, the government said yesterday. The ministry of information said police had released the woman Tuesday night and the prosecutor had closed the case.

Police said Tuesday they were questioning the woman after she appeared in a series of videos, initially posted to messaging app Snapchat, wearing a crop top and a high-waisted miniskirt. She had been filmed walking through the historic fort of Ushaiqer, north of Riyadh, and playing with sand in the dunes. The videos were uploaded over the weekend to the "Model Khulood" Snapchat account.

The ministry said in a statement that the woman had confessed to walking through the site in a skirt with her hair uncovered but that the footage had been uploaded without her knowledge. Women are required to wear long black abaya robes and cover their hair in public in most of Saudi Arabia, which has some of the world's harshest restrictions on women.

The kingdom does not allow women to drive and requires them to be accompanied or given written permission by a male relative - usually a father, husband or brother - to study, work or travel. The videos sparked heated debate among social media users in the region and beyond on questions of gender and rights in the kingdom. — AFP

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KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with the visiting Sultan ul-Bohra Dr Mufaddal Saifuddin.— Amiri Diwan photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem.

CBK ORGANIZES EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES AT THAT AL-SALASIL

KUWAIT: The Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced its cooperation with That Al-Salasil bookstore for organizing an exciting educational and cultural event exclusively for My First Account holders aged five to 14 years old at its branch in Avenues Mall. The event meant to encourage kids to read more and highlight importance of reading in developing and upgrading the culture and general knowledge of kids. The event will include numerous fun and educational activities like bookstore tour, storytelling and crafts, in addition to games and competitions and giveaways. The activities will be held every Wednesday and Thursday for three weeks starting from 26 July to 10 August with both morning and evening timings available.

Parents and guardians can register their kids through the CBK website under the 'Promotions section' and will be contacted shortly by the bank to choose day and timing preferable to them or they may contact the bank's Call Center. It is worth to mention that My First Account is a savings account designed for children from birth to 14 years old. The account contributes in a perfect way for parents who want to secure a better future for their children and saving money for them from an early age.



AMIR RECEIVES SULTAN UL-BOHRA

HIS HIGHNESS CONGRATULATES KUWAITI ATHLETE

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday the visiting Sultan ul-Bohra Dr Mufaddal Saifuddin and an accompanying delegation. The meeting was attended by Advisor at Amiri Diwan Mohammad Dhaif Alla Sharar. Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir received at Bayan Palace National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, as well as Acting Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

In other news, His Highness the Amir sent cables to a bevy of Kuwaiti athletes, congratulating them on their successful outings during the Arab Athletics Championship recently held in Tunisia. Gold medalists Majid Al-

Zaid and Essa Al-Zankawi, Khaled Al-Subaie, who bagged a silver medal, bronze medal winners Fajer Mandani and Nadia Al-Haqan, as well as the bronze-winning quartet of Yaqoub Al-Yoha, Mishal Al-Mutairi, Abdulaziz Qarainis and Hussein Al-Sheeha, were the recipients of His Highness the Amir's cables.

In his cables, His Highness the Amir wished the competitors success in their careers, saying that such accomplishments would propel Kuwait to the upper echelons of sports. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables.—KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Acting Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem meets with the Mexican Ambassador to Kuwait Miguel Angel Isidro.— KUNA

GHANEM CALLS FOR EMERGENCY AIPU SESSION ON AL-AQSA MOSQUE

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem received at his office yesterday the Mexican Ambassador to Kuwait Miguel Angel Isidro. MP Nayef Al-Merdas Al-Ajmi attended the meeting.

Separately, Ghanem has called for an emergency session for the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union (AIPU) on the ongoing escalation in Jerusalem, and the Israeli violation of Al-Aqsa Mosque sanctity. Ghanem made the call in a letter to AIPU President Habib El Malki, who is also Speaker of the Moroccan House of Representatives.

Due to the continued violations by

the Israeli occupying forces at Al-Aqsa Mosque, preventing Palestinian's from entering the site to perform prayers, Ghanem asked for an emergency meeting of the AIPU in Morocco or at the Arab League the headquarters in Cairo "as soon as possible," the letter reads.

The session aims to discuss the hazardous escalating situation in Jerusalem, and to agree on political, diplomatic and popular moves on the Arab, Islamic, continental and international levels to strongly press the occupation authorities to stop their unjust practices that run against all international and human laws and norms, Ghanem noted.— KUNA

PAKISTAN BACKS AMIR'S EFFORTS TO END GULF CRISIS

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif on Tuesday expressed his country's support of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's efforts to resolve the Gulf crisis. This came during talks in Islamabad with the visiting Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani.

The foreign minister briefed the premier on Qatar's response to the demands of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt and the current status of mediation efforts pursued by His Highness the Amir. The prime minister appreciated the "sagacity and wisdom" of His Highness

the Amir, and said Pakistan supports these "sincere efforts," according to an official statement. "Pakistan maintains close, friendly and cooperative relations with all GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries and is concerned at the recent crisis in Middle East," added the statement. Furthermore, Sharif said that Pakistan wishes to see a diplomatic solution to the problem between brotherly Islamic countries. Meanwhile, the Qatari minister expressed his gratitude to the prime minister for the warm reception and reiterated Qatar's desire to further enhance bilateral relations between the two countries.— KUNA

ARAB LEAGUE CHIEF DENOUNCES ISRAELI MEASURES IN JERUSALEM

CAIRO: Arab League Secretary General Ahmad Abul-Gheit yesterday denounced the Israeli violence and arbitrary measures against Palestinians in the occupied Jerusalem, especially in the vicinity of Al-Aqsa Mosque. In a statement, Abul-Gheit demanded the Israelis to immediately stop all bring to a halt all such practices and measures, and to fully respect the sanctity of the Mosque. He warned against the gravity of the escalating Israel has been taking since

Friday, preventing Palestinian worshippers from entering and performing prayers in Al-Aqsa. These measures constitute obvious violation of the international human rights law, and will only lead to further tension and fueling of conditions in the city, in addition to provoking Muslims' feelings, Abul-Gheit said. He noted that the measures will leave their positive implications on any opportunities for a political settlement between Israel and the Palestinians.— KUNA

KUWAIT TO HOST EU-GCC ENERGY EVENT IN OCTOBER

GAS PRODUCTION WILL RISE TO 510 MILLION CUBIC FEET

BRUSSELS: A two-day event on "Energy Efficiency: A Key Driver for Clean Energy Transition" will take place in Kuwait, on October 2-3 under the patronage of Minister of Oil and Minister of Electricity and Water Essam Al-Marzouq. It is organized by the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council (EU-GCC) Clean Energy Technology Network in partnership with the Kuwait Society of Engineers and the Public Authority of Applied Education and Training, said the organizers in a press release.

The aim of the event is to foster partnerships by bringing together high-level stakeholders from the EU and the six-member GCC to discuss Energy Efficiency and Cooling Technologies suitable for the region, exchange

best practices and lessons learned and to advance collaboration between EU and GCC actors.

The EU-GCC Clean Energy Network initiated its activities in 2010, as a response to the common EU-GCC interest for strategic clean energy cooperation. The Network aims to catalyse and coordinate cooperation on clean energy, including policy and technology aspects among stakeholders in the EU and GCC countries. In December 2015, the EU launched the second phase of the "EU-GCC Clean Energy Network II" project aiming at further developing the activities of the Network and at supporting its mid-term sustainability. The Network targets stakeholders from both the GCC and the EU,

including energy authorities and policy makers.

Gas production

In other news, Marzouq announced that Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) and its affiliates plan to ratchet up free gas production capacity to 510 million cubic feet and increase light oil output to 200 thousand barrels per day (bpd) by December.

Speaking to the press, Marzouq said that capacity would be enhanced through three production units to be configured soon, all of which will churn out 100 cubic feet of free gas and 40,000 bpd of light oil. Marzouq, who doubles as Minister of Electricity and Water, pointed out that Kuwait has collaborated with



Oil Minister Essam Al-Marzouq

reputable gas exploration and production companies to help meet the country's rising need of natural gas, as temperatures soar during the summer. He added that Kuwait, through cooperation with staunch ally Saudi Arabia, was "eager to develop its gas fields in order to boost production capacity."—KUNA

'KAFO' MEETS YOUTH ASPIRATIONS: ADVISOR

KUWAIT: 'KAFO' is a national e-platform that enables the search, connection and collaboration among achievers in Kuwait for better future opportunities, building networks for knowledge sharing and communities around common interests, an official said.

Chairman of the Supervisory Committee of the Kuwait Achievers for Future Opportunities (KAFO) Project Dr Youssef Al-Ibrahim noted that the project was developed to meet youth aspirations as per the recommendations of the National Youth Project, which was initiated by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Ahmad Al-Jaber Al Sabah in 2013 as a nationwide campaign to outreach youth and involve them in national development plans.

Ibrahim, Advisor at the Amiri Diwan, said his remarks during a seminar to introduce the project. The main objective of KAFO is to have access to Kuwaiti achievers and talents through a platform that can display their efforts and empower them to attain more and collaborate with others. "They are the real assets of Kuwait and the hope for its future," he said. Ibrahim hoped the project would create self-renewing energy in the Kuwaiti youth to push them with economic activities and voluntary work that have always characterized the Kuwaiti personality.

Meanwhile, Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education Dr Mohammad Al-Faris said that KAFO includes a large segment of young people, which requires building a database for them to facilitate the search process for their competencies. The existence of a database for young people to identify their potential is very important to help them in projects and action teams, in addition to supporting and developing their abilities, Minister Faris said.

Kuwait's youth are its real wealth and the support of His Highness the Amir for these projects is a clear evidence that Kuwait's future lays within youth, Faris noted, adding that the Ministry of Education will support

such projects by giving young teachers the opportunity to develop the educational system. In the meantime, General Coordinator of the project Dr Fatma Al-Mousawi said the main goal of the meeting is to introduce the project and facilitate the process of identifying the official website in its experimental phase before the official launch in October this year.

"Our aim also is to hear and gather more opinions and comments about the website for the development of the project before the official launch," she pointed out. The database will focus on six electronic communities in the fields of sports, media, culture, arts, science and technology, as well as food.— KUNA



Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education Dr Mohammad Al-Faris speaks to reporters.



KUWAIT: Officials attend a seminar to introduce 'KAFO'; a national e-platform that enables the search, connection and collaboration among achievers in Kuwait.— KUNA



KUWAIT: Vehicles stuck in traffic created after the opening of the Jahra road tunnel that leads to the Sheraton roundabout. — KUNA

COORDINATION TO END SHERATON ROUNDABOUT TRAFFIC CONGESTIONS

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

Undersecretary for Traffic Affairs Major General Fahad Al-Shuwaie said the Engineering Department is working on finding solutions to

avoid the traffic jam resulting from the opening of the Jahra road tunnel that leads to the Sheraton roundabout. He said a proposal was

given to the ministry of public works to open a side road to the right before the roundabout for those heading to the first ring road.

KUWAIT: Acting Interior Ministry Assistant



FIREMEN BATTLE CHEMICALS WAREHOUSE BLAZE

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

and detergents warehouse on Seventh Ring Road. Firemen from Kabd, Ardhiya, Sabhan, Mubarak Al-Kabeer, south

Salmiya and Kazima fire stations participated in battling the blaze, Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) said in a

statement. Investigations are underway to find out the cause of the fire.

KUWAIT: Fire broke out in a chemicals



KUWAIT: Maj Gen Abdullah Al-Muhanna (center) speaks during a press conference yesterday.

2,731 TEACHERS, ADMINISTRATORS RESIGNED THIS YEAR

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Acting Head of the Services Termination Department at the Education Ministry Mohammad Matar said the number of employees who resigned and retirees whose transactions have been completed this year reached 2,731 teachers and administrators, including 1,062 citizens and 1,669 non-Kuwaitis. He said the general education sector terminated them for implementation of its replacement policy, adding that 103 Kuwaitis were sent into forced retirement because they

completed 34 years of service. He asked expats to submit their resignations three months before the end of the school year so that the Civil Service Commission would not deduct 25 percent from their indemnities.

Cases won

Social Affairs Ministry assistant undersecretary for legal affairs Abdelaziz Shuaib said there is a rise in the number of cases won by the ministry. He said that this was the result of official adherence to procedures and what the law stipulates to safeguard citizens' rights.



This photo released by the Interior Ministry yesterday shows prisoners released on an Amiri pardon.

261 PRISONERS RELEASED ON PARDON

KUWAIT: An Amiri decree was issued to pardon 1,207 prison inmates. Accordingly, 261 were released, while 757 had their sentence commuted and 189 were removed from the deportation list, the Interior Ministry said in a statement yes-

terday. Interior Ministry Assistant Undersecretary for Correctional Institution and Sentences Implementation Affairs Maj Gen Abdullah Al-Muhanna congratulated those who were included in the pardon.

HEALTH INSURANCE COMPANY'S CONTRACT EXTENDED FOR SIX MONTHS

By A Saleh and KUNA

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health's contract with the General Services Health Insurance Company for expats was extended for six months, which will help prevent delay in visa renewal transactions, Health Minister Dr Jamal Al-Harbi said yesterday. He also said that 2,600 nurses are available for Jaber Hospital and that he has asked for pharmacists to work there.

Harbi was speaking during a press conference held yesterday. "The Ministry of Health is eager to develop its technical system and the national strategy for promoting health services offered by the government sector," he told reporters.

The executive plans of the five-year national strategy come in cooperation

with the UN World Health Organization (WHO), the minister said. A major phase of the strategy is building the technical and administrative cadres at the supervisory posts through adopting the relevant scientific bases.

Harbi noted that they agreed with a host of international specialized institutions to organize courses for qualifying those who will hold these posts, including the UK's London School of Economics (LSE). Meanwhile, the minister said that they had re-organized work at the department of treatment abroad, as well as in the health offices overseas. He noted that some of the officials in the overseas offices were referred to the prosecution after irregularities were spotted.

Crime

Report

MENTALLY ILL MAN MURDERS HIS MOTHER IN ZAHRA

KUWAIT: A female citizen was killed by her psychologically disturbed son. The body was recovered by the coroner. Police responded to a call about a murder in Zahra. When they arrived at the scene, they found out that an 18-year-old man had stabbed a woman several times who was later identified as his mother.

Boy killed

A Syrian was devastated by the death of his child when he took him to his mill in Shuwaikh, where he was electrocuted. The 10-year-old boy was playing in the shop, where he touched a live electric wire. The father cut the power off, but the boy had already died. Police and paramedics arrived at the scene, then forensics personnel were called in.

Thefts

Investigations are ongoing to identify and arrest thieves who broke into cars in Hawally, Sulaiybiya and Wafra. A citizen told Nugra police that her car was broken into while parked in a mall's parking lot and money was stolen from it. Meanwhile, a citizen in Sulaiybiya told police the window of his luxury car was smashed and its contents were stolen. In Wafra, an Asian said his car was stolen while parked in front of his house.

Fugitive nabbed

Farwaniya police arrested a bedoon wanted on several cases, including arson. He is also wanted to serve a six-month jail sentence. The arrest was made by a police patrol that stopped him.

Assault

A college student was beaten by a man she knows following a dispute over marriage. Surra police received a medical report as the victim filed a complaint. The suspect is being summoned for questioning and possible legal action.

Bootleggers arrested

Farwaniya police prevented three Asians from selling liquor in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh. Patrols noticed a van with three men who seemed nervous when stopped, so police searched the vehicle and found 91 bottles of liquor ready for sale. The three worked for a laundry shop in Khaitan and used the van to sell the liquor without their sponsor's knowledge. The three were sent to concerned authorities and will be deported. Separately, Farwaniya detectives arrested a citizen discharged from the interior ministry for selling liquor to cafe patrons. The arrest was made while he was making a deal with a client. He attempted to escape, but failed and was caught with six locally-made liquor bottles.

— Translated from the Arabic press



KUWAIT: Jahra Municipality Director Eng Mohammad Al-Aradhi said six stores were closed and 22 citations were issued during a recent crackdown on shops around the governorate. — By Hanan Al-Saadoun

In Brief

MINISTER HIGHLIGHTS ATHLETES' ACHIEVEMENTS

KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry and Acting Minister of State for Youth Affairs Khaled Al-Roudhan on Tuesday commended the distinct achievements of Kuwait's athletes in recent international events. The Kuwaiti sports have demonstrated excellence on the continental and the international scenes, and the Kuwaiti athletes climbed the winners' podiums raising the Kuwait flag, the minister said in a press statement. Roudhan stressed the state's keenness on supporting such talents and promoting their capabilities for more success. —KUNA



US DOLLAR RATE STABLE AT KD 0.302

KUWAIT: The US Dollar exchange rate was stable at KD 0.302, while the Euro continued its hike from yesterday, reaching KD 0.349, said the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) yesterday. The CBK noted that the Sterling Pound was down to KD 0.394. The Swiss Franc was up to KD 0.316 and the Japanese Yen was at the same rate at KD 0.002. —KUNA



KUWAIT OIL DOWN 41 CENTS TO \$45.47 PB

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went down 41 cents to \$45.47 per barrel (pb) Tuesday as oppose to \$45.88 pb the day before, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. At the global level, the prices were up after investors showed optimism over Libya's joining of countries cutting down on production. The price of the Brent Blend future contracts for September were up 77 cents to \$49.18 pb, while the Texas West Intermediate August future contracts were up to \$46.74 pb. —KUNA



Photo

of the day



KUWAIT: Kuwait City's skyline at sunset. —KUNA

ALGHANIM INDUSTRIES SPONSORS NUKS-USA ORIENTATION EVENT

KUWAIT: Alghanim Industries, one of the largest private companies in the region, sponsored the annual NUKS-USA's orientation event, which took place at the Kuwait International fairgrounds in Mishref on Monday 17 July, 2017. Over 1,350 students, who will fly to the United States this fall to begin their college studies, were in attendance. The event was held under the patronage of Dr Mohammed Al-Fares, Minister of Education and Higher Education of the State of Kuwait and attended by the Ambassador of the United States of America to the State of

Kuwait, Lawrence Silverman, as well as representatives from Alghanim Industries. This sponsorship is part of Alghanim Industries commitment in supporting the National Union of Kuwaiti Students (NUKS) USA branch for the academic year 2017/18.

Speaking to the attendees, Ambassador Lawrence Silverman said: "If I had one message, it is one my parents gave me when I went off to university, and one that I passed to my children as they began their higher education: Your success is exactly that - yours. You will succeed in the United States because you went

to class, you studied hard, and you remained a student in good standing, all while enjoying everything that American college life has to offer. This year, almost 1,500 Kuwaiti students have chosen to study in the United States. Enabled by the generous support of the Kuwaiti government, more students choose to study in the United States than in any other country. Let me reiterate that the United States welcomes students from Kuwait and want to see more of you studying in the US."

Chief Human Resources Officer at Alghanim Industries, George Lambros, commented on the company's sponsorship, saying: "We are always pleased to participate in events that help support talented Kuwaiti students planning to pursue higher education abroad. Representing Alghanim Industries at events that cater to Kuwaiti youth is a great opportunity to tell them about our company and all the different opportunities we have to offer. We look forward to partnering with NUKS-USA in other future initiatives to support Kuwaiti students studying in the U.S., and to providing career opportunities for Kuwaiti graduates at Alghanim Industries."

Alghanim Industries also supported the event through its diverse businesses through a draw with gifts from X-cite by Alghanim Electronics and food and beverages from Costa Coffee, served throughout the event. Alghanim Industries has sponsored many activities of the National Union of Kuwaiti Students (NUKS) - USA branch in recent years, including the annual conference held in the United States which is the largest gathering of Kuwaitis outside of Kuwait. This initiative comes as part of Alghanim Industries' Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program, which is committed to empowering the underprivileged, supporting education and encouraging entrepreneurship.

It is also worth noting that the company was a Strategic Sponsor for the fifth annual Tmkeen Youth Symposium, an initiative that provides youth with valuable insights about entrepreneurship from industry leaders, academics and experts, and was held under the patronage of the Amir, HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. It is also the largest supporter for INJAZ-Kuwait, as it encourages its employees to volunteer regularly in INJAZ's different programs. In addition to being a platinum sponsor of "ArabNet Conference" and providing free event tickets to 100 university students in Kuwait. The company also recently entered a partnership with the UNHCR, signing a MoU through which Alghanim Industries will support the education of Syrian refugee children in Lebanon.



KUWAIT: General Director of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) Dr Ahmad Al-Athari recently visited Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait's (ABK) head office, where he thanked bank officials for supporting PAAET activities that were held in recent months.



KUWAIT: US Ambassador to Kuwait Lawrence Silverman gives his opening remarks.



One of the draw winners receives his gift.

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Mist Fan

Heavy Duty

26"

46 Litre

59 Price

FL-650F-2
Mist Fan

Heavy Duty

28"

29 Litre

69 Price

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190 Litre

4.7 Cubic Feet
Heater Light
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+

SHARP

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Microwave

20 Litre

5 Power Levels
255 mm Diameter Turntable
Mechanical Control

79 Price

FL-650
Stand Fan

20"

14 Price

FS40-14BU
Stand Fan

16"

3 Speed choice
Height & Tilt Adjustable

9 Price

FS40-15F
Stand Fan

16"

10"
2-hour timer

6 Price

MAC-140FMP5D

14 Litre

10 WARRANTY ON MOTOR
DDM DIRECT DRIVE MOTOR

+

Midea

H5-85L

45 Litre

8 Programs
Auto Power Cut Off
Child Lock

125 Price

FB50-9H
Wall Fan

20"

6 Price

FW40-7JR
Wall Fan

16"

3 Speed choices
Delicate style

6 Price

HC20F-FLP-20
Floor Fan

20"

9 Price

OR-PR28ICE
Ice Cube Maker

26 kg Ice Maker
5 kg storage

+

WPU-8000CG
Cooler Water

Made in Korea

2 Tap Hot and Cold
Table Top Water Cooler
1.5 liter hot water
4 liter cold water
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149 Price

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Court finds Thai general guilty of human trafficking

VENEZUELA'S NICOLAS MADURO DEFIES TRUMP OVER CONSTITUTION RE-WRITE

Page 8

Page 9



RAQA: Members of the Women's Protection Units (YPJ) arrive on the frontline on the eastern outskirts of Raqa, during the ongoing offensive by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which are made up of an alliance of Kurdish and Arab fighters, to retake the city from Islamic State (IS) group fighters. — AFP photos

SOLD BY IS, YAZIDI FEMALE FIGHTERS BACK FOR REVENGE

RAQA: She was trafficked into Raqa as a sex slave by the Islamic State group but managed to escape. Now Yazidi fighter Heza is back to avenge the horrors she and thousands of others suffered. Her hair tucked under a tightly wrapped forest green shawl embroidered with flowers, Heza says battling IS in its Syrian bastion has helped relieve some of her trauma. "When I started fighting, I lifted some of the worries from my heart," she says, surrounded by fellow Yazidi militia women in Raqa's eastern Al-Meshleb district. "But it will be full of revenge until all the women are freed."

She and her two sisters were among thousands of women and girls from the Kurdish-speaking Yazidi minority taken hostage by IS as it swept into Iraq's Sinjar region in August 2014. The women were sold and traded across the jihadists' self-proclaimed "caliphate" in Syria and Iraq. Around 3,000 are believed to remain in captivity, including one of Heza's sisters. "When the Yazidi genocide happened, Daesh snatched up the women and girls. I was one of them," Heza recounts, using the Arabic acronym for IS.

The United Nations has qualified the massacres IS carried out against the Yazidis during the Sinjar attack as genocide. IS separated Yazidi females from the men in Sinjar, bringing the women and girls into Raqa. "They took us like sheep. They chased us and humiliated us in these very streets," Heza tells AFP, gesturing to a row of heavily damaged homes in Al-Meshleb.

The eastern district was the first neighborhood captured from IS by the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, a Kurdish-Arab alliance, in their months-long offensive to seize the jihadist

bastion. SDF officials told AFP that their forces had already rescued several female Yazidi captives, including a 10-year-old girl, since they entered Raqa city in June.

Despite pain, I felt joy

Over the course of her 10-month captivity in Raqa, Heza was bought by five different IS fighters. Her voice strained but her brown eyes still sharp, the young fighter says she prefers not to detail the abuses she suffered. But in an indication of the extent of her trauma, Heza-whose name means "strength" in Kurdish-says she tried to commit suicide several times. Finally, in May 2015, she escaped from the home where she was being held to a nearby market, and she found a Syrian Kurdish family who smuggled her out of the city.

She travelled around 400 kilometers across war-ravaged northeast Syria back into Iraq to join the Shengal Women's Units (YPS). The YPS-named after the Kurdish word for Sinjar-is a part of the US-backed SDF. Heza underwent intensive weapons training, and when the SDF announced its fight for Raqa in November 2016, she and other YPS fighters were ready. "When the Raqa offensive began, I wanted to take part in it for all the Yazidi girls who were sold here in these streets," she says.

"My goal is to free them, to avenge them." The SDF spent months tightening the noose around Raqa before breaking into the city in June, and the YPS took up their first positions in Al-Meshleb several weeks later. It was the first time Heza was back in the northern Syrian city since her escape. "When I entered Raqa, I had a strange, indescrib-

able feeling. Despite the enormous pain that I carry, I felt joy," the fighter says.

Rifles are lined up in neat rows inside the abandoned home used by the YPS as their base in Al-Meshleb. Yazidi women in brand-new uniforms gather around a crackling walkie-talkie for news from the front. Some of them, like 20-year-old Merkan, have travelled far to join the fight against IS. Her family is originally Yazidi Turkish, but Merkan and her 24-year-old sister Arin were raised in Germany. When they heard about IS's infamous sweep into Sinjar in 2014, they were outraged. "I could never have imagined a world like this. I didn't expect things like this could happen," Merkan says. "I was in so much pain," says the tall militiaman.

Her older sister decided to travel to Sinjar in late 2014 to join the YPS, and Merkan followed in early 2015. "I only had one goal in front of me: liberating the Yazidi women, and all women who were still in Daesh's clutches." She had scribbled a similar pledge in Kurdish on a wall behind her. "Through strength and struggle, we Yazidi women fighters came to Raqa to take revenge for the August 3 massacre," the graffiti says, referring to when IS entered Sinjar. "We are avenging Yazidi girls," it adds.

"Yesterday there was Al-Qaeda and today there's Daesh. We don't know who will come next. I want to go anywhere there is injustice," Merkan said. Fellow fighter Basih is sitting quietly in a neighboring room, chain-smoking cigarettes in the muggy July afternoon. "We suffered the ugliest forms of injustice. Our revenge will be proportional to it," she said. — AFP

LOUD SOUND PRECEDED US POLICE SHOOTING AUSTRALIAN WOMAN

CHICAGO: Police in Minnesota were startled by a loud sound prior to fatally shooting an unarmed Australian woman who had called them to report a possible assault, US investigators revealed Tuesday. The state agency probing the killing of Justine Damond, also known by her maiden name Justine Ruszczyk, interviewed one of the two officers who responded to her emergency call on Saturday night in Minneapolis. It was the first time since the incident that authorities offered more information about the circumstances, as community leaders and Damond's family complained they had few details over a killing that reverberated in her native Australia.

Damond had called Minneapolis police Saturday around 11:30 pm to report a possible assault occurring near her home. Two officers responded with their police car's emergency lights off. Officer Matthew Harrity told investigators Tuesday that he had been "startled by a loud sound" near the squad car just before Damond approached, the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) said in a statement. His partner, Officer Mohamed Noor, was in the passenger seat. "Harrity indicated that Officer Noor discharged his weapon, striking Ruszczyk through the open driver's side window," the agency said.

The BCA did not identify the startling sound, but an unidentified officer recorded on a police radio conversation published by the website Minnesota PoliceClips, speculated it may have been fireworks that sounded like gun shots. After the shooting, the officers provided medical aid until paramedics arrived, but Damond died at the scene of a gunshot wound to the abdomen, authorities said. The officers' body-worn cameras were not on during the incident, and investigators appealed for witnesses to come forward.

Meanwhile, Minneapolis officials pressed for patience, saying the state investigation took precedence and city authorities therefore had little information of their own to share. "We don't have all the answers," Minneapolis Mayor Betsy Hodges said at a Tuesday night news conference. "But, the information the BCA shared this evening gets us closer to having answers, closer to seeing justice done," she said.

Damond, a 40-year-old meditation instructor and life coach, was an Australian national who had moved to the US to marry her fiance Don Damond-who on Monday had criticized a lack of information from investigators. Her death reverberated around the world, from a makeshift memorial at the Lake Harriet Spiritual Community center where Damond worked, to her native Australia. Hundreds of family and friends gathered for an emotional vigil at Sydney's Freshwater beach at daybreak yesterday, standing in silence and holding candles before casting pink flowers into the water.

In an interview with Australia's Channel Nine, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull on Wednesday expressed shock. "It is inexplicable," he said. "We are demanding answers on behalf of her family. And our hearts go out to her family, and all of her friends and loved ones." A day earlier, Damond's father John Ruszczyk addressed Australian media at a news conference, calling for justice. "Justine was a beacon to all of us. We only ask that the light of justice shine down on the circumstances of her death," he said.

Officer 'a caring person'

Noor, who has been with the Minneapolis police force for 21 months, declined investigators' requests for an interview, the BCA said Tuesday. "We cannot compel Officer Noor to make a statement," Mayor Hodges said, "I wish that he would... because he has a story to tell that no one else can tell." In a statement, Noor's attorney Tom Plunkett called the officer "a caring person," who "empathizes with the loss others are experiencing." But Plunkett said ongoing investigations prevented the officer from saying any more.

There are three investigations, one conducted by the BCA which takes precedence, a police department use of force review, and a civilian oversight civil rights probe that has not yet begun. Damond's case was the latest high-profile police shooting. Most others involved white police officers and African American victims. In this case, Noor is Somali American, while Damond was white. "Justine's death shows no one should assume 'officer-involved shootings' only happen in a certain part of town or to certain kinds of people," Congressman Keith Ellison, who represents Damond's district in the US House of Representatives, said in a statement. — AFP



RAQA: Members of the Women's Protection Units (YPJ) eat on the eastern outskirts of Raqa.

IRAN'S PRESIDENT THREATENS RESPONSE TO US SANCTIONS

TEHRAN: Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said yesterday that Tehran would "respond appropriately" to new US sanctions but that Iran remained committed to its nuclear deal with world powers. "The Islamic Republic of Iran will always stick to its international commitments," Rouhani said in a televised cabinet meeting. But if the US wants "to press forward with new sanctions under any pretext... the great nation of Iran will respond appropriately," he said.

"We will not forgive violations by the Americans and we will stand against them." His comments came

a day after the US and Iran traded tit-for-tat sanctions over the Islamic republic's ballistic missile program. The State Department slapped sanctions on 18 individuals and entities in Iran, hours after the White House admitted Tehran was sticking to the 2015 agreement. Iran hit back with its own sanctions against "American people and entities that have acted against the Iranian people and other Muslim peoples of the region."

Rouhani yesterday accused Washington of "duplicitous": "On one hand they send official reports to

Congress verifying that Iran has been completely loyal to the nuclear deal," Rouhani said. "On the other hand they seek new sanctions under various excuses against logic (and) the spirit and text" of the accord, he said. Iran's parliament on Tuesday voted to streamline a bill that would increase funding for the country's missile program and Revolutionary Guards in response to Washington's "adventurism" in the region.

An overwhelming majority of lawmakers voted to prioritize the motion that would see an additional \$260 million allocated to developing the missile pro-

gram and the same amount to the elite Revolutionary Guards' foreign operations wing, the Quds Force. Rouhani accused his American counterpart Donald Trump of breaking international deals on Cuba, North Korea and climate change, all reached under Trump's predecessor Barack Obama. He said Washington was pushing Iran to "abandon its commitments" and that the US was "worried over improved economic relations between Iran and Asia and Europe." "We are happy that so far the 5+1 (world powers) have stood strongly to protect" the nuclear deal, he said. —AFP



BAGHDAD: This file photo shows Iraqi forces walking amidst the destruction in Mosul's Old City. —AFP

AFTER THE BATTLE: MOSUL TO RISE FROM THE ASHES

MOSUL: The battle over, it's now time to start rebuilding Iraq's second city, parts of which were literally flattened during the offensive against holed up jihadists of the Islamic State group. But before this can happen, the chaotic mess caused by the conflict that devastated Mosul must be cleared away. Standing outside his damaged house in the west of the city, Manaf Yunes looked on as a worker removed rubble from a balcony. "I don't have any money because I haven't been paid for three years. I had to borrow to be able to begin renovating," the 57-year-old former official said.

On July 10, the authorities announced they had defeated IS in Mosul after a nine-month campaign that unleashed destruction of almost unimaginable dimensions on the ancient city. According to a preliminary assessment, it will cost more than \$1 billion just to restore basic services such as running water, electricity, schooling and medical care to all of Mosul, said Lise Grande of the UN Development Program (UNDP) in Iraq. The western sector was the hardest hit. "The levels of destruction we are seeing are the worst in Iraq. Western Mosul represents one of the largest and most complex stabilization challenges the UN has faced," Grande said. West Mosul has been eviscerated, its buildings half collapsed or shattered, craters in the road sprouting tangles of misshapen and broken water pipes.

Restoring basic services

According to Abdel Sattar Habbo of the local municipality, more than 90 percent of west Mosul's infrastructure and public services was destroyed. And the figure for private property is nearly as high, at 70 percent. He put the cost of the damage at several billion dollars, and said between three and four months would be needed just to "stabilize" the west of the city. By that he meant bringing back on-line-even partly-necessities including water, power and public services to enable "a return to life."

"Based on preliminary assessments, we estimate that \$470 million is needed to help restore the main electricity, water and sewage grids and rehabilitate key public facilities including hospitals, schools and houses in the most heavily damaged

neighborhoods in western Mosul," said the UNDP's Grande. In the old town, where the jihadists battled to the last in the final hours of the most ferocious clashes, "almost one-third of the housing stock is most likely severely damaged or completely destroyed," the UN wrote in a recent report.

Erfan Ali, head of the UN Human Settlements Program in Iraq, said that despite the destruction, the medical sector was already on the mend. "Some major hospitals... have been almost completely destroyed," he said, while others were "completely looted and burned" when Mosul was under IS occupation. "However, the health sector is gradually recovering, and almost half of the hospitals are currently working, which means in most cases that some floors have been rehabilitated," he said.

Laying new pipes

In the east of the city a semblance of normal life has resumed, with crowded streets and shops and restaurants again open for business. And in west Mosul, despite the widespread destruction, hesitant steps are already being taken to bring the area back to life. As rubble is removed, workmen from the municipality lay new pipes in trenches dug in roadways to repair the sewerage system. While they await the beginning of major reconstruction projects, residents of battered Mosul must do what they can to cope. For electricity they rely on neighborhood generators, and water is supplied by tank trucks or NGOs.

Aid groups have given out "construction kits" of wooden planking, plywood panels and tarpaulins to nearly 12,700 families, said Melany Markham, spokesperson in Iraq for the Norwegian Refugee Council. Outside Manaf Yunes's house in the west of the city, there are now bags of cement and stacks of breeze blocks. The front of his home bears the scars of war. A booby-trapped vehicle exploded outside the building, blowing in its windows and destroying part of the balcony. A wooden board now covers a large hole in his bathroom wall. "We built this house bit by bit," he said, gloomily, and now work must begin again. —AFP

AT LEAST 20 YEMENI CIVILIANS REPORTED DEAD IN AIR STRIKE

ADEN: An air raid in Yemen has killed at least 20 people mostly from the same family, the UN and witnesses said yesterday, the latest in a series of suspected strikes on civilians by a Saudi-led coalition. The attack on Tuesday afternoon hit a group of civilians in the Mawza district of the southwestern province of Ta'ez, a statement by the UN refugee agency said. Residents said the attack was carried out by a warplane from the Saudi-led coalition fighting Shiite rebels in support of Yemen's internationally recognized government. At least seven women and four children were among those killed, they said.

The UNHCR said it was "deeply shocked and saddened at reports of the deaths and injuries of a number of internally displaced persons in an aerial attack" on the area. The statement said the civilians had fled fighting in the nearby Mokha district, on the Red Sea coast. Coalition-backed forces loyal to President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi recaptured the port of Mokha in February as part of a major offensive to drive rebels from Yemen's lengthy coastline. The UNHCR statement said more than half a million civilians, 27 percent of Yemen's internally displaced people (IDPs), originate from the governorate of Ta'ez.

Extreme dangers

"This latest incident once again demonstrates the extreme dangers facing civilians in Yemen, particularly those attempting to flee violence, as they disproportionately bear the brunt of conflict," the statement said. The coalition launched a military operation

against the rebels in March 2015 as insurgents closed in on Hadi in his southern refuge in Aden forcing him to flee to Riyadh. The World Health Organization estimates that more than 8,000 people have been killed in Yemen's conflict, most of them civilians, since the intervention.

The Saudi-led coalition has faced repeated criticism over civilian casualties in Yemen. It accuses the rebels of using civilians as human shields. Last month, an air raid on a market in rebel-controlled Saada province, in north Yemen, killed 24 civilians. Another suspected coalition raid in Ta'ez province in May was reported to have killed more than 20 civilians. The coalition has admitted responsibility for some strikes that killed civilians, including a raid on the rebel-held capital Sanaa in October 2016 that killed more than 140 people at a funeral ceremony.

The UNHCR statement said appealed for parties to the conflict to do "their utmost in the protection of civilians and the mitigation of suffering." "A peaceful political solution to resolve the conflict in Yemen is urgently needed to end civilian suffering," it said. Repeated attempts to bring about a political solution to the conflict, including a series of UN-mediated peace talks, have failed. The Shiite Huthi rebels, who Saudi Arabia says are supported by its regional arch-rival Iran, seized control of large parts of the country including Sanaa in late 2014 and early 2015. Campaigners in the West have urged countries including the United States and Britain to suspend arms exports to Saudi Arabia over civilian casualties in the conflict. —AFP

IRAQI PM: RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN MOSUL WERE 'INDIVIDUAL ACTS'

VIDEO SHOWED SOLDIER GUNNING DOWN UNARMED MAN

BAGHDAD: Iraqi forces committed human rights violations during the battle to retake the city of Mosul from the Islamic State group, the country's prime minister acknowledged, but insisted that these were "individual acts" for which the perpetrators would be punished. The remarks by Haider Al-Abadi, at a late night press conference on Tuesday, came after shocking videos emerged on social media following the victory in Mosul and showing troops throwing captured IS suspects off a high wall, then shooting their bodies below.

The US-backed nearly nine-month-old campaign for Mosul is mired in violations committed by government forces and paramilitaries that international human rights groups have decried as war crimes, ranging from extrajudicial killings for IS suspects to forced displacement and detention to civilians. The most recent evidence is the videos that emerged even after Al-Abadi last week declared "total victory" in Mosul. Another video showed a soldier gunning down an unarmed man kneeling in front of a car.

Al-Abadi speculated that soldiers who committed such violations were either "ignorant" of the consequences or had struck a deal with Daesh "to defame us and the security forces." The prime minister did not cite or detail any single incident. Daesh is the Arabic acronym for IS. "Any violation against the law or any violation against a person's dignity is not acceptable and we will chase them (perpetrators) down," he added. "These are individual acts



MOSUL: Suspected Islamic State members sit inside a small room in a prison south of Mosul. —AP

and not widespread and we will not tolerate such acts."

Iraqi security forces are also accused by Human Rights Watch of forcibly moving dozens of women and children with alleged links to IS to a tent camp near Mosul that authorities describe as a "rehabilitation camp." The New York-based watchdog said the camp in Bartella, around 20 kilometers east of Mosul, had been opened recently, following a government directive to have IS family members undergo "psy-

chological and ideological rehabilitation." It houses at least 170 families, mostly women and children from areas of western Mosul, where the last battles against IS took place. "Iraqi authorities shouldn't punish entire families because of their relatives' actions," said Lama Fakh, the Mideast deputy chief at HRW. "We are against collective punishment," Al-Abadi said. "If their (IS militants) families cooperated with them in their crimes against civilians, then they will face legal conse-

quences, but those who didn't take part ... will not face anything." Iraqi forces recaptured Mosul after the city was held for around three years by the Islamic State group.

IS militants were notorious for atrocities, both against civilians and Iraqi security forces, often hunting down anyone connected with the police or military after they overran territory. The assault to retake Mosul also involved grinding urban warfare in which the security forces suffered heavy casualties. —AP

ON HOT MIC, ISRAELI PM RAPS CRAZY EU, ADMITS SYRIA STRIKES

BUDAPEST: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was caught yesterday by a live microphone railing against the European Union's "crazy" insistence on resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a precondition for closer ties with the 28-state bloc, and trumpeting Israel as essential to its prosperity and survival. Netanyahu was meeting with leaders of Poland,

Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia at a regional summit, where a conversation with his Czech and Hungarian counterparts discussing Iran, Syria, the Islamic State, and EU-Israel relations was accidentally broadcast to journalists covering the conference.

Netanyahu also made a rare public admission that Israel has struck Iranian arms convoys in

Syria bound for Hezbollah "dozens and dozens of times." The Israeli premier was overheard blasting the European Union's approach to Israel, saying "it's crazy. I think it's actually crazy" that the EU maintains that resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must come before closer trade ties. "There is no logic here. Europe is undermining its security by undermining Israel. Europe is undermining its progress by undermining the connection with Israeli innovation because of a crazy attempt to create conditions (for peace with the Palestinians)," said Netanyahu.

European ties with Israel would determine whether the 28-member union would "live and thrive or shrivel and disappear," he added. The EU doesn't recognize Israeli sovereignty over territories it captured in the 1967 Mideast war, including the West Bank and east Jerusalem, where the Palestinians hope to establish a state. It has been a vocal critic of Israel's settlement construction and has adopted measures mandating the labeling of goods produced in West Bank settlements.

"The European Union is the only association of countries in the world that conditions the relations with Israel - that produces technology in every area - on political conditions. The only ones. Nobody does it," Netanyahu said, citing Russia, China and India's willingness to do business with Israel despite politics. Netanyahu has pushed for closer trade ties with India and China in recent years. Earlier this month, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid a state visit to Israel, during which the two countries signed a number of trade agreements cementing increasingly warm relations. —AP



BUDAPEST: Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, right, listens to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during a press conference held in the Pesti Vigado building in Budapest, Hungary. —AP

SAUDI AIRLINE SAYS US LAPTOP BAN LIFTED

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's national carrier said a US ban on laptops and tablets in the cabins of its US-bound planes had been lifted yesterday. The kingdom's civil aviation authorities informed Saudia that the ban had been lifted after a US team inspected security measures at airports in Riyadh and Jeddah, the airline's spokesman Abdulrahman al-Taieb said. Washington in March barred all electronic devices larger than a mobile phone in the cabins of direct flights to the United States from 10 airports in Turkey, the Middle East and North Africa, only allowing them in hold luggage.

The ban was brought in after intelligence officials learned of efforts by jihadists from the Islamic State group to produce a bomb that could be hidden inside such devices. Washington said it would abolish the ban for companies that implemented new safety measures. Saudia, also known as Saudi Arabian Airlines, was the last carrier to have its ban lifted. —AFP

OPPOSITION INFIGHTING IN SYRIA'S IDLIB KILLS 14

BEIRUT: Infighting between two of the most powerful factions in Syria's opposition-held Idlib province has killed at least 14 people in the past 24 hours, a monitor said yesterday. The fighting involves the jihadist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), led by a former Al-Qaeda affiliate, against one-time ally Ahrar al-Sham, a powerful Islamist rebel group. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said fighters from the two sides were engaged in clashes across the province in northwest Syria that killed 11 fighters and three civilians in the last 24 hours.

"These are the most violent and widespread clashes that have taken place between Ahrar al-Sham and Hayat al-Sham," Observatory director Rami Abdel Rahman said. "The clashes are ongoing across the entire province, with territory

changing hands... It's an existential battle," he added. An AFP correspondent in the province also reported fighting in several areas, particularly in the town of Sarmada and around the towns of Saraqeb and Al-Dana. He said both sides had set up multiple checkpoints inside and around provincial capital Idlib city.

The two groups have clashed before, despite having previously formed the backbone of the alliance that captured most of Idlib in early 2015. The latest conflict arises partly out of a dispute over Ahrar al-Sham's desire to fly the flag of the Syrian uprising in Idlib city, the Observatory and AFP's correspondent said. Idlib city was only the second provincial capital to fall from government control, and the province is one of the last remaining strongholds of the rebels. —AFP

MONTENEGRO WILDFIRES RAGE BUT UNDER CONTROL IN CROATIA, PORTUGAL

PODGORICA, Montenegro: Firefighters in Montenegro battled for a third day yesterday to douse wildfires along the Adriatic coast, while blazes ravaging parts of neighboring Croatia as well as Portugal were brought under control. "We expect a firefighting plane that has arrived from Ukraine to join in. Fires could be localized and put under control during the day," Montenegrin local firefighting chief Zoran Babic told local media. Montenegro sought international help two days ago to battle the flames which broke out late Sunday.

Swiss and Bulgarian helicopters and a water bombing plane from Israel were expected to arrive later yesterday. The fires on the Lustica peninsula had forced the evacuation of more than a hundred campers and threatened the neighboring towns of Tivat, Herceg Novi and Kotor. At least 15 fires were active throughout the small Balkans country, the interior ministry said. Apart from five fires in Lustica and a few villages, fires broke out overnight near the towns of Cetinje, Niksic and the capital Podgorica, a statement said.

Further north along the coast in Croatia, where a dozen wildfires had also broken out on Sunday in the villages surrounding the popular tourist destination of Split, the situation was returning to normal, officials said. "We cannot say that (fires in Split region) are extinguished but they have been localized," the head of the firefighters in Split, Ivan Kovacevic, said late Tuesday, adding there was no danger for people and buildings. According to Croatia's firefighting commander Slavko Tucakovic, the fires were possibly

caused by sparks from electric power lines. A probe has been launched to establish the cause. The cause of the fires in Montenegro is still not known. Major forest blazes that raged since Sunday in northern Portugal were meanwhile brought under control overnight. The temperatures dropped significantly and were due to drop to 24 degrees Celsius comparing to 35 C in the previous days. However, more than 2,400 firefighters remained on the ground to prevent the fires from spreading again.

"The amelioration of weather conditions was good for fighting fires," a spokeswoman of civic protection Patricia Gaspar said Wednesday, urging the population, however, to remain vigilant "despite the lull." Last month Portugal battled a giant fire in the central region that raged for five days, killing 64 people and injuring more than 250, with many trapped in their cars by the flames. Following the tragedy, experts said Portugal is likely to see more massive forest fires because the country is highly exposed to global warming's climate-altering impacts. —AFP

VENEZUELA'S NICOLAS MADURO DEFIES TRUMP OVER CONSTITUTION RE-WRITE GOVT TO LAUNCH SPECIAL EMERGENCY JUSTICE PLAN

CARACAS: President Nicolas Maduro said that controversial plans to re-write Venezuela's constitution will move ahead "now more than ever" following US President Donald Trump's threat of economic sanctions. Maduro, speaking late Tuesday to the country's Defense Council, also said the government will launch a "special emergency justice plan" to capture anti-administration "conspirators," who will then receive "exemplary punish-

ment." The sharp words came after Trump on Monday warned of unspecified "strong and swift economic actions" against Venezuela if the July 30 Constituent Assembly election was held.

An unofficial plebiscite held by opponents to the leftist regime over weekend saw 7.6 million voters-out of an electorate of 19 million-reject the planned Constituent Assembly and support early elections. The opposition, which controls the National

Assembly, fears that Maduro's plan is designed to keep the leftist administration in power indefinitely. Trump slammed Maduro as "a bad leader who dreams of becoming a dictator," and said that the United States "will not stand by as Venezuela crumbles."

The United States and Venezuela have had decades of tense relations, dating back to the time of Hugo Chavez, Maduro's mentor and predecessor who died in 2013.

independent," a defiant Maduro told the Defense Council, a gathering of most senior government officials. "Now more than ever" Venezuela will proceed with the Constituent Assembly, he said. Maduro's tough rhetoric comes ahead of a 24-hour nationwide strike set for Thursday, launching what the political opposition calls a "final offensive" to push him out of office.

Venezuela has endured near-continuous protests for nearly four

months that have left 97 people dead. The country is in the midst of a deep economic crisis that includes soaring inflation, widespread crime, and a dearth of medicine, food and household basics. Part of the economic downturn stems from relatively low global prices for oil, the country's main export.

But Venezuela's opposition also blames mismanagement by Maduro, who has stepped up the nationalization of businesses, employed the military to control

food distribution, and imposed currency controls. Maduro in turn blames an economic "war" against him that he claims is fomented by the right-wing opposition working with Washington. The president claims that his plan to have a Constituent Assembly rewrite the constitution is the only available path to "peace" and economic recovery.

Weak international support

That constitutional rewrite plan however has earned rebukes from Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and other Latin American nations, as well as Canada, the Organization of American States, the United Nations and the European Union. Bolivia was one of the few to stand by Venezuela. Its leftist president, Evo Morales, accused Trump of maneuvering toward an "intervention and domination of the Venezuelan people." "His goal is to grab its oil," he said on his Twitter account.

Mariano de Alba, an expert on international relations, said the international pressure could emphasize to Maduro "the costs for the government's economic and political interests" if it goes through with the Constituent Assembly. Groups giving the government its support, he said, could be persuaded "that the best option is to seek a negotiated solution, because that would be better than abruptly losing control of the country."

Rioting broke out in different parts of Caracas on Tuesday after protesters blocked streets in the capital. Government prosecutors said on Twitter that a man died in the northeastern state of Antioquia when he was "burned during a demonstration," but gave no details or date of the alleged incident. "Every Venezuelan must take in their own hands the responsibility to defend democracy," said musician Wuilly Arteaga, a local celebrity who plays his violin during protests. "We're in the streets to defend our rights, the constitution and demand that Maduro leave," he added.—AFP



CARACAS: A truck set ablaze by opposition activists blocking an avenue during a protest burns in Caracas. —AFP

ment." The sharp words came after Trump on Monday warned of unspecified "strong and swift economic actions" against Venezuela if the July 30 Constituent Assembly election was held.

An unofficial plebiscite held by opponents to the leftist regime over weekend saw 7.6 million voters-out of an electorate of 19 million-reject the planned Constituent Assembly and support early elections. The opposition, which controls the National

Assembly, fears that Maduro's plan is designed to keep the leftist administration in power indefinitely. Trump slammed Maduro as "a bad leader who dreams of becoming a dictator," and said that the United States "will not stand by as Venezuela crumbles."

The United States and Venezuela have had decades of tense relations, dating back to the time of Hugo Chavez, Maduro's mentor and predecessor who died in 2013.

Maduro defiant

"There is no power in this world that can break the will to be free and

TRUMP TAPS JON HUNTSMAN AS US AMBASSADOR TO RUSSIA

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump has tapped veteran diplomat and former Utah governor Jon Huntsman as ambassador to Russia, the White House said Tuesday. The announcement came amid swirling controversy and multiple investigations into allegations that the Trump campaign colluded with Moscow to win the 2016 election. Huntsman, 57, previously served as US ambassador to China and Singapore. If confirmed by the US Senate, Huntsman would venture to Moscow for a job that will be particularly high-profile as a special counsel in Washington probes the ever-growing Russia scandal plaguing the White House.

As a candidate, Trump criticized Huntsman, a fluent Mandarin speaker, for letting China do "a major number on the US" during his time in Beijing under former president Barack Obama. Huntsman spent less than two years in that post before launching a failed bid to secure the 2012 Republican presidential nomination. A two-time governor of the state of Utah, Huntsman currently serves as chairman of the Atlantic Council, a foreign policy think tank, as is a director on a number of corporate boards, including

Caterpillar, Chevron, Ford Motor Company and Hilton.

The father-of-seven initially endorsed Trump for president last year, but later called on him to drop out following the release of a 2005



SOUTH CAROLINA: In this file photo, former then-Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman speaks in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, as he ends his campaign for president. —AP

recording in which the former reality TV star used vulgar language to brag about groping women. A moderate Republican, he was George Bush Sr's ambassador to

Singapore from 1992-93 — becoming the youngest American to hold the post of ambassador in more than 100 years. He served as a deputy trade representative under George W. Bush's administration



from 2001-2003 where he helped negotiate several pacts with China.

He then resigned to run for governor of Utah, a heavily Mormon state with which he shares reli-

gious ties, winning with 78 percent of the vote when he stood a second time. Former president Barack Obama reached across party lines to name Huntsman his ambassador to China in 2009, a position he held until 2011, when he left to launch a presidential run against his former boss. The Trump administration has been besieged by allegations that the president's closest advisors colluded with Russia to win the 2016 election.

Trump's eldest son Donald Jr recently released emails showing he held a meeting during the campaign with Kremlin-connected figures, hoping to get dirt on his dad's election rival Hillary Clinton. The controversy grew Tuesday after the White House revealed the US leader had an additional, previously undisclosed chat with Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin at this month's G20 summit in Hamburg, raising questions about what the pair talked about, who was present and why the meeting was not previously mentioned. Meanwhile the State Department said Tuesday it had held "tough, forthright" talks with Russian officials over access to diplomatic compounds in the United States that were suspended by Obama.—AFP



BERLIN: Britain's Prince William, left and Kate, the Duchess of Cambridge, second right, arrive with their children, Prince George, second left and Princess Charlotte, at Tegel airport in Berlin. —AP

PRINCE WILLIAM, KATE TAKE BREXIT 'CHARM OFFENSIVE' TO GERMANY

BERLIN: Prince William and his wife Kate embarked yesterday on a three-day visit to Germany billed as a "charm offensive" by local media as Britain begins thorny Brexit talks in earnest. William, who is second in line to the British throne, and Kate touched down in Berlin from Poland accompanied by their young children George and Charlotte. The first stop for the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge will be a luncheon at the giant modern office complex of Chancellor Angela Merkel, widely considered the European Union's most powerful leader.

German media said the long-planned visit was auspiciously timed as the negotiations on Britain leaving the EU get under way in fits and starts. National broadsheet Sueddeutsche Zeitung called the young family "Her Majesty's Secret Weapon" and the German tour a "diplomatic mission" with the enthusiastic backing of the Foreign Office. "They know better than anyone else on the island that the image of the United Kingdom on the continent is not the best at the moment," it said.

"What could you do in this situation to indicate to your neighbors that Britain is of course a stable nation? Obviously, you send in the royals." News website Spiegel Online called the visit a "charm offensive." "The royals represent a kind of common sense that this hard ideological gov-

ernment of the Tories seems to have completely lost at the moment," its commentator Thomas Huetlin said.

Rescue mission

Conservative daily Die Welt called the royal visit to Germany "a kind of rescue mission" a year after the fateful Brexit referendum which stunned the remaining 27 EU member states. "William and Kate are in Germany with their children to lighten the mood," it wrote. In Poland, the royal couple met freedom icon and Nobel peace laureate Lech Walesa and visited a former Nazi German concentration camp.

While in Berlin, William and Kate will greet the public at Brandenburg Gate, the landmark symbol of German unity, and view the sprawling Holocaust Memorial in the heart of the capital before meeting President Frank-Walter Steinmeier at his urban palace.

The couple will today move on to Heidelberg in the west, Cambridge's twin city, where they will take part in a rowing competition. They return to Berlin late Thursday for a party at a century-old dance hall to meet Berliners working in "creative industries" before completing their European tour on Friday in the port city of Hamburg at the spectacular new Elbphilharmonie concert hall. —AFP

CONTROVERSIAL FRENCH ANTI TERROR BILL CLEARS HURDLE

PARIS: A controversial bill to toughen France's security laws cleared its first hurdle late Tuesday when the conservative-dominated Senate approved the legislation by a majority. Senators backed a first reading of the bill by 229 votes to 106, meaning the text will now be handed to the lower house, the National Assembly, for debate in October. The new laws—a campaign pledge of President Emmanuel Macron—will replace a state of emergency imposed after the November 2015 terror attacks in Paris that left 130 people dead. Under the state of emergency, authorities have the power to

place people under house arrest, order house searches and ban public gatherings without the prior approval of a judge. The measures were extended for a sixth time on July 6. Some of them will become permanent under the proposed law, a move rights groups including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch say is draconian. Interior Minister Gerard Collomb defended the bill, saying it was necessary to combat the "ever present" terror threat. "We want to come out from the state of emergency, but we can't do so without counter-terrorism controls in place." —AFP

RUSSIA BACKS BILL TO STRIP 'TERRORISTS' OF CITIZENSHIP

MOSCOW: Russian MPs yesterday passed a law to strip naturalized citizens of passports for offences classed as "terrorism" following a deadly April suicide bombing in the Saint Petersburg metro. The lower house of parliament passed the bill in its final third reading. It now goes through the senate and to President Vladimir Putin for a final signature. Putin called for such a law after the April 3 attack in the second city of Saint Petersburg by a bomber who was born in Kyrgyzstan but then gained Russian citizenship.

The bomber and 15 others died in the attack. Putin said authorities should have the power to revoke the passports of naturalized citizens on terror grounds, citing large numbers of Russian nationals joining the Islamic State group to fight in Syria.

The new legislation introduces an oath for those who acquire Russian citizenship to observe the laws and constitution and "to be true to Russia, to respect its culture, history and traditions."

The new legislation says anyone who is convicted of committing or preparing to commit a crime "involving terrorist activity" can be stripped of naturalized citizenship. Those convicted of such offences will be treated legally as if they lied when they swore the oath of allegiance. Courts would be obliged to inform the immigration authorities within five days of such a verdict entering force. The new legislation also makes it easier for Ukrainians to gain Russian citizenship. If signed into law, it will enter force on September 1 this year. —AFP

MONTENEGRO COUP PLOT TRIAL ADJOURNED

PODGORICA, Montenegro: The trial of two pro-Russian opposition leaders and 12 others over their role in an alleged bid to topple Montenegro's government was adjourned yesterday after claims the prosecutor was biased. The 14 suspects, who risk lengthy jail terms, include Democratic Front

leaders Andrija Mandic and Milan Knezevic as well as two Russian nationals who will be tried in absentia. "The prosecutor put pressure on defendants and their lawyers. We are talking about absolute bias," Milan Petrovic, one of the defense lawyers, told the court.

Prosecutor Milivoje Katnic has also published transcripts of a conversation between a prominent lawyer and one of the accused he was supposed to defend. "We are shocked with such behavior," Petrovic said. A ruling on the demand is expected by today.

Montenegrin police arrested a group of Serbians on the eve of a general election in October, accusing them of planning to storm parliament and target the pro-Western Milo Djukanovic, who was then prime minister. Authorities allege that "Russian state bodies" were involved in the conspiracy in a bid to

prevent Montenegro from joining NATO. The trial has drawn huge public and media interest. The courtroom was packed and a few dozen Democratic Front supporters waited outside with placards saying: "Freedom for Andrija and Milan," the two pro-Russian opposition leaders. —AFP

CHINESE ACTIVIST QUESTIONS ARREST IN IVANKA TRUMP FACTORY PROBE

BEIJING: Labor activist Hua Haifeng had avoided legal trouble in his 14 years investigating companies in China, but that changed after he looked into a factory that made shoes for Ivanka Trump's brand. Hua and two colleagues had worked undercover in factories that manufactured shoes for the brand of US President Donald Trump's daughter and other foreign firms when they were detained in May. The 36-year-old activist and the two other men, who work for New York-based non-profit China Labor Watch (CLW), were accused of using "spying and other monitoring equipment".

The government has intensified a crackdown on human rights activists and lawyers in recent years. But Hua said he believes the factory's link to the Ivanka Trump brand may have been a "factor that attracted police interest", though he cannot confirm it. "As for

Ms. Ivanka and her family, I want to say that business activities should abide by business regulations, and not use a family's political resources for personal commercial gain," said Hua. Hua, who was released on bail in June along with his colleagues, said he was interrogated on 16 occasions for up to three hours at a time.

He was kept in a shared cell where he slept beside a urine bucket. For the first week he was not given access to a lawyer, but the father of two said his conditions gradually improved as his wife paid the authorities to give him better food. Li Qiang, CLW's founding director, said the case marks the first time activists have faced police trouble in the non-profit's 17-year history. "But this is the first time we've investigated Ivanka Trump (suppliers), so it may very well be related to the brand," Li said.

Respect the law

The activists had been probing two plants owned by major footwear producer Huajian Group-one in the city of Dongguan in southern Guangdong province, the other in southern Jiangxi province's Ganzhou. A CLW statement alleged that factory employees worked 15-hour days with minimal breaks and no overtime pay, among other labor abuses. Collectively, the investigators worked undercover at the factories for several weeks between March and May.

Huajian Group did not respond to repeated requests for comment, but it has previously denied the allegations. For her part, Ivanka Trump company president Abigail Klem said in a statement: "After discussions with our licensee, we have determined that Ivanka Trump brand products have not been produced at the factory in question since March."

But CLW said they found the Ivanka Trump company listed on Huajian's production schedules for May and June, along with several other prominent overseas fashion brands.

The investigators' arrest put a fresh spotlight on Chinese business activities linked to the US presidential family. Ivanka Trump, who is a White House advisor, has taken a formal leave of absence from her fashion brand, announcing in January that she is no longer involved with the company's management or day-to-day operations. Her husband, Jared Kushner, is also a top aide to the US president and his own family business has come under scrutiny over its financial dealings in China. "I don't know much about (Ivanka Trump's) women's fashion brand, but any company or brand should respect the law and fulfill their responsibility towards society," Hua said. The activist said the police

in their questioning had been focused on a watch equipped with a camera, which was in a suitcase but had never been used. He said he only took cellphone photos of the public areas surrounding Dongguan. Hua worked in one factory for a day and was detained before he could go to another one.

World's factory

Hua and his fellow investigators have not been officially charged, nor has a trial date been set. Authorities said the case was still being investigated and declined to provide additional information. Hua, back home in central Hubei province, vowed to never stop doing labor rights work. "China is the world's factory; our workers work for the entire world," he said. "In the decades since economic reform and opening up, the labor community has paid too much." — AFP

News

In Brief

Philippines puts big casinos on money-laundering watch

MANILA: The Philippines said yesterday it would monitor large transactions at casinos to curb money-laundering, after proceeds from an \$81 million theft were funneled through several gambling establishments last year. President Rodrigo Duterte signed a law this week adding the gaming sector to monitored institutions. Casinos must now report to the central bank's Anti-Money Laundering Council all transactions exceeding five million pesos. The law authorizes the council to obtain court orders freezing these funds for up to six months if it is suspected they were "in any way related to an unlawful activity". Funds proven in a court trial to be related to crime will be forfeited to the state.—AFP

Singapore offers Manila drones

SINGAPORE: Singapore said yesterday it has offered surveillance drones and urban warfare training to Philippine troops battling Islamist fighters, to prevent the militants becoming entrenched and threatening the rest of Southeast Asia. Philippine troops have been battling to dislodge militants loyal to the Islamic State group who seized parts of the southern city of Marawi on May 23 in a bid to establish a base in the Mindanao region, which shares sea borders with Malaysia and Indonesia. IS has said it plans to establish a caliphate in Southeast Asia as it did in parts of Iraq and Syria. Singapore's defense ministry said its offer includes the use by Filipino troops of its urban warfare training facilities and a detachment of drones.



JAKARTA: In this file photo, members of Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia hold posters during a rally in Jakarta, Indonesia. — AP

Indonesia bans local branch of Hizb ut-Tahrir

JAKARTA: Indonesia's government yesterday banned the local branch of Islamic group Hizb ut-Tahrir, rejecting criticism from rights groups that the move was undemocratic. The government said it revoked the license of Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) because the group conducted activities that were against the state ideology. Hizb ut-Tahrir, which calls for Islamic law and wants to unify all Muslims into a caliphate, has been operating for decades in Indonesia and has tens of thousands of followers. "With HTI's legal status revoked, the group is therefore disbanded," the justice ministry said in a statement. HTI said it would challenge the decision. "This is a true form of abuse by the government against its own citizens," HTI spokesman Ismail Yusanto said.

Four Shiites shot dead in SW Pakistan: Police

QUETTA, Pakistan: Gunmen ambushed a car and killed four family members from the Shiite Muslim minority in a sectarian attack in southwest Pakistan yesterday, police said. The men sprayed bullets at the vehicle of the Hazara Shiite family travelling to Karachi as they passed through Choto, a town some 40 kilometers south of the Balochistan provincial capital Quetta. "Four people of a family, including a woman, were killed and another man wounded when gunmen fired with automatic weapons on their car as it slowed down on a speed bump," local police station chief Abdul Qudoos said. "It is a sectarian killing as the family had no enemy," Qudoos said.

China aggressive in border row, says India diplomat

NEW DELHI: A top Indian diplomat said China is being unusually aggressive in a month-old border dispute with India that shows no sign of easing, media reports said yesterday. Beijing has made virtually daily warnings to its neighbor over the deadlock on a remote Himalayan plateau, where Indian and Chinese troops have been locked in a tense face off. Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar told lawmakers in a closed briefing on the dispute that India wanted a diplomatic settlement, the reports said. "Jaishankar told us that China's aggression and rhetoric on the recent standoff is unusual," a member of the parliamentary panel at Tuesday's briefing told Indian media. "We will continue to engage with them through diplomatic channels," the foreign ministry number two was quoted as saying by Press Trust of India news agency. —Agencies

COURT FINDS THAI GENERAL GUILTY OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

VERDICT IS BEING CLOSELY-WATCHED INSIDE, OUTSIDE THAILAND

BANGKOK: A Thai general was found guilty of human trafficking yesterday as a Bangkok court convicted scores of people in a mass trial exposing the lynchpin role of corrupt officials in the grim, lucrative trade in Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants. Thailand's junta launched a crackdown in May 2015 on a network funneling desperate migrants through southern Thailand and onto Malaysia, holding some for ransom in jungle camps.

It unspooled a crisis across Southeast Asia as gangmasters abandoned their human cargo in the camps where hundreds died from starvation and malaria, and at sea in overcrowded boats which were then "ping ponged" between Thai, Malaysian and Indonesian waters. After a day delivering verdicts for many of the 102 defendants, Bangkok Criminal Court found Lieutenant-General Manas Kongpaen guilty of multiple human trafficking charges. A judge said he was also guilty of complicity in a "transnational organized crime" network and "worked with others to facilitate human trafficking."

The ruling is an extremely rare conviction for a senior army officer in junta-ruled Thailand. Manas, the highest-ranking official on trial, was a top figure in the security apparatus covering Thailand's south—a key transit zone in a trafficking trail that stretched from Myanmar to Malaysia. The court heard he received bank transfers from trafficking agents worth 14.8 million baht. But the police investigation found he also used his position to guide trafficking gangs around checkpoints after their arrival on remote beaches as they headed to the jungle camps.

In 2013 he was promoted to head the Internal Security Command (ISOC) for the



BANGKOK: In this senior adviser to the Royal Thai Army Lt. Gen. Manas Kongpaen arrives at the Criminal Court in Bangkok, Thailand. — AP

entire south. Current junta leader Prayut Chan-O-Cha was army chief at the time. Before the crackdown rights groups had long accused officials of ignoring and even conducting the trade in humans through Thailand's southern provinces. The trial has revealed a lattice of military, police, local political and mafia figures acting as traffickers, agents and logistics men, all soaking up cash from some of Asia's poorest and most vulnerable migrants. Over the years the smuggling gangs are estimated to have netted tens of millions of dollars.

Soldiers and kingpins

Some reporting restrictions were placed by judges citing national security and Manas was allowed to give evidence behind closed doors. Another well-connected kingpin con-

victed yesterday is Pajuban Aungka-chotephan, better known as Ko Tong or 'Big Brother Tong'. Police accused him of using private Andaman Sea islands, close to tourist spots such as Koh Lipe, to shift boatloads of migrants to the mainland, where they were packed into lorries and taken to the fetid camps straddling the Malaysia border. He was found guilty of human trafficking and links to organized crime.

By evening over 50 people, including two police officers had been convicted of various offences, ranging from guarding the squalid migrant camps to trafficking and negligence. At least ten were acquitted including an army captain and a ranking police officer. Thailand's role as a key trafficking route spilled into full view after officials found dozens of shallow graves in the hidden

camp camps dotting the steep, forested hills of the Thai-Malaysian border in May 2015. They revealed the horrors endured by some of the migrants, who were starved and held in bamboo pens by traffickers who demanded over \$1,000 for their release.

Big business, big money

The verdict is being closely-watched inside and outside Thailand. The government is desperate to dispel the kingdom's notorious reputation for human trafficking. Earlier yesterday Junta chief Prayut angrily denied the case reflected systemic corruption within the security services. "Manas alone will not make the entire military collapse," he told reporters. Critics say the case was prematurely concluded and describe a trial marred by witness intimidation, secret evidence hearings and restrictions on media reporting.

"We expect there are many more perpetrators out there," Amy Smith, from Fortify Rights, said. "This is a big business with big money." The senior policeman who initially headed the investigation, Major General Paween Pongsirin, fled Thailand under threats to his life.

Days before he left he said the case had been pulled before it could delve further into the complexity of officials. Stateless Rohingya Muslims have fled neighboring Myanmar in their tens of thousands since sectarian violence flared in 2012.

They were joined by Bangladeshi economic migrants on rickety boats southwards across the Andaman Sea, seeking work and sanctuary in Malaysia and Indonesia. Thousands are believed to have died at sea, in a migrant flow that garnered few headlines until the trafficking crackdown in 2015. — AFP

PHILIPPINES' DUTERTE THREATENS TO END PEACE TALKS AFTER ATTACK

MANILA: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte threatened to end peace talks with communist rebels yesterday, hours after suspected guerrillas wounded four of his military bodyguards in an ambush. Aides said Duterte, 72, was not in the convoy when gunmen opened fire on two Presidential Security Group vehicles along a highway on the main southern island of Mindanao, where martial law is in effect. The government blamed the New People's Army—the 4,000-member armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines—and threatened to shelve peace negotiations unless the guerrillas stopped targeting soldiers in the south.

"The president directed the government panel... not to resume formal peace talks unless the reds (leftist rebels) agree to stop their attacks against government troops in Mindanao," said a statement issued by the presidential palace. The latest communist attack came as government forces on Mindanao fought Islamic State group-inspired militants who have been holed up in the southern city of Marawi since May 23. The communist party, which is waging Asia's longest-running insurgency, called on its armed wing on Tuesday to launch offensives in response to Duterte's plan to put Mindanao under martial law until the end of the year. A 60-day martial rule is now in force on Mindanao as part of the

military campaign in Marawi, but the Duterte government said Tuesday it needed more time to accomplish the mission. The communist insurgency that began in 1968 and which the military says is now mostly waged in Mindanao has claimed an estimated 30,000 lives. The rebels have been in off-and-on peace talks with the government since Duterte, a self-described socialist, was elected last year.

Both sides declared unilateral cease-fires, but these did not last. Duterte suspended formal peace talks in May after both sides failed to resolve a dispute over a rebel order for fighters to step up attacks.

To try and end the two-month impasse, Duterte was planning to send negotiators shortly to an unspecified venue and informally discuss a possible bilateral ceasefire agreement, the government statement said. But it warned that for formal peace talks to resume, the rebels must commit to "suspending operations against the military and the police and stopping all their extortion activities on the ground". A senior Mindanao military official, Brigadier-General Gilberto Gapay, said the communists were behind the attack on the Duterte bodyguards. "This is part of their nationwide call for armed groups to oppose martial law by launching intensified offensives against government forces," Gapay told radio station DZBB in Manila. — AFP

SURF'S UP! NORTH KOREA TOURISM AGENCY TRIES TO WOO FOREIGNERS

SEOUL: North Korea's tourism agency has launched a website offering holiday options ranging from surfing to rice planting, despite strong US warnings to avoid travel to a nation where several trips have ended in jail. Sixteen Americans have been detained in the past decade in North Korea, including 22-year-old student Otto Warmbier who was given a long prison term for stealing a hotel propaganda banner. He was sent home in a coma in June but died several days later.

The "DPR Korea Tour" website, run by the North's National Tourism Administration, depicts the country—which is subject to stiff sanctions over its weapons programs—as just another tourist destination. It introduces package trips to various parts of the country including the capital Pyongyang, and offers various "theme tours" for travelers seeking

something more unusual. Visitors are invited to check out beaches on the east coast, including the Majon Bathing Beach, where "surfing has come into vogue among tourists" for its favorable conditions and clean water.

The website also provides basic travel information like air and train routes and ways to get around Pyongyang using public transport such as cabs and buses. However, it does not allow users to book tours directly and does not list the handful of foreign agencies that arrange trips to the isolated state. The country's official name is the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The US State Department strongly warns Americans against travelling to North Korea, citing "serious risk of arrest and long-term detention". Canada, Australia and New Zealand are among other nations giving similar warnings.—AFP



MYANMAR: This photo shows a Muslim woman sewing machine at her room in Da Paing IDP camp near Sittwe town in Rakhine state. — AFP

THAI SMUGGLING CRACKDOWN LEAVES MYANMAR'S ROHINGYA IN LIMBO

SITTWE, Myanmar: Five years have passed since Hla Hla Sein was forced into a displacement camp in western Myanmar for Rohingya Muslims, where disease and deprivation are rife and armed guards patrol a barbed-wire perimeter. But after a crackdown on the international smuggling routes that once offered a dangerous-but viable-escape route, she now sees no way out. "We have no idea how many years we will have to live like this," the 40-year-old widow said inside the tiny bamboo hut she shares with her son, tugging nervously at her purple headscarf.

"Our lives are worse than animals... we are human only in name." Deadly sectarian riots in 2012 drove more than 120,000 Rohingya into the camps in Rakhine State, where they live in ramshackle homes and are deprived of adequate food, schools and doctors. For years human traffickers cashed in on the group's desperation, ferrying thousands of Rohingya across the Andaman Sea to countries like Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia. The journeys were defined by danger: from rickety boats on high seas to abuse and even death at the hands of the gangs, who held many victims for ransom in jungle camps on the Thai-Malaysia border.

That route was shuttered by Thailand's junta in 2015 and few boats have left the camps since, according to residents, aid workers and migration experts. The move may have spared Hla Hla Sein death at sea or abuse at the hands of smugglers, but it

also cut off a way out of a painful limbo. While a Bangkok court rules yesterday on the fate of more than 100 people arrested for running the trafficking network, she will spend another day distributing food rations in the camp.

Ready to die

Hla Hla Sein and her son had tried to escape to Malaysia before the crackdown, but their boat was so overcrowded it started to sink a few hours into the journey, forcing the captain to turn back. It was only after they returned to shore that she found out the smugglers had planned to sell them as slaves at their destination. "I was ready to die at sea as we have nothing in this country," she said. "Our children cannot get education, even I cannot work. I thought dying would be better."

Buddhist-majority Myanmar has long been chastised for its treatment of the Rohingya, a group of more than a million Muslims whose rights and freedoms have been successively stripped away since the early 1980s. Over the past five years almost 170,000 have fled the country, according to the UN's refugee agency, leaving many families split across borders. "It's impossible to go to Malaysia by boat nowadays," said a Rohingya camp leader, asking not to be named. "We do not want people to die at sea." Recently, a new outbreak of violence in northern Rakhine pushed more than 70,000 Rohingyas across Myanmar's north-western border to Bangladesh. — AFP

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Focus

DARK DAYS FOR CHINA
DEMOCRACY DREAM

The death of Liu Xiaobo deprives China's dissident movement of a crucial figurehead at a time when political activism on the mainland is being forced ever deeper underground, and pro-democracy forces in Hong Kong are under threat. The world had not heard from Nobel laureate Liu since he was jailed in 2009 for writing a petition calling for political reform, but he remained an influential heavyweight of China's democracy movement and an inspiration for opponents of the Communist-ruled system.

His death in custody from cancer last week triggered rage and frustration among the dissident community but also a sense of hopelessness as they face hardened repression under China's President Xi Jinping. "When the Chinese authorities can so easily control life and death, people are more afraid to fight," said activist Su Yutong, who fled to Germany after being repeatedly detained and questioned over her work at an NGO. "They see that even a Nobel Peace Prize winner can die in jail."

There are fears that Liu's supporters will now be targeted, particularly his wife Liu Xia, who has been under house arrest since 2010. Veteran China specialist Willy Lam said most of Liu's friends were already under 24-hour surveillance and that the dissident community in general was "highly demoralized". "They realize they are going through a long winter with no light at the end of the tunnel," said Lam, a politics professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

The fact that support from the international community is outweighed by the desire of foreign governments to keep Beijing onside has also hit hard, said Teng Biao, a human rights lawyer and visiting scholar at Princeton University. "If the West is reluctant to anger China, there will be no hope," Teng told AFP. However, some say they will brave it out. One of the country's most prominent social activists Hu Jia, 43, has vowed not to leave China despite being under police surveillance since his release from prison six years ago. "I want to stay and make an impact on the country," he told AFP.

Hong Kong remembers

Liu's death prompted an outpouring of grief in semi-autonomous Hong Kong, where pro-democracy forces must also contend with an increasingly assertive Beijing. "We have to face the same political system and oppression," said pro-democracy lawmaker Eddie Chu. "There used to be some distance, but now it's more intimately felt." A day after Liu died, Hong Kong's High Court disqualified four pro-democracy lawmakers from parliament following an unprecedented intervention from Beijing over the way they incorporated protests into their oaths of office last year. Two lawmakers who advocate complete independence for Hong Kong - a concept that infuriates China - had already been ousted from the legislature. Hong Kong still enjoys freedoms unseen on the mainland - thousands gathered for a memorial march to Liu on Saturday, while over the border even online tributes to him were removed. But a string of incidents, including the disappearance of a city bookseller and a reclusive mainland tycoon, have heightened concerns of Beijing's political overreach.

When it was handed back to China by Britain in 1997 under a semi-autonomous 'one country, two systems' deal, some hoped Hong Kong's colonial institutions, such as an independent judiciary and partially elected legislature, would lead to liberalization over the border. However, as China's wealth and global clout skyrocketed, Hong Kong's influence waned. Now it is seen by Beijing as a hotbed of subversion, particularly since mass protests calling for more democratic reform in 2014.

Xi warned any challenge to Beijing's control over Hong Kong crossed a "red line" earlier this month when he visited the city to mark 20 years since the handover. Jonathan Sullivan, director of the China Policy Institute at the University of Nottingham, described the current political environment as "increasingly circumscribed". "It remains to be seen if (the democracy movement) feels it can advance its agenda through the 'legitimate' political process. And if not will there be a resurgence of street politics?" asked Sullivan. The movement itself is struggling for direction, having splintered between veteran activists calling for change across China and younger Hong Kong-centric "localists" who say the city must just fight for itself. Analysts agree that by-elections for the seats of the ousted lawmakers will prove whether or not the pro-democracy message is alive and kicking.

Lawmaker Chu says the movement needs a clearer vision, but must also accept that change will not come quickly. "Liu Xiaobo persevered, sacrificing even his life, not because he knew he would succeed but because he saw himself as part of a long-term process," Chu told AFP. "Maybe Hong Kong is like this too. It's not about setting a goal for victory at a certain time." — AFP

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OPIUM NUMBS THE PAIN FOR PICKERS

For almost three years, Amandeep started most of his working days eating opium and ended them smoking heroin. In between he picked watermelons for up to 13 hours a day in what activists say are exploitative conditions faced by thousands of Indian laborers in Italy's Pontine Marshes, just south of Rome. Drugs helped him get by, says Amandeep, a 30-year-old who asked to use a pseudonym. "In summer it is very hot, your back hurts. A bit of opium helps you not to get tired...Too much puts you to sleep, I took just a little, only to work," Amandeep told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

About 30,000 Indians, mainly Sikhs from Punjab state, live in the Pontine Marshes, a region that Italy's fascist regime drained for agriculture in the 1930s. Most work as laborers and over the last decade many have been forced to work for virtually nothing to pay off debts to agents who promised good jobs and organized travel from India. This is known as debt bondage - the most prevalent form of modern-day slavery worldwide according to the United Nations. As many as 46 million people are estimated to be enslaved globally, said rights group Walk Free Foundation in 2016.

Atypical Addicts

The Indian workers have settled in villages and the seaside towns where Romans spend holidays, but they have secluded lives. Speaking little or no Italian, many cycle long distances every day from rundown, shared accommodation to the thousands of farms and greenhouses that produce courgettes, radishes, melons, kiwis and mozzarella. A growing number of these laborers are taking drugs to cope with long hours, poor conditions and very low pay, according to interviews with workers, doctors, police and rights groups.

Most chew dried poppy pods, which contain low levels of morphine and codeine, but when consumed regularly can cause addiction that requires methadone treatment. Some, like Amandeep, slide into consuming heavier drugs, including heroin. "They are not typical addicts," said Ezio

Matacchioni, a neurologist at the addiction treatment department of a hospital in the provincial capital of Latina. These users do not seek euphoria or pleasure, he said. "They take drugs to put up with the strain... because they are treated like slaves."

Debt Bondage

Amandeep was prescribed methadone two years ago after he was hospitalized during a withdrawal fit. He first arrived in Italy from Punjab in 2008, dreaming of a bright future promised by a labor agent to whom he paid \$13,000 for a plane ticket and travel documents. Amandeep paid half up front and took a loan from the agent for the rest, which he paid back by working virtually for free for about seven months. "(I was left with) just about enough to eat and pay the rent," he said.

Many Indian laborers who settled here in the last 10 years came in similar circumstances, said Marco Omizzolo of In Migrazione, a migrant rights group. "Traffickers promise work and accommodation as well as sorting out travel and paper work, four essential things for those who do not speak Italian," he said. Newcomers are sometimes stripped of their documents to ensure they don't leave until the debt is repaid, he added. Afterwards most remain in the area, where they rely on the support of the Sikh community but remain vulnerable to exploitation. In many farms, pickers are paid €3-5 (\$3.30-\$5.50) an hour - well below the industry minimum wage of about €8 - and work without breaks in scorching summer temperatures. Those hired with a regular contract often have fewer days than they actually work recorded on their payslips. "I can't read my contract," said one laborer. "Before coming here I thought Italy was a paradise but I still haven't found where that paradise is."

The work is overseen by gang masters, known as "caporali", often members of the Sikh community acting as go-betweens with employers, who recruit pickers but withhold part of their pay. "If the farm owner pays 4 euros, (gangmasters) tell (workers) the pay is 3.80 and pocket the difference," said Gurmukh Singh, head of a local Indian

community association. Andrea de Gasperis, a regional chief prosecutor, said investigation was difficult as few people are willing to speak out against other members of their community. "There is little we can do if they do not report (abuses)," he said. Those who do are seen as troublemakers and it's hard for them to find another work, added Omizzolo.

The code of silence began to crack in April 2016 when Singh helped organized a strike and demonstrations for better pay. Those protests encouraged many workers to come forward - but also exposed Singh to threats and intimidation. Police have since carried out dozens of inspections, and have arrested two gangmasters, a farm owner and a farm manager. Pietro Greco, head of the local branch of Italy's main farming association, said Italy's notorious red tape was also responsible for pushing some employers to cut corners. "If there was less bureaucracy many companies would hire workers with no need for middlemen or caporali," he said.

Poppy Fields

Meanwhile, the consumption of poppy pods is spreading. Omizzolo and Singh said they first heard about opioid use four years ago and reports have been increasing since. Few workers will admit chewing husks as drug use is taboo in the community. Yet laborers said the pods are a common sight and are relatively cheap, with 100 grams costing about €10. One picker said almost half of his about 50 co-workers made regular use of the drug.

At least one worker told a mobile health clinic that he wanted to quit but found it difficult as poppy use was "strongly encouraged" on his farm. Two addiction help centers treated more than 20 Indian laborers with methadone in 2016 and they expect the number to rise this year. "We are the tip of the iceberg," said Matacchioni, the neurologist. Patients seek help to cope with withdrawal that can cause chills, sweating, diarrhoea, vomiting and muscle pain. Gianfranco Mozzillo, head of a local police unit, said poppy pod trafficking is an "expanding phenomenon". —Reuters

MCCONNELL: 'THE MAN IN THE MIDDLE'

For seven years, US Senator Mitch McConnell vowed to slay Obamacare if only his Republican Party controlled both chambers of Congress and the White House. Pull it out "root and branch," he pledged. The 75-year-old Senate majority leader now has that luxury. But instead of basking in the glow of his first major legislative victory in the Donald Trump era, McConnell is what a source close to the majority leader calls "the man in the middle in an impossible spot."

Late on Monday and again on Tuesday, after a long struggle, McConnell's efforts to repeal all or portions of former President Barack Obama's landmark 2010 Affordable Care Act and replace them with less expensive healthcare came crashing down. With 52 Republican senators in the 100-member chamber, McConnell could lose only two of his colleagues on any bill that was opposed by Democrats and still win with Vice President Mike Pence casting the tie-breaking vote. Three times, he failed to muster the 50 supporters needed.

The man who epitomized "the party of no" in Democrats' eyes during Obama's presidency, especially when he slammed the door in February 2016 on Merrick Garland's Supreme Court nomination, fell victim to the "no" of fellow Republicans. "We finally get a chance to repeal and replace, and they don't take advantage of it," Trump, six months into his four-year presidential term, said on Tuesday.

Around Washington, there was dismay Republicans could not deliver on a promise they assert helped them to assume control in January of Congress and the White House. "I am kind of shocked," said Republican Representative Dave Brat, of the conservative firebrand House Freedom Caucus that has been a thorn in the side of the Republican establishment. His hand weakened, McConnell could be heading into fierce budget battles, a tax reform fight



Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell talks to reporters following the weekly Senate Republican policy luncheon at the US Capitol Tuesday in Washington. —AFP

and a storm over legislation avoiding a government debt default that could shake global financial markets. The result has Democrats feeling emboldened 16 months before the next congressional elections.

Reputation Questioned

Around town, the sphinxlike McConnell is known as a master of Senate rules, able to outfox opponents, giving nothing away until he can strike at just the right moment. The senator's leadership job, a position he yearned for in the years leading up to his 2015 ascension, does not appear to be in jeopardy. But this rocky run calls into question McConnell's reputation as a master tactician and dealmaker that he earned as Republican minority leader under the Democratic Obama.

It is "a real blow to Republicans in Congress generally and to leadership," said

former Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, a Republican. More of the blame sits with the rank-and-file, Lott said. "The problem in Washington today is not lack of leadership. The problem is lack of followership." Had McConnell succeeded, Lott said he would have been "considered a magician" given the inability of Republicans to coalesce around healthcare legislation for so many years.

A Republican operative with ties to McConnell saw a possible silver lining: Failure to pass healthcare could boost chances for tax reform or infrastructure investment if Republicans felt it a more urgent political imperative to rack up a win for Trump before the November 2018 congressional elections.

Fatal Flaws?

McConnell, a courtly Kentuckian who can appear at pains to speak to reporters

nipping at his heels, won accolades in years past for cutting deals with Democrats to keep the government operating and making permanent most of former President George W. Bush's tax cuts. Those deals involved giving voters government services and lower taxes. But Republican healthcare legislation involves taking something away from millions of lower-income people - their medical coverage.

"In part they (Republicans) misunderstood how difficult it will be" to repeal and replace Obamacare, former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, a Democrat, said in a phone interview. Republican rhetoric against Obamacare was so "hyperbolic" it had to take priority early in Trump's presidency, but senators lacked enthusiasm for legislation, said Daschle, who like Lott lobbies on behalf of healthcare interests.

Once boxed into healthcare, McConnell took another controversial step, one that many Republicans questioned. Instead of developing a healthcare bill in public, McConnell and his top aides, with the advice of a 13-member group of male senators, called the shots. McConnell said hearings were unnecessary, as healthcare policy had been intensively debated since Obama took office in 2009. He said he was listening to suggestions of all of his 51 fellow Republican senators.

Many senators felt disconnected and tensions boiled over. As Monday wore on, matters only got worse for McConnell. Republican Senator Ron Johnson publicly accused him of "a real breach in trust" in hard-charging back-room negotiations. He threatened to withhold support for the bill. McConnell supporters argued that no matter how he handled the private negotiations, the Republican leader was dealt a difficult hand from the outset. "The majority leader is trying to keep all the frogs in the wheelbarrow and it's a tough job but he's doing a good job," said Republican Senator Lisa Murkowski. —Reuters



NATO paratroopers drop out of a US Air Force Hercules during the 'Swift Response 17' joint airborne military exercise at Bezmer airfield near the village of Bezmer on Tuesday. The US led exercise, part of the multinational 'Saber Guardian 2017' exercise, involves up to 1,600 soldiers from the United States, Canada, Italy, Portugal and Greece. — AFP

CAN TRUMP SAVE HIS PRESIDENCY?

Continued from Page 1

Republican defections, all of this is not what you expect," said Julian Zelizer, a professor of history at Princeton University.

Trump swaggered into office on Jan 20 declaring Washington was broke and only a killer businessman such as himself could fix it. That promise looks increasingly threadbare. The White House remains understaffed, under-skilled and struggling to attract new talent. Existing staff there admit to being exhausted and demoralized. Trump's political agenda has been blown to smithereens: The border "wall" has not been built, NAFTA has not been torn up, the Iran deal is still in place and Obamacare remains the law of the land.

Even with Republicans in control of both houses of Congress, the influential and nominally supportive Drudge Report declared this the "MOST UNPRODUCTIVE CONGRESS IN 164 YEARS." Oratorically, Trump has continued where his campaign left off, picking fights with the press, judges, his own party, Democrats and FBI director James Comey, whom he fired. All the while, a drip, drip of evidence has amplified allegations that his family and aides sought help from Russia to tip the election against Hillary Clinton.

There have been bright spots. The Islamic State group has been virtually defeated in Mosul and in Raqqa, the capital of the so-called caliphate, is besieged. Trump has fulfilled his promise to scrap a trans-pacific trade deal, and successfully appointed conservative judge Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court. But Trump wins have been few and far between. "I don't see these six months as a success and it's hard for me to see the argument that it was," said Zelizer.

But presidents can and do right the course. Bill Clinton's first term was notoriously difficult and like Trump he suffered an early and embarrassing legislative defeat on healthcare. "History is full of examples of presidents who learn from their mistakes and go on to have major legislative successes," said Alex Conant, a Republican strategist at Firehouse Strategies who served in George W. Bush's administration. "Presidents are ultimately judged

on what they get done and he's only six months in. There is still plenty of time for them to do a lot. He could still end up being a highly successful president."

But changes would be needed, Conant admits. Even Republicans have criticized Trump's recent failed efforts to push his own healthcare reforms over the line. With little policy background, Trump has seemed more at home with the theater of the presidency: Preferring military parades in Paris to making policy speeches and wrangling votes. "A couple of meetings with senators and a handful of tweets is not going to cut it on something as controversial as healthcare reform," said Conant.

But, he argues, Trump still has the time and some of the skills needed to secure victories, as long as he is willing to make the pitch. "His entire life he's been a very good marketer and during the campaign he did an amazing job energizing the conservative base," Conant said. "Those are the skills he needs to now apply to governing." "In his previous life he was marketing everything from steaks to bottled water to condos with his name on it. Now tax reform is going to have his name on it."

But Trump's character could equally prove his administration's worst enemy. "A lot of the problems he faces are him, and he's not going to change his personality," said Zelizer. Michael Signer, the Democratic Mayor of Charlottesville and a lecturer at the University of Virginia said "the path to legitimacy" for Trump "would be to signal his embrace of our traditional norms and our checks and balances." "The more he refuses to do that, the lower his numbers will go, the more illegitimate his presidency will get and the more desperate he will get."

If nothing changes, Trump's approval ratings - already historically low at 40 percent - could portend a shellacking in the 2018 midterm elections. "If Democrats strengthen their size or gain power in one or both chambers then the president is in for a ride," said Zelizer, predicting impeachment hearings and wholesale pushback. "The more cornered he feels, he's not going to have some diplomatic response. He'll get angry, he'll attack his attackers. I don't think it gets calmer or pretty in the Oval Office, I think as things get intense it's going to get much uglier." — AFP

FRENCH MILITARY CHIEF RESIGNS

Continued from Page 1

had lost "a man of huge value" and claimed de Villiers' resignation showed "the very serious abuses and worrying limits" of Macron's leadership.

De Villiers had repeatedly complained that the military was overstretched and said he saw it as his duty to inform politicians. In a Facebook "letter to a young recruit" last week, he wrote: "As everyone has their shortcomings, no-one should be blindly followed."

The opposition accused Macron of humiliating his military chief but Prime Minister Edouard Philippe told parliament yesterday de Villiers could not, as a soldier, "honorably contest his boss's choices". Retired General Dominique Trinquant, who advised Macron during his campaign, said the row had cast a pall over his otherwise "remarkable" start in office. "This is a hitch that will probably be a bit difficult to get past," he said in an interview with AFP.

Macron's defense cuts - part of a 4.5-billion-euro reduction in spending aimed at reducing France's budget deficit - have been viewed by the military as a betrayal after his strong show of support for the armed forces. On his first day as president, he visited soldiers injured in overseas operations and his maiden foreign trip as leader

took him to Mali to meet French troops engaged in counter-terrorism operations.

A former head of the French air force, General Vincent Lanata, told L'Express news weekly on Tuesday he was "very shocked" by Macron's "rant" at de Villiers. The crisis was exacerbated by its timing, coming in the week of the July 14 Bastille Day military parade, where US President Donald Trump was the guest of honor. During the parade, Macron rode down the Champs-Elysees avenue in an open-topped military vehicle with a grim-faced de Villiers as Trump looked on.

Macron says the belt-tightening is temporary and that he remains committed to boosting defence spending to 2.0 percent of gross domestic product by 2025 (around 50 billion euros), in line with NATO targets. Nuclear-armed France and Britain are the biggest military powers in the European Union. French forces are currently engaged on three fronts. French jets are taking part in strikes against Islamic State jihadists in Syria and Iraq. Some 4,000 French soldiers are involved in efforts to stop the spread of extremism in West Africa. And at home, 7,000 soldiers are deployed to patrol the streets after a series of terror attacks that have killed more than 230 people since 2015. — AFP

QUARTET SWAPS 13 QATAR DEMANDS...

Continued from Page 1

Mouallimi said the four-nation quartet thinks it "should be easy for the Qataris to accept" the six principles. He stressed that implementation and monitoring must be "essential components", and "there will be no compromise when it comes to principles". But he said both sides can talk about details of "the tactics" and "the tools" to implement them - "and that's where we can have discussion and compromise."

The Saudi ambassador explained that the initial 13 points included some principles and some tools to achieve compliance. Mixed in the 13 points were what Western nations might see as fair demands, such as cracking down on support for extremists and curbing ties with Iran, and tougher-to-swallow calls to shut down the Al-Jazeera television network - one of Qatar's best-known brands - and kick out troops from NATO member Turkey, which has a base in Qatar.

Mouallimi stressed that stopping incitement to violence is essential, but he said closing Al-Jazeera might not be necessary. "If the only way to achieve that is by closing down Al-Jazeera, fine," he said. "If we can achieve that without closing down Al-Jazeera, that's also fine. The important thing is the objective and the principle involved."

UAE Minister of State for International Cooperation Reem Al-Hashimy said all the countries involved have strong relations with the United States "and we believe that the Americans have a very constructive and a very important role to play in hopefully creating a peaceful resolution to this current crisis". US President Donald Trump has sided strongly with Saudi Arabia and the UAE in the dispute, publicly backing their contention that Qatar is a supporter of Islamic militant groups and a destabilizing force in the Middle East.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson recently concluded several days of shuttle diplomacy and sealed a deal to intensify Qatar's counterterrorism efforts. The memorandum of understanding signed by the US and Qatar

lays out steps Qatar can take to bolster its fight against terrorism and address shortfalls in policing terrorism funding. Hashimy called the MOU "an excellent step". "We'd like to see more of that," she said. "We'd like to see stronger measures taken and stronger commitment made to address that." Hashimy said "at this stage the ball is in Qatar's court". "We're looking for a serious change in behavior, serious measures," she said. "No more talk."

Qatar has further escalated the situation by encouraging Turkey's military presence, Hashimy said. "We do not want to see a military escalation of any kind," she said. "We hope to be able to resolve this internally and among ourselves with the assistance of strong mediation, whether it's from the US or the Kuwaitis."

Mouallimi stressed that Qatar's future lies with its neighbors not with "faraway places", a clear reference to Turkey and Iran which are supporting Doha. "Our Turkish brothers need to recognize that the era of covert and to some extent unwanted intervention in the Arab world has long gone," he said. "If Turkey wants to play a constructive role they are welcome to do so, but trying to find the role through military bases or military intervention would not be productive, and would not fare well for Turkey's reputation in the Arab world."

Diplomats from the four countries who attended the briefing said there have been discussions about possible next steps. UAE Ambassador Lana Nusseibeh said that "if Qatar is unwilling to accept core principles around what defines terrorism or extremism in our region, it will be very difficult" for it to remain in the Gulf Cooperation Council with Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain. "So it may be a parting of ways for a little while in order to work things out," she said. Mouallimi said the quartet briefed the 10 elected Security Council members Tuesday and hopes to meet the permanent members as well. There are no plans to take the dispute to the UN's most powerful body, he said, but "if we develop the conviction that that is a necessary move forward, then we will do so." — Agencies

AUTHORITIES CALL FOR INFO ON ABSCONDING...

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, Islamist opposition MP Waleed Al-Tabtabaei said yesterday he plans to call for an emergency National Assembly session to discuss the pro-Iran cell. Tabtabaei said on his Twitter account that he is coordinating with opposition MPs Mohammad Hayef and Mohammad Al-Mutair to request the emergency session for the Assembly, which is currently on summer

recess. Tabtabaei and his colleagues must secure the signature of 33 MPs in order to submit a request calling for the emergency session, according to Assembly laws.

Tabtabaei and Hayef have sent several questions to the interior minister about the 14 men and demanded that the ministry issue a statement clarifying the reported escape. The 14 men were set free after the appeals court acquitted them last year. But the court of cassation overturned the ruling and sentenced them to various jail terms.



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NEUER REPLACES LAHM AS BAYERN'S CAPTAIN

BERLIN: Germany goalkeeper and captain Manuel Neuer will replace Philipp Lahm as Bayern Munich's skipper for next season, the Bundesliga champions' chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge has confirmed. "Our number one is the number one (choice) — Manuel Neuer," Rummenigge told Munich daily newspaper TZ. "He is an established professional, who will take the armband from Philipp Lahm. "He has developed really well with the national team-not only on, but also off the pitch." World Cup-winner Neuer has been Germany's goalkeeper since Bastian Schweinsteiger made his final international appearance last August. The 31-year-old Neuer steps in to skipper Bayern after Lahm retired from all football in May after 22 years with the Bavarian giants. Neuer has sat out Bayern's current tour of China and Singapore to recover from a foot surgery, but is expected to be back for the German giants when the new Bundesliga season kicks off on August 18. — AFP

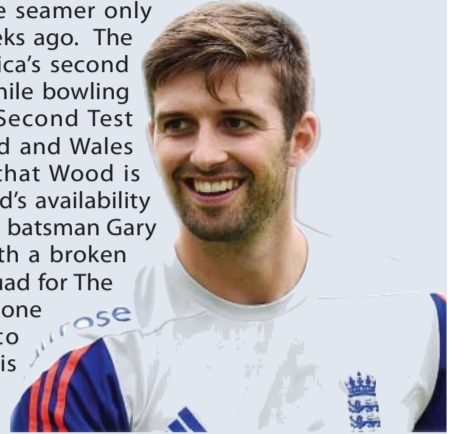


R&A CHIEF KEEN TO SEE AILING TIGER WOODS BACK

SOUTHPORT: The head of golf's governing body has expressed his hope that former world number one Tiger Woods will one day feature again at a British Open. This year's championship tees off on Thursday at Royal Birkdale in the town of Southport, north-west England, with Woods again absent. The 41-year-old's attempts to resurrect his career have been hit by a series of operations on his back since 2014, and he has made only one top-20 finish in the past two seasons. His absence this week means it is now seven straight majors that he has sat out. "I think the sport should be eternally grateful for the transformation he drove in golf. I would love to see him tee it up here again," R&A chief executive Martin Slumbers said at Birkdale yesterday ahead of the start of this year's Open. Woods has won 14 majors and once held the world number one ranking for a record 683 weeks. But this year Woods' rehabilitation from injury was overshadowed by his arrest in May for driving under the influence. "I hope he gets well. I hope he gets fit. I hope he falls back in love with golf. I hope he tees it up at the Open. He'd be extremely welcome," added Slumbers. Woods has won the Open three times, most recently at Hoylake, not far from Birkdale, in 2006. — AFP

ENGLAND SEAMER WOOD FIT FOR THIRD TEST

LONDON: England fast bowler Mark Wood has been passed fit for next week's Third Test against South Africa at The Oval after scans revealed no serious injury on his left heel. Wood has been blighted by injuries throughout his career, with ankle problems keeping him out of Test cricket for nearly two years from October 2015, with the seamer only making his comeback at Lord's two weeks ago. The 27-year-old sat out some of South Africa's second innings after suffering from soreness while bowling during England's humbling 340-run Second Test defeat at Trent Bridge. But the England and Wales Cricket Board confirmed Wednesday that Wood is available for next week-if selected. Wood's availability provides a timely boost for England with batsman Gary Ballance ruled out of the Third Test with a broken finger. The selectors will name their squad for The Oval on Friday or Saturday with at least one enforced change required due to Ballance's injury. The four-Test series is currently level at 1-1. — AFP



GOLF

MCILROY HOPING TO CATCH HIS WAVE AT BRITISH OPEN

SOUTHPORT: Just three years ago, Rory McIlroy was the best player in the world without a trace of argument. He won the final two majors of the year, with a World Golf Championship title in between. He had reason to believe his reign would last as long as he wanted it to.

Now he's simply trying to get back into the conversation. The starkest reminder of the state of his game was not so much missing three cuts in his last four tournaments. It was being told on the eve of the British Open that the bookies listed him at 20-1 to win at Royal Birkdale.

"Good time to back me," McIlroy said. "I mean, look, if I was a betting company and I saw my form over the past few weeks, yeah, that's probably a fair enough price. But again, all it takes is one week for those odds to go back."

He has been through these mini-slumps more than once in the 10 years since he first played the British Open at Carnoustie. McIlroy missed four of five cuts in 2012, including his title defense in the U.S. Open, and ended the summer by winning the PGA Championship to return to No. 1 in the world.

This one has been the most aggravating because it involves injury. The hairline rib fracture he suffered in January during the South African Open is no longer an issue, but it forced him to sit out nearly two months, and then he played only once in two months between the Masters and the U.S. Open in part because it was acting up.

It all led to what McIlroy describes as a start-and-stop year, one that to this point doesn't include a trophy. "But I'm in good spirits," McIlroy said. "I feel like it's all coming together. I'm just waiting for that round or that moment or that week where it sort of clicks and I'll be off and running. I've had little periods like this before in my career, and I've been able to bounce back



SOUTHPORT: Northern Ireland's Rory McIlroy speaks during a press conference ahead of the British Open Golf Championship, at Royal Birkdale, Southport, England yesterday. — AP

from them. I'd say I was in worse positions than this. I feel like my game ... the pieces are all there, it's just about trying to fit them together."

AS FOR HIS ODDS?

That speaks to a broader picture of the 146th edition of the British Open, which starts Thursday at Royal Birkdale. Dustin Johnson, the No. 1 player in the world, and Jordan Spieth have taken turns as the favorite by the bookies.

Right behind them is Jon Rahm, the dynamic 22-year-old from Spain who already has won twice this year. Masters champion Sergio Garcia is right up there. There is no clear favorite. There is no clear plot that is any different from the previ-

ous few majors, except for the US Open held on a new course in Wisconsin. Johnson was close to being a dominant figure when he won three straight tournaments against the strongest fields of the year at the time, and then he slipped down the stairs on the eve of the Masters, wrenched his back and didn't swing a club for a month.

Jason Day ended last year at No. 1 in the world, and then found himself emotionally wrapped up in tending to his mother, who was diagnosed with lung cancer. McIlroy wouldn't have seen this coming at the end of last year when he won the FedEx Cup.

"But these things sort of crop up out of nowhere and they challenge us," he said. Maybe it's one shot, one round, one

week to get that spark. That's what Johnson is looking for since his return from back injury.

"It's taken me a long time to get everything back to feeling where it was," Johnson said. "I'm trying to get back to that point. It's definitely a lot harder." When he won the British Open down the coast at Royal Liverpool in 2014, McIlroy mentioned an adage he first heard from Tom Weiskopf. When a player is going well, he can't imagine what it was like to play poorly. And when he's playing badly, he can't imagine what it was like to play great.

SO WHERE IS HE NOW?

"I feel like I can hit the ball in the fairway, and from there I can hit the ball on the green," McIlroy said. "And if I get my line, I can put the ball in the hole from there. So it's not bad. It's not as if I can't see myself shooting a good score. It's all there. It's just a matter of putting it all together."

He has slipped so far from the dominant force in golf - McIlroy hasn't been at No. 1 since September 2015 - that he could win the next two majors and still probably not reach Johnson at the top of the ranking.

His odds would certainly get better, just like when he was the favorite at just about every major. He still remembers those days. "When you ride on the crest of a wave, it's easy to get caught up with those expectations and you start believing them," he said. "When I won those three tournaments in '14 and I was where I was in the game, of course I thought, 'OK, I really can keep this going.' ... And some things just come along that you don't expect."

"I'm in a place where I'm trying to figure out how I get back to that position where I was," he said. "I'm trying to get back there and I'm doing everything I can. And hopefully the start of that crest of a wave happens this week." — AP

TRUMP MAKES JASON A DAY LATE ARRIVING AT BIRKDALE

SOUTHPORT: Jason Day is hopeful he can figure prominently at this week's British Open despite arriving at Royal Birkdale later than planned thanks to Donald Trump. The Australian was due to be in England on Sunday but ended up putting back his departure by 24 hours because of flight delays in New York which he put down to the US President.

"I had three weeks off before this, so I could have got in early," Day said at Birkdale on the eve of Thursday's Open first round. "I was actually supposed to get here Sunday. And I was flying through JFK and President Trump was there and there was a bunch of delays. So I just decided to move my flight back a little bit later." Trump attended the US Women's Open in New Jersey last weekend, and the delays allowed Day to spend an extra day at home with his young children, and be there for his son's birthday.

The 29-year-old world number six's change of plans meant he did not practice on the Southport links on Monday, but he believes a lack of golf going into the championship could benefit him.

"Usually I get in here to places like this early. I usually get in Thursday or Friday and play a couple of practice rounds. I did it this year at Augusta and I was just truly knackered by the time I started Thursday," he said. "This week has felt a lot quicker to me. And I got some work in before I came in here. I think all in all I feel pretty ready and fresh going into tomorrow's round."

Day was presented with an award on Wednesday for ending 2016 as world number one. Since then he has dropped back due to poorer form, including a missed cut at last month's US Open.

PGA champion in 2015, when he also came fourth in the Open at St Andrews, Day admits to having had his mind elsewhere at the start of this year due to a cancer scare involving his mother.

"When you feel like you're going to lose someone that is very close to you, there's nothing you want to do more than just be with them and you don't even want to think about playing golf or even think about working," said Day. He plays with 2015 Open champion Zach Johnson and reigning Masters champion Sergio Garcia in the first two rounds as he chases a first win since the Players Championship over a year ago.

"I'm looking forward to trying to get back into the winner's circle this year, and hopefully I can do that this week," he said. — AFP

PREVIEW

BIG NAMES IN FIGHT FOR FORM COMING INTO BRITISH OPEN

SOUTHPORT: While uncertainty surrounds the form of leading names such as Dustin Johnson and Rory McIlroy, the British Open begins at Royal Birkdale today with a plethora of players hopeful of winning the Claret Jug.

When The Open last came to the links at Southport, near Liverpool on the coast of north-west England, it was 2008 and Tiger Woods had just won the US Open. That was his 14th major, but Woods has not won any since and no longer does a single player dominate the sport.

The last nine majors have all been won by a different name, going back to Jordan Spieth's back-to-back victories at the Masters and US Open in 2015. Indeed, the last seven majors have all been claimed by players who had never previously taken one of the sport's biggest prizes, including Brooks Koepka at last month's US Open and Henrik Stenson in The Open at Troon 12 months ago.

"I think it's a really impressive stat and it speaks to the state of the game. There are a lot of tremendous young players right now," Spieth, the 23-year-old world number three, said on Tuesday. "And then you've got guys like Henrik and Dustin, guys who are still young, but guys who have been around in contention many, many times, and it was sooner or later going to happen, and it did. It was just a matter of time for them." But, with the likes of Japan's world

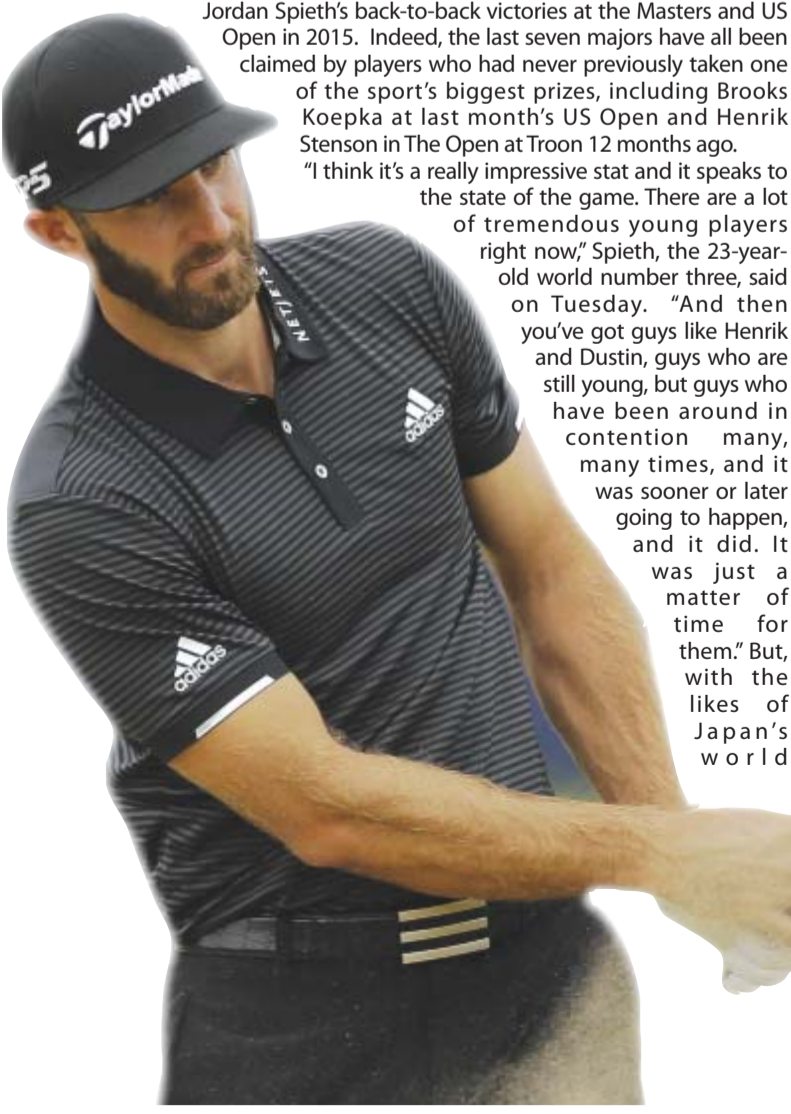
number two Hideki Matsuyama looking a threat, can another first-time winner lift the Claret Jug in front of Birkdale's distinctive white Art Deco clubhouse on Sunday evening? "I think there's a lot more guys who haven't won majors than guys who have that are playing, so the chances are it is going to be somebody that hasn't won one," added Spieth. Spieth's game is in a better place than world number one Johnson, who sat out the Masters with a back injury and missed the cut in last month's US Open at Erin Hills. Nevertheless, Johnson, 33, has remained the favourite for the \$1.845 million first prize with most bookmakers this week, while fourth-ranked McIlroy looks to climb out of a worrying slump. He has missed the cut at three of the last five majors and also failed to make the weekend on the links at the Irish Open and Scottish Open recently. Formidable challenge - Padraig Harrington was the last winner at Birkdale, a stunning par-70 course that winds its way through the sand dunes, nine years ago. He is the last player to

successfully defend the Claret Jug, and Stenson will hope that is an omen for him, although he must know the sort of golf that saw him defeat Phil Mickelson on the last day at Troon was once-in-a-lifetime stuff.

"I think once you win one, obviously that's off your shoulder. And it's more about putting yourself in contention again and trying to win a second one," the Swede, 41, said on Tuesday.

Five of the last six Open champions have been aged 39 or older. In 1998, Birkdale crowned the 41-year-old Mark O'Meara, although a fresh-faced 17-year-old Justin Rose finished fourth as an amateur. Rose, along with local lad Tommy Fleetwood, now look the best bets for a first English winner since Nick Faldo in 1992. Birkdale is hosting The Open for the 10th time all told, with Lee Trevino and Arnold Palmer

among the former champions here. The latter won the first of his two Opens at Birkdale in 1961, and a plaque sits by the 16th fairway to commemorate a famous shot he hit from a bush on his way to the title. The course has great history and poses a formidable challenge, not least if the weather deteriorates. Conditions were glorious on Monday and Tuesday but it is set to be much cooler and more unsettled for Thursday's first round and there is a risk it could be downright unpleasant by Friday. "I think it's the fairest links golf course we play, it rewards great golf," said Rose. "But we really haven't played this course in good weather. This week might not be great." — AFP



Dustin Johnson



Jon Rahm



Jordan Spieth

VIKINGS TO HOLD FINAL MANKATO TRAINING CAMP AFTER 52 YEARS

MINNEAPOLIS: From Alan Page to Jared Allen, Fran Tarkenton to Teddy Bridgewater, Chuck Foreman to Adrian Peterson, the Minnesota Vikings spent 52 years making a 90-minute drive from the Twin Cities to Mankato for training camp.

The Vikings' proud history of holding camp on the campus of Minnesota State University, Mankato is entering its final days. The team announced Tuesday that this camp will be its last in the college town 90 miles southwest of Minneapolis.

The Vikings will open their new, sprawling practice facility in the Twin Cities suburb of Eagan in March and will hold training camp there going forward. "Over the past 52 years we have formed incredible relationships with Minnesota State University, Mankato, the City of Mankato, and the entire community, and those partnerships made this decision difficult," Vikings executive Kevin Warren said. "With our increased space and amenities, the Twin Cities Orthopedics Performance Center will give our players,

coaches and staff the best opportunity to succeed, and we feel hosting training camp at our new home is the proper move for the organization and Vikings fans."

Staying closer to home for training camp is a trend that has spread throughout the league in recent years. The Vikings are one of 12 teams to leave headquarters for camp this summer. That does not include the Green Bay Packers, who practice on their own fields in Green Bay but stay in the dorms at nearby St. Norbert College, as

they have for 60 years.

Through the years, the Vikings would take over Mankato at the end of every summer and players would bunk in the dorm rooms. Quarterback Dante Culpepper and receiver Randy Moss drove flashy sports cars into town as thousands of fans swarmed them in the parking lot. Former coach Mike Tice held court at a bar and restaurant just across the street from the practice fields, and WWE star Brock Lesnar, who was trying out with the Vikings in 2004, rumbled with the Kansas City Chiefs

during a joint practice.

Police used to set up shop on Highway 169 on the eve of camp to catch Vikings players speeding through the sleepy town of St. Peter to try and make the check-in time, including receiver Koren Robinson being clocked at 120 mph in 2006.

The darkest day in the team's long history in Mankato happened on Aug. 1, 2001, when offensive tackle Korey Stringer died after a collapsing during practice a day earlier on a particularly sweltering afternoon.—AP

CYCLING

FROOME LOOKING TO CONTROL ALPS

LA MURE: Chris Froome has tasked his Sky team-mates with mission control as the Tour de France begins brutally tough back-to-back Alpine stages yesterday. The reigning champion has an 18 second lead in the yellow jersey competition ahead of Italian Fabio Aru, but two other riders—Romain Bardet and Rigoberto Uran—are also within 30sec of the lead. There are four categorised climbs on the menu on Wednesday's 183km 17th stage from La Mure to Serre-Chevalier, and nearly 60km of steep climbing. Although the finish is at the end of a long 28km descent, there are 30km of climbing just before that and Froome is determined to keep his rivals under tight wraps.

"(Wednesday) is certainly going to be a race for us to control, but otherwise I'm feeling good," he said. "I do believe these next two days are the biggest consecutive days in this year's Tour de France. "It's hard to say exactly how selective it's going to be, or just a case of the four of us, all within half a minute, chasing each other's shadows, or whether it's going to be blown wide open. "On the upside, myself and (team-mate) Mikel Landa are feeling great coming into this final week of the race."

Landa is fifth at 1min 17sec but could have an important role to play as a foil with Froome's rivals concentrating not just on trying to take time off the leader, but also cautious of Landa's potential to push them off the podium.

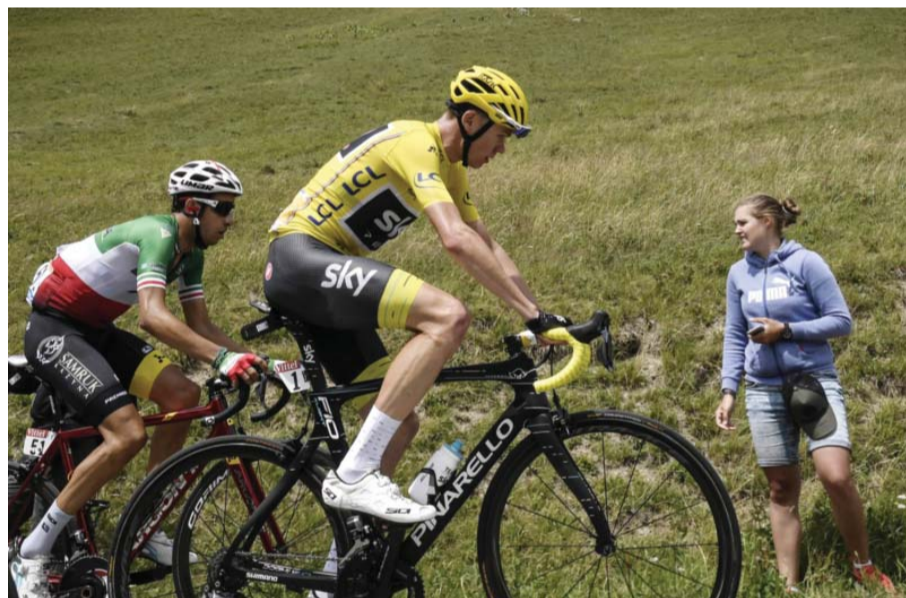
"Everyone is trying to get an advantage

over Sky, which is a strong team which prefers to go on the attack rather than defend," said Basque Landa. "Who knows, maybe (Wednesday) will require more attention, there are more climbs and more terrain for strategies—I think it could be more dangerous." It's certainly going to be an epic stage with three huge climbs—the Col de la Croix de Fer, Col du Telegraph and Col du Galibier, the highest point of this year's race at more than 2,600 metres above sea level. It could encourage one of the top 10 rivals a bit further back to strike out a long way from home.

"I've lost time but we'll see how things go (on Wednesday)," said twice former winner Alberto Contador, who was caught out in Tuesday's crosswinds and lost more than 90sec, dropping out of the top 10. "Everything will depend on how my legs are and how my rivals react during the race."

The Spaniard, though, is not one to sit on and wait to see how things pan out. However, with a summit finish to come on Thursday and a time-trial on Saturday, Uran believes the leaders might be more concerned with avoiding losing time.

Uran is fourth at 29sec but knows that after Froome, he's the best time-trialist amongst the yellow jersey challengers. If he has no time in the Alps, he will fancy his chances of overhauling Bardet and Aru on Saturday. "Now the losses Alps are beginning," he said. "You have to be careful every day."—AFP



LE LA MURE: Great Britain's Christopher Froome (R), wearing the overall leader's yellow jersey, and Italy's Fabio Aru ride during the 183 km seventeenth stage of the 104th edition of the Tour de France cycling race yesterday between Le La Mure and Serre-Chevalier, French Alps. — AFP

GREEN JERSEY KITTEL QUILTS TOUR DE FRANCE

SERRE-CHEVALIER: Sprint star Marcel Kittel quit the Tour de France yesterday after a crash on the 183km, 17th stage in the Alps from La Mure to Serre-Chevalier. The 29-year-old German was leading the sprinters' green jersey competition at the time he abandoned having won five stages so far. "Another sad news: Green jersey @marcelkittel, and winner of five #TDF2017 stages, has stopped at the top of Col de la Croix de Fer," said the German's Quick-Step team on Twitter. What had been a hugely successful Tour for Kittel quickly turned sour as he crashed 20km into yesterday's stage.

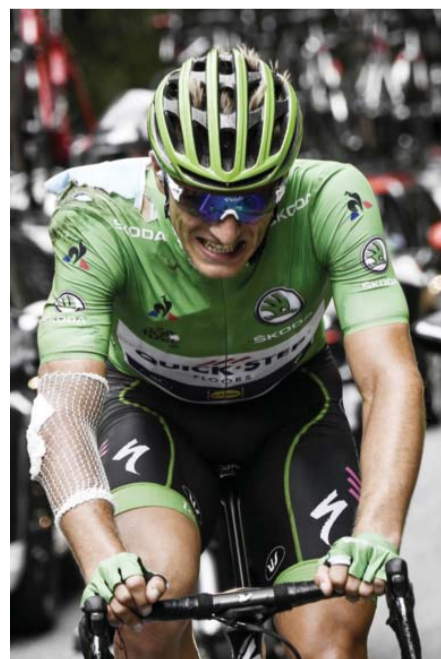
He was cut and bloodied and even needed to change a shoe while hanging onto his team car as the race continued. The peloton led by race leader Chris Froome's Team Sky sat up and waited for Kittel but once the climbing began with the second category Col d'Ornon, the German started to lose touch with the bunch. By the 24km long hors category Col de la Croix de Fer just over 100km from the finish, he was losing serious ground and the prospect of getting to the finish line within the required time delay was diminishing, so Kittel quit.

"We might not have Paris, but we'll always have these fantastic wins! Thank you, @marcelkittel!" added Quick-Step. Kittel had taken his personal total to 14 Tour stage wins, overtaking the record mark of 12 by a German that Erik Zabel managed.

He had held a 128-point lead over Michael Matthews in the green jersey competition and looked likely to win that. But a determined Matthews had whittled down that lead to just 29 points over the past four days and by winning yesterday's intermediate sprint, he moved to just nine

points behind Kittel.

The German would still have been expected to win the jersey with two likely flat stage sprints to come but Matthews could have taken it off him on Thursday's stage with 20 points up for grab in the intermediate sprint there. As it is, the Australian will now wear the green jersey on Thursday and with a 160-point lead over German Andre Greipel, he is almost certain to win it if he reaches Paris.—AFP



LE LA MURE: Germany's Marcel Kittel wearing the best sprinter's green jersey, injured after falling, rides during the 183 km seventeenth stage of the 104th edition of the Tour de France cycling race yesterday. —AFP



PRETORIA: In this Oct. 1, 2016 file photo, South Africa's Lionel Mapoe, left, is tackled by Australia's Quade Cooper, top right, and teammate Bernard Foley, during the Rugby Championship match between South Africa and Australia, at Loftus Versfeld in Pretoria, South Africa. Cooper has been omitted from Australia's 38-man training squad. — AP

RUGBY

QUADE COOPER OMITTED FROM WALLABIES TRAINING SQUAD

SYDNEY: Quade Cooper has been omitted from Australia's 38-man training squad for the Rugby Championship and Bledisloe Cup, raising questions about the future test prospects of the flashy but often unpredictable playmaker.

The move leaves Bernard Foley as the only specialist flyhalf in the extended squad announced by Wallabies coach Michael Cheika yesterday for a series of training camps starting north of Sydney next week. Kurtley Beale, a utility back who recently returned from England, was recalled to the Wallabies squad for the first time since the 2015 World Cup and is only other potential No. 10 in the initial group.

Cooper's omission is his first based on form since former Wallaby coach Robbie Deans left him out of the 2013 British and Irish Lions series. Cheika indicated it was not necessarily the end of international rugby for 29-year-old Cooper, who was only used sparingly off the bench in the June test matches against Fiji, Scotland and Italy.

"We have had a talk about the reasons why and obviously a lot of that is around trying to get him back into the space where he can be that player that is going to get us around the park and do the stuff we want him to do," Cheika said. "I don't feel like that has been happening."

Cheika did not select any players from the Brumbies, who are hosting a Super Rugby quarterfinal against the Hurricanes on Friday in Canberra. The squad includes 11 uncapped players, and seven others with four or fewer test caps. Cooper's absence didn't appear to be injury related. In a statement confirming the squad, the Australian Rugby Union said only three players - Kyle Goodwin, Lukhan Tui and James Slipper - were not considered for selection because of injuries.

Backrower Scott Higginbotham, who has played 34 tests for Australia, was one of the other notable omissions. The test squad will be chosen in the first week of August. "We have a lot of work to get done between now and Aug. 9 when we play New Zealand in Sydney," Cheika said. "That work started in June, we tried to maintain some of that throughout the last rounds of Super Rugby and now we start to take it up a level."

Australia squad

Forwards: Jermaine Ainsley, Adam Coleman, Pek Cowan, Jack Dempsey, Kane Douglas, Sef Fa'agase, Tetera Faulkner, Reece Hanigan, Richard Hardwick, Michael Hooper, Sekope Kepu, Adam Korczyk, Tolu Latu, Sean McMahon, Stephen Moore (captain), Tatafu Polota-Nau, Tom Robertson, Izack Rodda, Rob Simmons, Lopeti Timani, Taniela Tupou, Jordan Uelese.

Backs: Kurtley Beale, Israel Folau, Bernard Foley, Will Genia, Dane Haylett-Petty, Reece Hodge, Karmichael Hunt, Samu Kerevi, Marika Korobete, Campbell Magnay, Billy Meakes, Eto Nabuli, Sefa Naivalu, Izaia Perese, Nick Phipps, Curtis Rona. —AP

BOXING

CHINA BOXING STAR ZOU PRIMED FOR BIGGEST BATTLE

SHANGHAI: He is a two-time Olympic gold medalist and reigning world champion, but Chinese boxing star Zou Shiming is eyeing an even greater prize: making the sport big in his homeland. The 36-year-old defends his World Boxing Organization (WBO) flyweight title for the first time next week when he faces Japan's Sho Kimura in Shanghai, and is targeting a fourth-round knockout.

After a brilliant amateur career Zou turned professional in 2013 — at the relatively late age of 31 — and last November won the world title in Las Vegas to improve to a pro record of 9-1 with two KOs. Now he wants to harness his fame to put boxing on a par at home with more popular sports.

"In the West they already have a long history of boxing and everyone of all ages watch, but in China this is still something we have to work hard on," he told AFP in an interview at his sweltering gym in Shanghai. "The attention it gets here is not like some of our more conventional sports such as badminton and table tennis that lots of kids practise and play."

"We want to tell everyone in China that Chinese people have a Zou Shiming who brought back the belt from Las Vegas and kept it here, so that everyone will say, 'If Zou Shiming can, so can other Chinese.'"

With the end of his boxing career in sight he declined to say when he would retire—the affable Zou is turning his hand to promotion and mentoring the next generation. He turned

professional with US promoters Top Rank, whose founder and chief executive Bob Arum had his eye on the lucrative China market, and was under the tutelage of respected American trainer Freddie Roach.

But Zou is promoting himself for the July 28 fight, while insisting he will work with Top Rank again. He chose China for his first title defence in order to promote the sport in the country, partnering with Chinese companies such as Alisports which is part of e-commerce giant Alibaba. "It was significant that I won the belt in Las Vegas, the boxing temple. I want to bring this glory and passion, as well as the boxing culture, to China," he said. "It would be significant to defend it in China. I don't just want to bring the belt from the highest temple, I also want to guard it in China and keep it in China."

The weight of history is against Zou. Communist China's founder Mao Zedong banned the sport as too violent, and it only returned to the public consciousness in 1979 when Muhammad Ali visited China at the invitation of then-leader Deng Xiaoping.

Zou won bronze at the Athens Olympics in 2004, then gold at the Beijing Games four years later, before successfully defending his title at the London games in 2012 to put boxing back on the map in China.

Add three amateur world titles and it's easy to see why, if anyone can make boxing big in China, Zou can. He may train boxers after he retires.—AFP



SHANGHAI: This photo taken on July 12, 2017 shows Chinese boxer Zou Shiming (R) training at a gym in Shanghai. He is a two-time Olympic gold medalist and reigning world champion, but Chinese boxing star Zou Shiming is eyeing an even greater prize: Making the sport big in his homeland. — AFP

OGWUMIKE, GRINER, STEWART HEADLINE WNBA ALL-STAR RESERVES

NEW YORK: There will be a lot of fresh faces in Seattle for the All-Star Game this weekend, including reigning rookie of the year Breanna Stewart. The Storm's leading scorer was one of six reserves announced on Tuesday night who will be playing in their first All-Star contest.

She's joined on the West team by Los Angeles' Nneka Ogwumike and Chelsea Gray, Dallas' Skylar Diggins-Smith, Minnesota's Seimone Augustus

and Phoenix's Brittney Griner.

Griner, the league's leading scorer, won't play though after injuring her ankle and knee last week. WNBA President Lisa Borders will announce a replacement for Griner yesterday. Stewart and Gray will be playing in the game for the first time. The East has four reserves competing in their first All-Star contest. Atlanta teammates Layshia Clarendon and Elizabeth Williams will be making

their first appearances. So will Chicago's Allie Quigley and Connecticut's Alyssa Thomas. They are joined by Chicago's Stefanie Dolson and Indiana's Candice Dupree to round out the East reserves. With starters Tiffany Hayes, Jonquel Jones and Jasmine Thomas all playing in their first All-Star Games, the East has seven first-timers.

Dupree and starter Tina Charles are the only two players on the East team

who have been selected more than twice since Elena Delle Donne is out with an injury. She too will be replaced by Borders today. "It's great to see so many new faces and we'll have a good time out there," Charles said of all the All-Star rookies.

Dupree is the third player to make the All-Star Game with three different teams, doing it with Chicago, Phoenix and now Indiana. She joins Cappie Pondexter and Tina Thompson. While

Charles is the lone representative from New York, for now, Atlanta and Connecticut each have three players competing.

"I'm so, so excited to be part of the All-Star team this year," Williams said. "It's even more exciting that I get to share this time with two of my teammates, Tip (Tiffany Hayes) and Lay (Layshia Clarendon). Seattle is an awesome basketball city so I'm looking forward to a great weekend." —AP



BALTIMORE: Baltimore Orioles' Chris Davis watches his grand slam in front of Texas Rangers catcher Jonathan Lucroy and home plate umpire Brian Gorman during the fourth inning of a baseball game in Baltimore, Tuesday. —AP

BASEBALL

PIRATES RALLY PAST BREWERS IN MARTE'S RETURN

PITTSBURGH: Francisco Cervelli and Josh Harrison homered during a sixth-inning rally and the streaking Pittsburgh Pirates welcomed outfielder Starling Marte back with a 4-3 victory over the Milwaukee Brewers on Tuesday night. Marte went 1 for 3 in his return from an 80-game suspension for violating the performance-enhancing drug policy. He also walked in the sixth, coming around to score on Harrison's 11th home run of the season that tied the game. David Freese put the Pirates ahead to stay with an RBI single off reliever Oliver Drake (3-3) later in the inning. Ivan Nova (10-6) survived six innings to get the win. Felipe Rivero worked out of a two-on, one-out jam in the ninth for his eighth save. Pittsburgh won its third straight and pulled within five games of the first-place Brewers in the crowded NL Central.

DIAMONDBACKS 11, REDS 2

Chris Herrmann capped a six-run fifth inning with a two-run homer, and Arizona slugged its way past Cincinnati, shortly after

trading for slugger J.D. Martinez. Rey Fuentes added a pinch-hit, three-run shot in the seventh, All-Star outfielder Jake Lamb had a two-run triple and Arizona ended a five-game skid by tying a season high with nine extra-base hits - one from each spot in the order. The Diamondbacks had four doubles in the fifth, helping overcome Zack Cozart's 10th homer of the season. Arizona acquired Martinez from the Detroit Tigers in exchange for minor leaguers Dawel Lugo, Sergio Alcantara and Jose King. Cincinnati is 0-5 since the All-Star break, and opponents have reached double figures in runs in three of the games. Amid muggy conditions and a 90-degree first-pitch temperature, Robbie Ray (9-4) lasted six innings for Arizona. Reds starter Sal Romano (1-2), recalled from Triple-A Louisville earlier Tuesday to make his third career start, failed to retire a batter in the fifth.

ORIOLES 12, RANGERS 1

Chris Davis homered in a six-run first inning, added a grand slam in the fourth

and finished with a career-high six RBIs to help Baltimore breeze past Texas. It was the 19th career multihomer game for Davis, making his fifth start since coming off the disabled list with an oblique strain. Baltimore's cleanup hitter hadn't gone deep since June 10 and has 16 home runs after hitting 38 last season. The Orioles scored six runs against Tyson Ross (2-2) before making an out, and that was enough to send Baltimore to its second straight win over Texas following a three-game sweep by the Chicago Cubs. Dylan Bundy (9-8) allowed one run and four hits in six innings to earn his first victory since June 24.

PHILLIES 5, MARLINS 2

Maikel Franco had three hits, including a tiebreaking home run in the eighth inning, to help lift Philadelphia over Miami. National League home run leader Giancarlo Stanton hit his 29th for the Marlins, who have lost four of five. Franco's homer to left field off Dustin McGowan (5-1) was his 14th of the season and it broke a 2-all tie. Nick Williams added a two-run homer in the ninth to cap the scoring. Cameron Perkins drove in two runs for the Phillies and Pat Neshek (3-2) pitched a scoreless seventh for the victory. Hector Neris pitched a perfect ninth for his ninth save in 12 opportunities.

CARDINALS 5, METS 0

Michael Wacha threw a three-hitter for his first career shutout, Matt Carpenter had four hits, and St. Louis beat New York. Wacha (7-3) has won his last four starts. He struck out eight and walked one in his 99th career start. The 26-year-old right-hander, who was ineffective last season, had not won four straight starts since the 2013 playoffs when he helped lead St. Louis to the World Series. Wacha and the Cardinals capitalized on a shoddy Mets defense that let down starter Rafael Montero (1-6) with three errors. Montero allowed four runs, two earned, in six innings. New York has lost three straight and eight of 11. —AFP

MAGIC JOHNSON DAZZLED BY BALL MAGIC FOR LAKERS

LOS ANGELES: Magic Johnson believes Lonzo Ball's dazzling performances in the Las Vegas Summer League are a shape of things to come as the Los Angeles Lakers attempt to regain former glories.

Ball, chosen by the Lakers with the second overall pick in the draft, was named MVP of the summer league after posting two triple doubles and recording four games with 10 assists or more.

The 19-year-old's performances rewrote the record books in the summer league. Until this year, no rookie had posted more than one with 10 assists and no rookie had completed more than one triple double.

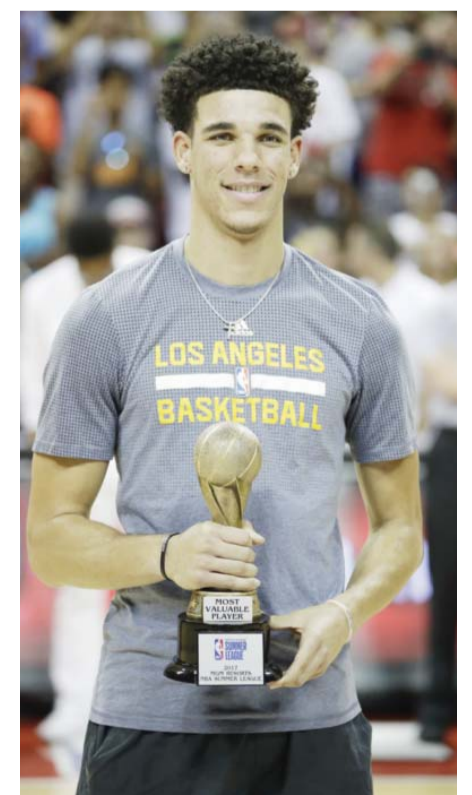
According to Johnson, that bodes well for the Lakers' future. "If he's getting triple-doubles in the summer league, he is going to get triple-doubles in the regular season," Johnson, the Lakers president of basketball operations, told reporters Tuesday. "Just like me, when I got here, there was pressure. I am going to play my game. Lonzo is going to play his game. The great ones do," he was quoted by ESPN as saying.

Johnson, who was speaking at the unveiling of Kentavious Caldwell-Pope at their El Segundo training base, said he had seen similarities between Ball and himself in his performances to date.

"Lonzo is special, no question about it, because he makes everyone better," Johnson said. "He does something you can't teach. He gives you a scoring pass. Very few point guards in this league can do that. I am talking about giving you a pass that leads to the score, not just passing it to you. ... I like him because he also is now a great teammate. He has a special effect on people."

The Lakers, who completed the worst season in the franchise's history in 2016 with a 17-65 record, and were second bottom in

the Western Conference last season, were already a better team, Johnson said. "The roster is more balanced. We saw the ball movement in summer league. ... We want to go up and down. ... Also, our practices are going to be amazing, and that will lead to us getting better in games," he said. —AFP



LAS VEGAS: Los Angeles Lakers' Lonzo Ball holds up the trophy for the most valuable player in the NBA summer league, before the team's basketball game against the Portland Trail Blazers in Las Vegas. — AP

MLB Results/Standings

Detroit 9, Kansas City 3; LA Dodgers 1, Chicago White Sox 0; Houston 6, Seattle 2; Arizona 11, Cincinnati 2; Philadelphia 5, Miami 2; St. Louis 5, NY Mets 0; Pittsburgh 4, Milwaukee 3; Baltimore 12, Texas 1.

American League Eastern Division				National League Eastern Division				
W	L	PCT	GB	Washington	Atlanta	Miami	NY Mets	
Boston	53	42	.558	-	57	36	.613	
Tampa Bay	51	44	.537	2	45	47	.489	
NY Yankees	48	44	.522	3.5	42	50	.457	
Baltimore	44	49	.473	8	41	50	.451	
Toronto	43	50	.462	9	31	61	.337	
Central Division				Central Division				
Cleveland	48	44	.522	-	Milwaukee	52	44	.542
Minnesota	47	46	.505	1.5	Chicago Cubs	48	45	.516
Kansas City	45	47	.489	3	St. Louis	46	47	.495
Detroit	43	49	.467	5	Pittsburgh	46	48	.489
Chicago White Sox	38	53	.418	9.5	Cincinnati	39	54	.419
Western Division				Western Division				
Houston	63	31	.670	-	LA Dodgers	65	29	.691
Seattle	47	48	.495	16.5	Arizona	54	39	.581
Texas	45	48	.484	17.5	Colorado	55	41	.573
LA Angels	46	50	.479	18	San Diego	40	53	.430
Oakland	42	52	.447	21	San Francisco	36	59	.379

WORLD CUP FINALISTS ENGLAND YET TO HIT PEAK FORM: KNIGHT

BRISTOL: Captain Heather Knight said England are yet to reach their best in the Women's World Cup, despite beating South Africa by two wickets at Bristol on Tuesday to reach the final. Sarah Taylor top-scored for England with a crucial 76-ball 54 as South Africa fought back hard in the latter stages to take the semi-final down to the clobbering over in their attempt of defending 218.

Two-time World Cup winners England will find out who they play in Sunday's sold-out final at Lord's when reigning champions Australia take on

India at Derby today. "We haven't put in the perfect performance together," Knight said afterwards, acknowledging there were areas England needed to improve in ahead of the final.

"The wicket was used and quite tired, so we were quite smart with our bowling. "Potentially in the field there's a few extra runs in a close match like that that plays on your mind as it gets close. It's not ideal that one of the top five didn't bat through and be there at the end. It would have made it a lot easier.

"There's still one game to go and if we

put our perfect performance in then I'll be a very happy captain." Set 219 to book a place in the showpiece finale, England made hard work of completing the chase after losing six wickets for 78 runs.

But they kept their cool in a nervy final over as Anya Shrubsole - with two runs required from three balls - hit her first delivery for four to secure victory. That England were in a position to win the match after such a collapse was thanks to the third-wicket partnership of 78 from Knight and Taylor, who returned to the England fold for this tournament after a year-long break

from the game. But Knight admitted England could now allow themselves to think about playing at the 'home of cricket'. "It's special," Knight added, reflecting on England reaching their seventh World Cup final.

"We've known that the final is at Lord's for a long time now and, trying not to think about it too much, it's been at the forefront of our minds. It's hard not to think about it. "A final at Lord's at a home World Cup, sold out, there's nothing better than that for me." "We set out to try and sing that song at Lord's, everything we've done

in the last 18 months has been towards that."

Although defeated, South Africa captain Dane van Niekerk heralded her team's effort, as they competed in their first World Cup semi-final since 2000, and hoped reaching the knock-out round will inspire a new generation of players back home.

"After this tournament and the performances our team have put in, you know, a lot of girls get a bit more interested in the game and try and play it and hopefully get excited for the game," she said. —AFP

LOURINHO 'READY FOR 15 YEARS' AT OLD TRAFFORD

LOS ANGELES: Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho has revealed he is targeting a 15-year stay at Old Trafford, telling ESPN in an interview on Tuesday he wants to restore the stability of the Alex Ferguson era. Mourinho, who took over the Premier League giants last year, told the network's website that he is desperate to deliver sustained success over a long-term period just as Ferguson did over nearly three decades. United have not won the Premier League title since Ferguson's retirement in 2013, with the club struggling to rediscover its dominance under David Moyes and Louis van Gaal.

Mourinho has never spent longer than three years as manager of a club during his trophy-laden career. But the 54-year-old, speaking as his team prepare to face Manchester City in Houston today in the latest leg of their US tour, insisted he saw United as a long-term project.

"I am ready for this," Mourinho told ESPN. "I am ready for the next 15, I would say. Here? Yes, why not? "I have to admit that it is very difficult because of the pressure around our jobs, everybody putting pressure on managers and things that peo-

ple say—that we have to win, but in reality only one can win and every year it is getting more difficult.

"This club, for so many years, was Sir Alex. People got used to it; people understood the great consequences of that stability. "After David [Moyes] and Mr. [Louis] Van Gaal, I come to my second year and hopefully I can stay and give that stability that the club wants. I will try, but again, I will have to try to deserve that, but that's what I try every day that I work."

Mourinho believes Ferguson's 27-year reign at United will never be emulated in the modern game. "I think Sir Alex's career is unique," Mourinho said. "I don't think it is possible to emulate. "Nobody is going to be in the same club for so many years, be in the same league for so many years. I think [Arsenal manager Arsene] Wenger will be the last with a similar story in terms of staying at a club for so many years.

"But I what I try to do in modern football nowadays is to try to deserve to stay in the club, because in this moment, it is about success. You have success, you stay in the club. You don't have success, you don't stay." — AFP



TILBURG: France's forward Eugenie Le Sommer celebrates after scoring during the UEFA Women's Euro 2017 football match between France and Iceland at Stadium Koning Wilhelm II in Tilburg on Tuesday. — AFP

SOCCER

FRANCE EDGE ICELAND 1-0 AT WOMEN'S EURO

DEVENTER: Eugenie Le Sommer converted a late penalty to lift France past diehard Iceland 1-0 while Nina Burger's early goal gave Austria an equally slim win over 10-player Switzerland at the women's Euro on Tuesday.

In Tilburg, Le Sommer sent Iceland's keeper Gudbjerg Gunnarsdottir the wrong way to score from the spot on 86 minutes after substitute striker Elin Metta Jensen had brought down Amandine Henry in the box. In the Group C opener in Deventer earlier on Tuesday, Austrian captain Burger scored 15 minutes in with a clinical right-foot finish after a pass from Sarah Zadrazil in a clash of Euro newcomers.

Switzerland were reduced to 10 players after Rahel Kiwic was sent off for bringing down Burger just outside the box with half an hour to go. France had won seven of their previous nine encounters with Iceland, but they struggled against the diehard defence on Tuesday. French midfielder Clarisse Le Bihan sent her shot wide and Dagny Brynjarsdottir headed over the crossbar at the other end in the first half. In the second, France stepped up their pressure and Iceland's defence had a hard time stopping a ball flicked by captain Wendie Renard from Camille Abily's free kick.

Moments later, Renard's header hit the crossbar after a corner, but then the defence collapsed as Jensen, who had been on the pitch for just three minutes, brought down Henry. France coach Olivier Echouafni said: "We have the win, that's the most important thing.

"We have to be effective. I love these games because the girls were in difficulty, but they were patient. They have been rewarded. Everyone did well." Austria had lost six of their previous eight encounters with Switzerland, but they were the more aggressive team in the first half. Solid throughout, the Austrian defence all but eliminated Switzerland star Ramona Bachmann of Chelsea.

After the break, Kiwic saw her header cleared off the goal line by Sarah Puntigam. Puntigam then almost punished Kiwic for her foul on Burger, but her free-kick was kept out by Gaelle Thalmann in the Swiss goal. Austrian keeper Manuela Zinsberger then diverted a long-range shot by Swiss substitute Vanessa Bernauer to safety.

Ten minutes from the end, Bachmann saw her shot deflected by the Austrian defence just over the crossbar as Austria hung on, although Thalmann prevented Viktoria Pinther from scoring a second.

"Our first-ever Euro game and a victory, that makes us very proud," said Austria coach Dominik Thalhammer. "It was a very good performance, tactically and physically too. We controlled the game most of the time." "It's definitely not what we wanted," said Switzerland coach Martina Voss-Tecklenburg, blaming nerves and pass quality for the loss. —AFP

ARSENAL STUN BAYERN ON PENALTIES IN SHANGHAI

SHANGHAI: Arsenal were outplayed for long periods by Bayern Munich before salvaging a last-gasp draw and then winning 3-2 on penalties in a Shanghai friendly yesterday. Reserve goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez was the unlikely hero for the Premier League side, saving Juan Bernat's soft spot kick after Arsenal substitute Alex Iwobi made it 1-1 right at the end of normal time.

It may only have been a friendly and Arsenal emerged victorious, but it made for painful viewing at times for manager Arsene Wenger, whose side suffered a 10-2 aggregate drubbing to Bayern in last season's Champions League. Robert Lewandowski needed just nine minutes to fire Bayern ahead from the penalty spot as the German champions dominated before Iwobi headed in at the death.

There will be no Champions League for Arsenal this term and a gulf in class was evident. At one point in the opening period at Shanghai Stadium, where temperatures hovered around 36 degrees Celsius (97F),

Wenger had his arms outstretched in frustration. And at the end of a first half in which Bayern could have scored another five times but for goalkeeper Petr Cech, Arsenal playmaker Mesut Ozil booted the ball high into the air in anger. The future of the German international, and that of Chilean star Alexis Sanchez, is in major doubt with both stalling over new contracts.

Sanchez is enjoying extra time off and is not in China after his involvement in the Confederations Cup. But he may not have made a difference against Carlo Ancelotti's side, who took the lead after Ainsley Maitland-Niles had brought down Bernat in the box and Lewandowski did the rest.

Iwobi's injury-time leveller sent the game straight to penalties. Both sides fielded a mixture of first-team regulars and reserves, with new Bayern signing James Rodriguez and new Arsenal striker Alexandre Lacazette starting. Arsenal face Chelsea in Beijing in their next warm-up game at the weekend, while Bayern play AC Milan in Shenzhen, southern China. —AFP



SHANGHAI: Bayern Munich's midfielder James Rodriguez (R) and Arsenal midfielder Granit Xhaka vie for the ball during the International Champions Cup football match between Bayern Munich and Arsenal in Shanghai yesterday. — AFP

MANAGER CONTE SIGNS IMPROVED CHELSEA DEAL

LONDON: Chelsea manager Antonio Conte signed a new two-year deal with the Premier League giants yesterday as the club moved to quell reports of a rift with the Italian. The deal was confirmed as Conte, who guided Chelsea to the title in his first season last year, prepares to take his squad on a pre-season tour of Asia.

"I am very happy to have signed a new contract with Chelsea," he said in a statement on Chelsea's official website. "We worked extremely hard in our first year to achieve something amazing, which I am very proud of. Now we must work even harder to stay at the top."

No terms of the deal were disclosed. English press reports said the new contract improved the terms of the remaining two years left on the three-year deal Conte signed when he joined the club last year.

Chelsea director Marina Granovskaia said the contract rewarded the "incredible success" Chelsea had enjoyed in Conte's first season. "This new contract reflects our belief that he can continue to deliver

results both domestically and as we return to European competition in the Champions League," Granovskaia said in a statement.

"Since arriving in west London, the 47-year-old Italian's passion, tactical acumen and winning mentality have endeared him to Chelsea supporters all over the world and we look forward to further triumphs with Antonio at the helm."

Conte's coaching staff has been augmented by the arrival of two more Italians, with Paolo Vanoli joining as an assistant to the first team head coach and Davide Mazzotta working as assistant/player analysis. The contract boost for Conte comes amid reports that the Italian has grown frustrated with Chelsea's inability to reinforce their title-winning squad. Chelsea had long been linked to a move for Everton striker Romelu Lukaku but saw the Belgian international join Manchester United instead. Conte had also reportedly been keen on Juventus duo Leonardo Bonucci and Alex Sandro, but neither came to fruition. — AFP

ARRESTED SPANISH FEDERATION CHIEF FACES BLEAK FUTURE

MADRID: Angel Maria Villar's future as the head of the Spanish football federation was in serious doubt yesterday following his arrest as part of a vast anti-corruption probe. Villar, his son Gorka Villar, and several Spanish federation executives were detained by police in a series of early morning raids on Tuesday on suspicion of embezzlement, fraud and collusion.

The investigation focuses on allegations that profits from international matches were skimmed. Investigators were also probing whether national federation funds had been used to bribe regional officials to vote for Villar as federation president, according to Spanish media reports.

"The list of accusations...really surprises me," the head of Spain's government sports council, Jose Ramon Lete, said during an interview with news radio Cadena Ser. Spain's Court of Sport (TAD) could open a disciplinary proceeding against Villar, who was re-elected unopposed in May to his eighth four-year mandate, he added. The sports council "through its president or a commission" could then request that Villar be suspended from his post, he added. Villar, 67, a senior vice president of FIFA, has headed the Spanish federation since 1988.

Under his watch Spain became one of the dominant forces in world football, winning two European championships and the 2010 World Cup. But his critics say his period in charge has also been undermined by ethical questions and an autocratic management style. Three major Spanish newspapers published editorials yesterday calling for term limits to be placed on the presidency of the football federation. "Twenty-nine years exercising absolute control over an organisation are too much and it creates a toxic atmosphere where there is a high risk of contamination by corruption," conservative ABC wrote. Center-left El Pais said the arrests

should be a "first step for a reform and complete regeneration of football institutions." "For Villar, the eternal president, this is the end. It should have happened earlier," the newspaper added in its editorial.

Villar, a former acting president and current vice president of European football governing body UEFA, spent the night in prison while he waits to be questioned by a judge, most likely today.

The investigation focuses on ten friendly matches which

the Spanish national team played between 2010 and 2013 after it won the World Cup in South Africa when its cache was highest, sports daily AS reported. The probe is also reportedly looking into whether there had been any improper channelling of football-related business to Gorka Villar, a lawyer specialising in sports law. Cadena Ser said police were also investigating "possible cases of ticket re-sales" for Spanish national team matches. The scandal "has done extraordinary damage to the image of Spanish football," said Ramon Lete, the head of Spain's government sports council. Villar, a former Athletic Bilbao midfielder who was capped 22 times for Spain, has been dogged by ethical issues over the years. He has been under investigation after the federation received a 1.2 million euros (\$1.4 million) subsidy to set up a football academy in Haiti that was never built.

The federation returned the money but the plan is still the subject of court proceedings. Villar was fined 25,000 Swiss francs (\$25,700) by FIFA's ethics committee in 2015 for failing to cooperate during an investigation into the awarding of the 2018 and 2022 World Cups to Russia and Qatar respectively.

The federation said it would push back a draw for the upcoming football league calendar until Friday in the wake of the arrests. It had been scheduled to take place today. — AFP



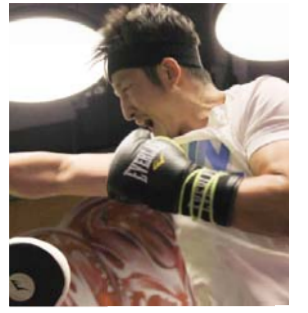
Angel Maria

Sports

McIlroy hoping to catch his wave at British Open



China boxing star Zou primed for biggest battle



THURSDAY, JULY 20, 2017

ARRESTED SPANISH FEDERATION CHIEF FACES BLEAK FUTURE

Page 15



SERRE-CHEVALIER: Stage winner Slovenia's Primoz Roglic, left, and Colombia's Jhon Darwin Atapuma, right, climb during the seventeenth stage of the Tour de France cycling race over 183 kilometers (113.7 miles) with start in La Mure and finish in Serre-Chevalier, France, yesterday. —AP

CYCLING

ROGLIC WINS STAGE, FROOME EXTENDS TOUR LEAD

SERRE-CHEVALIER: Former champion ski-jumper Primoz Roglic took a sensational solo victory on the mountainous 183km 17th stage of the Tour de France yesterday. Chris Froome came home third to stretch his overall lead to 27 seconds as Rigoberto Uran moved up to second and Fabio Aru dropped to fourth, with Romain Bardet remaining third.

Slovenia's Roglic, 27, was junior world ski-jumping champion in 2007 but switched to cycling in 2012. "To win a stage, I've dreamt about it many times," said Roglic, whose girlfriend and family were at the finish of the Tour's 'Queen stage', which started in La Mure. "It's crazy, incredible. There are no words. Right now I cannot really form all these feelings. Later probably I will know how big it is." He was part of an initial 33-man breakaway

that was whittled down to just six riders when Roglic attacked solo 6.4km from the summit of the hors category Col du Galibier, which at more than 2,600 metres above sea level was the highest point of this year's Tour.

He crested the climb, 28km from the finish in Serre-Chevalier, with a lead of just over a minute and half on a group of chasers including the top contenders. On the descent, Roglic easily managed his lead while a five-man chase group developed, including Froome.

But Italian Aru, who started the day second at 18sec, had been dropped by an acceleration from Bardet just before the Galibier summit and he was chasing desperately to limit his losses. Uran took second, 1min 13sec behind Roglic, to snatch six bonus seconds that moved him up to second, on the same

time as Bardet. Froome also took four bonus seconds for finishing third to help increase his lead, and he revealed he was congratulated by French President Emmanuel Macron at the finish. "It's a great honour to be congratulated by the president, it's also a very good thing for the Tour and the sport that he came here," said Froome, 32. "My legs are better than in the Pyrenees, today I felt good. I think also for tomorrow, we have the finish on the Col d'Izoard which will be very, very difficult."

Aru came in 31sec later to drop to fourth at 53sec ahead of today's second straight Alpine stage with its brutal finish at the summit of the imposing Col d'Izoard.

BARDET ATTACKS

Up front, Roglic proved the strongest of the

breakaway riders despite the presence of twice former Tour winner Alberto Contador, who couldn't follow the Slovene's acceleration on the Galibier. Further down the mountain-side, Bardet and Ireland's Dan Martin put in a succession of attacks that split up the yellow jersey contenders. Briton Simon Yates was one of the first to struggle and eventually lost a couple of minutes to see his lead in the young rider's competition ahead of South African Louis Meintjes cut to 2min 28sec.

He also lost sixth place to Martin. Aru was the next to struggle with the succession of accelerations, firstly by Martin but then several times from Bardet. The Frenchman went over the summit with Froome, Uran and Warren Barguil for company while Mikel Landa, the yellow jersey's Sky team-mate, caught them

on the descent.

Behind, Aru kept losing time, with Yates dropping even more on the rapid drag downhill to the finish. Earlier in the stage, Colombian climber Nairo Quintana had been distanced on the first category Col du Telegraphe, the twice runner-up continuing to struggle during this year's Tour having raced May's Giro d'Italia. He dropped out of the top 10, with Contador moving back up to ninth and Barguil 10th.

Meanwhile German sprint king Marcel Kittel pulled out before the halfway point of the stage after crashing in the first 20km. Kittel had won five stages during the race and held the sprinters' green jersey, which has now passed to Australian Michael Matthews, winner of two stages himself. —AFP

SWIMMING

SCANDAL THREATENS FINA ON EVE OF WORLD CHAMPS

BUDAPEST: Swimming's governing body FINA has been drawn into a financial scandal days before both their presidential elections and the start of the swimming world championships in Budapest. Kuwait's Husain Al Musallam, who is standing unopposed as FINA's first vice-president, has been caught up in a controversy for appearing to demand a 10 per cent cut of potential sponsorship deals.

In his role as general director of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA), the 57-year-old is heard asking for 'commissions' on deals worth "40 to 50 million" dollars in a tape recording obtained by The Times and Germany's Spiegel Online. The exchange is said to be between a prospective Chinese marketing agent and Musallam, who suggested that 10 per cent of any sponsorship deals arranged for the OCA should be separately channelled to him. Ahead of their elections in Budapest on Saturday and Sunday's start of swimming action at the world championships in the Hungarian capital, FINA said none of their regulations had been breached.

"These allegations are a matter for OCA to comment on although FINA will monitor developments carefully," said FINA in a statement. "However, it was determined there was no case to answer based on the information that is available to FINA at this time. "Moreover, there was no breach of any FINA regulations." The OCA denied any wrongdoing on Musallam's part and questioned the timing of the articles.

"The OCA firmly denies that OCA officials requested commissions for OCA sponsorship deals and confirms that no commission or money was paid to OCA officials, directly or indirectly, for OCA sponsorship deals," read the statement.

"All money for sponsorship deals went directly

to the OCA. "The OCA is fully aware of the tape in question and its content and believes that this tape is being used in a politically motivated campaign ahead of the upcoming FINA elections scheduled for 22 July 2017." The International Olympic Committee (IOC) told The Times and Der Spiegel that it had passed the allegations to its chief ethics investigator. It is not the first time this year that Musallam has courted controversy. In April, The Times revealed, he was effectively identified in a US

Department of Justice indictment as a co-conspirator who allegedly paid bribes to a football official.

Musallam is the right-hand man of Olympic powerbroker and OCA president Sheikh Ahmad Al Fahad Al Sabah, who in April resigned from his FIFA after being identified as a co-conspirator, along with Musallam, in the US indictment. The recording obtained by The Times has emerged from the FBI investigation into Musallam and Sheikh Ahmad. — AFP



BUDAPEST: Team Singapore competes in the Women's Team Free Routine preliminary during the synchronised swimming competition at the 2017 FINA World Championships in Budapest, yesterday. — AFP

SOCCER

SOLANKE SHINES AS LIVERPOOL BEAT PALACE

HONG KONG: New signing Dominic Solanke came off the bench to score as Liverpool beat Crystal Palace 2-0 in a pre-season game in Hong Kong yesterday.

The 19-year-old suggested he could prove a summer bargain at just \$4 million as he linked up well with fellow striker Divock Origi, who also got on the scoresheet in the Premier League Asia Trophy win. "It's been a smart move for him and for us," Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said of Solanke's transfer from Chelsea.

"He saw the opportunity and we could see it also. You could see immediately he is a smart player. He's a skilled boy and we are happy about this. We will help him all we can." Origi set up the first goal for Liverpool on the hour mark with a clever back-heel that found Solanke unmarked and the teenager made no mistake, finishing coolly in the stifling Hong Kong heat.

Origi then rifled home Liverpool's second in the 79th minute, to the delight of a crowd of 40,000. Klopp's new-look front line proved a welcome distraction for the German coach following reports that Leipzig had rejected a huge bid of \$86 million for star

midfielder Naby Keita.

Klopp bristled when asked about the Keita situation as rumours circled that the Guinea international's agent had been spotted in Hong Kong. "Are we in Macau?" asked Klopp in reference to the world's largest gambling hub, situated just across the Pearl River Delta from Hong Kong. "What do you know? Sixty-six million (pounds) turned down today? I don't think about this. "Today both teams played good football," added Klopp, turning his attention back to events on the pitch. "In the second half we made some changes and we scored. We changed the formation and it was nice to watch."

Liverpool will face Leicester City in the Asia Trophy final on Saturday after the Foxes won the earlier match 7-6 on penalties over West Bromwich Albion following a 1-1 stalemate in normal time. New signing Jay Rodriguez gave West Brom the lead with a stunning finish after nine minutes, only for Riyad Mahrez to squeeze the ball past Ben Foster to level things up midway through the first half. "Jay's strike was fantastic," said West Brom boss Tony Pulis. — AFP



OIL MARKETS REMAIN BEARISH



BEIJING: Shoppers walk through the capital city's popular shopping mall in Beijing. China's economic growth held steady in the latest quarter, boosted by unexpectedly strong trade and consumer spending, despite fears tighter lending controls aimed at cooling a surge in debt are weighing on commercial activity. — AP

GULF BANK POSTS 10% RISE IN NET PROFIT FOR H1 2017
GLOBAL RATING AGENCIES UPGRADE THEIR OUTLOOK ON BANK



Gulf Bank Chairman Omar Alghanim

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank K.S.C.P. announced yesterday its financial results for the first half of 2017. The Bank recorded a net profit of KD 22.8 million in the first 6 months of 2017, an increase of 10 percent over the same period of 2016. The Bank was able to generate a net interest income of KD 63.5 million and an operating profit of KD 60.5 million during the first half of 2017, recording an increase of 7.5 percent and 8.2 percent respectively. In addition, credit costs (specific provisions and write-offs less recoveries) continue to improve quarter after quarter with a decline of 11 percent in Q2 compared to Q1 of 2017.

As of first half 2017, total assets of the bank grew by 3 percent compared to first half of 2016 while

Loans & Advances increased by 2 percent over the same period of last year. Total equity reported at the end of first half 2017 was KD 577.5 million and general provisions stood at KD 222 million for the same period, representing 38 percent of total equity.

Commenting on the results, Omar Kutayba Alghanim, Gulf Bank Chairman, said: "We are pleased with our Bank's solid performance for the first half of 2017. This has reflected positively on the earnings per share as it grew by 10 percent to 8 fils per share for the first half of 2017 compared to the previous year." Alghanim continued: "This year, we are proud to announce that S&P Ratings has revised its outlook of Gulf Bank to "Positive" from "Stable".

Positive outlook

As part of their 2017 annual credit rating review, S&P Global Ratings revised their outlook on the bank to "Positive" from "Stable" and affirmed its issuer credit rating at "A-". Similarly, Moody's Investors Service affirmed the bank's "A3" long-term deposits rating and "Stable" outlook. In addition, Capital Intelligence also affirmed the Bank's Financial Strength Rating at "BBB+" and the subordinated bond rating at "BBB" both with "Stable" outlooks. Fitch continues to rate Gulf Bank at "A+" for its Issuer Default Rating with a "Stable" outlook.

Gulf Bank continues to be strongly recognized both internationally and locally. During Q2 2017, the

bank received 'The Best Mobile Banking Experience in the Middle East' award from Arabian Business Magazine, 'The Best Retail Bank in Kuwait' award by The Banker Middle East and was named by Forbes Middle East among the Top 10 Companies in Kuwait during the Forbes 'Celebrating Kuwait's Success' event.

Alghanim concluded his remarks by stating: "I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to these outstanding results. I want to thank our customers for their continuous support and loyalty towards Gulf Bank. I appreciate the dedication of our management and staff, commitment of our Board of Directors and Shareholders, and the support from the Central Bank of Kuwait."

SAUDI ARABIA EMPTIES DOMESTIC CRUDE TANKS

LONDON: Saudi Arabia has been progressively reducing its bloated domestic stocks of crude in a sign the global oil market is rebalancing, albeit more slowly than OPEC anticipated. Saudi Arabia's domestic crude stocks declined in 16 of the 19 months between November 2015 and May 2017 according to government data reported to the Joint Organizations Data Initiative.

Domestic stocks fell to just 259 million barrels at the end of May 2017, which was the lowest level since January 2012, according to updated figures published on Tuesday. Stocks were down by 30 million barrels compared with the same month a year earlier and are now down by 71 million barrels from their peak in October 2015.

Like other producers, Saudi Arabia holds stocks for a range of reasons, including the need to cover field maintenance and manage seasonal changes in consumption and exports. Operational stocks are held to satisfy demand for exports as well as from domestic oil refineries and power plants burning crude to produce electricity.

The best way to track stocks over time is to compare them with the total daily requirement from exports, refinery intake and direct crude burn. In June 2014, just before oil prices started sliding, Saudi crude stocks totalled 286 million barrels, equivalent to about 28.4 days' worth of combined exports, refinery intake and direct crude use.

By October 2015, with prices well on the way to their nadir in January 2016, stocks had risen to 329 million barrels, equivalent to 32.7 days' worth of combined requirements. Since then, stocks have been progressively reduced and were down to just 259 million barrels and 25.7 days' worth of combined requirements in May 2017. Saudi crude stocks display a strong element of seasonality owing to refinery maintenance schedules and increased crude consumption for electricity generation during the hot summer months. Nonetheless, there has been a clear downward trend in both absolute stocks and days of cover since late 2015 as production has fallen short of combined requirements. The rise and subsequent fall in Saudi crude stocks illustrates how heavily oversupplied the crude market was during 2014/15 as well as the gradual rebalancing under way during 2016/17.

During the slump, Saudi Arabia struggled to find buyers for all its production. Now the kingdom is taking advantage of strong demand to cut excess stocks to more normal levels. Assuming the data are accurate, the persistent draw in domestic stocks likely explains why Saudi officials sound confident when they say the global oil market is rebalancing.

Supply chain

In general, crude moves down the supply chain from areas of net production to areas of net refining and consumption. Despite significant trading activity around particular cargoes, the movement of crude essentially occurs in only one direction. For commercial reasons, it makes no sense to move crude back up the supply chain, away from consumers and refineries back towards producers. Crude stocks are positioned as close to refiners and final consumers as possible, subject to the availability and cost of storage. Stocks in producing countries therefore tend to be the last to fill during periods of oversupply but first to drain during periods of undersupply. The buildup of crude stocks in Saudi Arabia during the later stages of the slump in 2015 and the subsequent draw down from 2016 is consistent with this pattern.

The turning point in Saudi stocks in October/November 2015 roughly coincided with the turning point in crude prices and calendar spreads in December 2015/January 2016. Saudi crude stocks have fallen much faster than crude stocks in the principal refining areas including the United States. Saudi crude stocks have fallen by 30 million barrels since May 2016 compared with a drawdown of just 6 million barrels in the United States over the same period.

Saudi stocks are down 71 million barrels since October 2015 while US crude stocks are still up by 48 million barrels over the same period. Something similar seems to have occurred with the draw down in Iran's crude stocks held in floating storage during 2016.

The persistent draw down in Saudi stocks is obviously a disequilibrium phenomenon since it cannot continue forever. Releasing producer stocks into the supply chain during 2016 and the first half of 2017 added to the sense of continuing oversupply.—Reuters



WASHINGTON: US Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin (left) and Chinese Vice Premier Wang Yang pose for a photo before an opening session at a US and China comprehensive Economic Dialogue at the US Department of the Treasury yesterday in Washington, DC. — AFP

US SEEKS 'FAIR, EQUITABLE AND RECIPROCAL' TRADE WITH CHINA

WASHINGTON: The US launched its first round of trade talks with China since Donald Trump took office in an unusually blunt manner yesterday, demanding more "fair, equitable and reciprocal" relationship, with more access to American made goods and services. Noting the more than 200 percent surge in Chinese exports to the United States in the last 15 years, creating a trade deficit of \$309 billion last year, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross insisted change was necessary. "If this were just the natural product of free market forces, we could understand it, but it's not," Ross said in the opening ceremony of the one-day meeting between the world's top two economies. "So it is time to rebalance our trade and investment relationship in a more fair, equitable and reciprocal manner." The talks are a continuation of the process undertaken by the previous two administrations, which the Trump administration has rebranded as the US-China Comprehensive Economic Dialogue (CED).

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said the talks with the Chinese delegation led by Vice Premier Wang Yang would focus on concrete steps to provide greater access and a "level playing field" for US companies to the world's second largest market. "We need to work together to maximize the benefit for both sides. But this is only possible if there is a more fair and balanced economic

relationship between the US and China," Mnuchin said. "It means addressing the imbalances cause by the Chinese intervention in its economy," he said, adding: "A more balanced economic relationship will create prosperity for our two countries and the world." During his campaign, Trump attacked China for unfair trade practices, but his meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping at his Florida resort in April prompted a change of rhetoric and the launch of a 100-day economic cooperation plan.

That led to specific but narrow achievements, including opening the Chinese market to US beef exports, and pledges to remove barriers to US credit card transactions, credit ratings, and other financial services, including bond underwriting, that were to be concluded prior to Wednesday's talks. Wang said the key point about the meeting is the two countries are "having dialogue, not confrontation." "We don't need to defeat each other in handling differences," he cautioned, stressing that "confrontation will immediately damage the interests of both" countries.

Wang quoted a passage from Trump's 2009 business advice book "Think Like a Champion"—which in turn was quoting industry pioneer Henry Ford—saying, "Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success." "China is ready to work together." — AFP

Chart 1: Crude oil prices (\$/bbl)

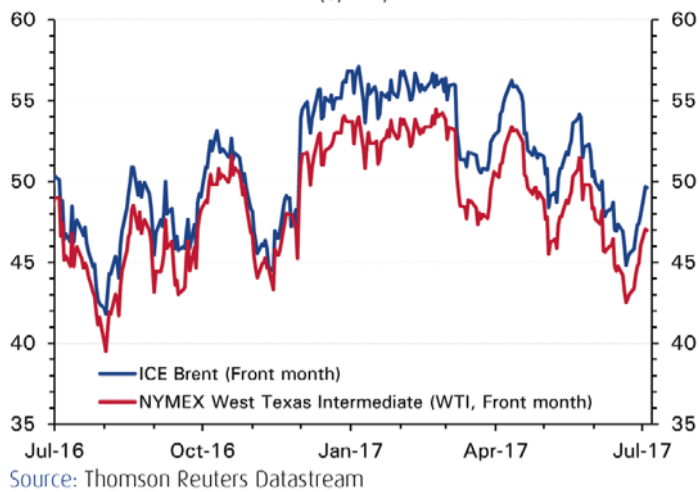
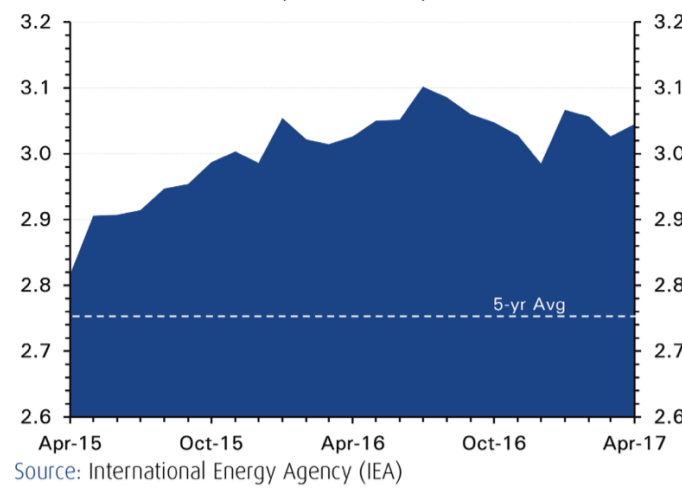


Chart 2: OECD commercial crude and product stocks (billion barrels)



OIL MARKETS REMAIN BEARISH

NBK ECONOMIC REPORT

KUWAIT: It was not meant to happen this way. Another month, another decline in oil prices. This time, in Brent's case, the drop was to its lowest level in ten months when it fell to \$44.8 per barrel (bbl) on 21 June. Since OPEC/non-OPEC rolled over their production cut agreement for an additional 9 months on 25 May, oil prices have fallen by 7 percent. Crude oil benchmarks, Brent and West Texas Intermediate (WTI), closed June at \$47.9/bbl and \$46.0/bbl, respectively, a decline of 15 percent in 2017 on average. Indeed, Brent's performance in the first half of this year was its worst since 1998.

While a late, 8-consecutive day gain at the end of June and in early July—the longest run of gains in seven years—helped spare some of Brent's blushes, there is little escaping the fact that oil bulls have largely deserted the scene and that the markets have fallen into a state of despondency. And the chief culprit is US light tight oil (shale), whose volumes are helping to both offset some of the supplies taken off the market by OPEC/non-OPEC this year and slow the drawdown of crude stocks from storage tanks.

Weekly metrics on these two dynamics are, along with counts of US oil rigs, the most closely watched data by the markets. And they have not made pleasant reading for OPEC in 2017. US crude production is up 5.5 percent to 9.25 mb/d as of 23 June — an additional 480,000 barrels per day (b/d) of crude to partly offset the 1.8 mb/d of supplies that OPEC/non-OPEC have withdrawn from the oil markets since January. US shale's resurgence is even more remarkable since bottoming out at 8.43 mb/d exactly a year ago: an impressive 822,000 b/d, which is a year-on-year (y/y) rise of almost 10 percent.

The closely-watched oil market report by the International Energy Agency (IEA) is also unlikely to provide much comfort. In its most

recent edition, the IEA confirmed what many analysts and market traders had long suspected, which is that OECD commercial crude and petroleum product stocks increased rather than decreased in the first

der that oil markets are despondent. Calls for OPEC to consider deeper cuts, in order to accelerate the stock drawdown, are growing louder. In view of the fact that previous instances of OPEC market

OPEC's much-coveted 'balance' Nevertheless, there may be a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel. US crude and petroleum product stockpiles are slowly drawing down as the peak summer demand gets into full swing. And there is certainly scope for more sizeable inventory declines before the autumn refinery maintenance period. According to the IEA, demand growth is expected to firm up to an average of 1.5 mb/d in 2H17 compared to 1.1 mb/d in 1H17.

With demand outstripping supply since the beginning of 2Q17, the demand/supply balance or stock change has swung into negative territory. Barring demand growth moderating and/or supply growth accelerating during the remainder of the year, the much-touted stock draw should indeed finally take place. Based on our own estimates, for the end of 4Q17, a cumulative stock draw of around 240 million barrels could be on the cards. This would bring OECD stocks back down to 2.8 billion barrels, not far off OPEC's 5-year average target of 2.75 billion barrels. 2018 thus looms large as the make-or-break year.

Highlights

- Oil prices declined for a second consecutive month in June, with both Brent and WTI falling by 5% to \$47.9/bbl and \$46.0/bbl, respectively.
- Sentiment remains resoundingly bearish, despite a recent 8-day bull run that saw Brent approach the symbolic \$50 level.
- US crude production continues to increase, rising to a high of 9.35 mb/d in June, driven by shale production.
- US/OECD crude stocks are not drawing down fast enough to buoy the markets.
- OPEC output rose in May to 32.1 mb/d, thanks to a ramp up in Libyan and Nigerian output, while compliance fell slightly to 105%.
- Markets swung into supply deficit territory in 2Q17, with the deficit expected to widen in 2H17; stock drawdowns should accelerate.

quarter of this year. Four months into the OPEC/non-OPEC agreement and total OECD stocks had reversed course and gained 60 million barrels to reach 3.044 billion barrels by April. OPEC's target of bringing global crude and petroleum stocks back to the 5-year average level of around 2.75 billion barrels appears to be even farther away, possibly into 2018 at the current rate.

Moreover, OPEC's own production is heading in the wrong direction, away from its aggregate production target of 31.75 mb/d. According to OPEC secondary source data, the group's total output climbed back over the 32 mb/d level in May to 32.14 mb/d, thanks to output gains in Nigeria and Libya. These two OPEC members are not subject to output restrictions under the terms of the November agreement. But compliance levels among quota members also deteriorated slightly in May, to 105 percent from 107 percent in April, as a result of output increases in Iraq, Iran and Algeria. Little won-

intervention, most notably in late 2008, have tended to involve several production cuts, rather than one, it is not entirely wishful thinking on the part of the oil bulls. Stock draws to accelerate in 2H17 but 2018 is looking more likely for

Chart 3: US commercial crude stocks and refinery runs

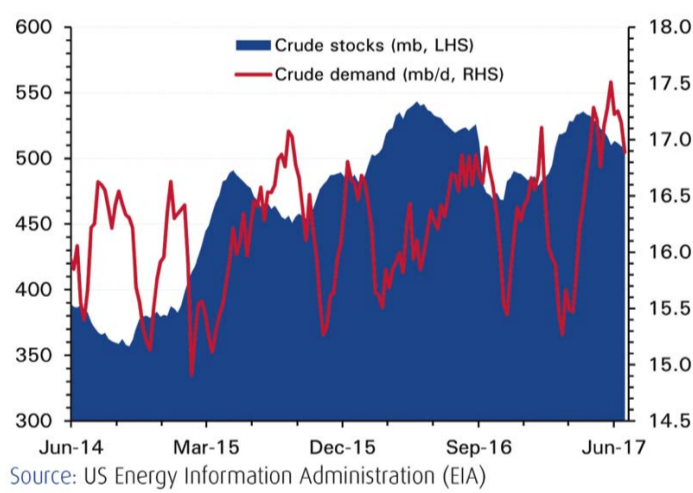


Chart 4: US crude oil production and rig counts

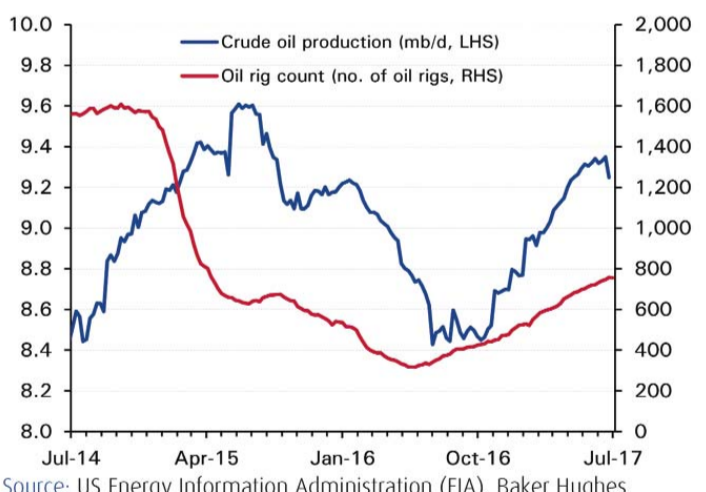
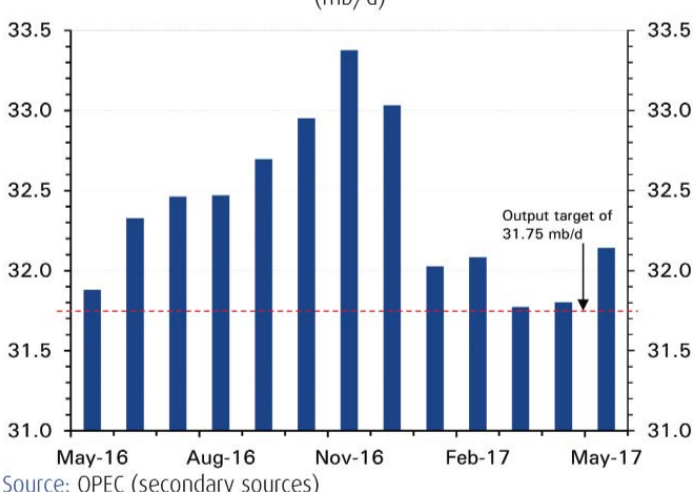


Chart 5: OPEC crude oil production (mb/d)



EXCHANGE RATES

AL-MUZAINI EXCHANGE CO.

ASIAN COUNTRIES	
Japanese Yen	2.706
Indian Rupees	4.713
Pakistani Rupees	2.887
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.971
Nepali Rupees	2.953
Singapore Dollar	228.800
Hongkong Dollar	38.886
Bangladesh Taka	3.731
Philippine Peso	5.978
Thai Baht	9.052
GCC COUNTRIES	
Saudi Riyal	80.974
Qatari Riyal	83.400
Omani Riyal	788.591
Bahraini Dinar	806.300
UAE Dirham	82.673
ARAB COUNTRIES	
Egyptian Pound - Cash	21.100
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	16.830
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.219
Tunisian Dinar	125.910
Jordanian Dinar	428.480
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	2.023
Syrian Lira	2.164
Morocco Dirham	32.111
EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES	
US Dollar Transfer	303.450
Euro	351.400
Sterling Pound	399.190
Canadian dollar	241.120
Turkish lira	86.640

Swiss Franc	317.920
Australian Dollar	241.090
US Dollar Buying	302.250
GOLD	
20 Gram	249.070
10 Gram	127.450
5 Gram	64.570
DOLLARCO EXCHANGE CO. LTD	
Rate for Transfr	Selling Rate
US Dollar	303.100
Canadian Dollar	240.555
Sterling Pound	396.465
Euro	351.205
Swiss Frank	291.315
Bahrain Dinar	803.920
UAE Dirhams	82.920
Qatari Riyals	84.135
Saudi Riyals	81.720
Jordanian Dinar	427.420
Egyptian Pound	16.954
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.971
Indian Rupees	4.713
Pakistani Rupees	2.878
Bangladesh Taka	3.746
Philippines Peso	5.967
Cyprus pound	167.275
Japanese Yen	3.705
Syrian Pound	2.413
Nepalese Rupees	2.951
Malaysian Ringgit	71.560

Chinese Yuan Renminbi	45.280	
Thai Bhat	10.000	
Turkish Lira	86.255	
BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL		
CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
Europe		
British Pound	0.388741	0.398741
Czech Korune	0.005379	0.017379
Danish Krone	0.042973	0.047973
Euro	0.344374	0.353374
Norwegian Krone	0.033419	0.038619
Romanian Leu	0.076613	0.076613
Slovakia	0.009055	0.019055
Swedish Krona	0.032473	0.037473
Swiss Franc	0.310833	0.321833
Turkish Lira	0.081072	0.091372
Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.232202	0.244202
New Zealand Dollar	0.217354	0.226854
America		
Canadian Dollar	0.234565	0.243565
Georgina Lari	0.137053	0.137053
US Dollars	0.299350	0.303770
US Dollars Mint	0.299850	0.303770
Asia		
Bangladesh Taka	0.003390	0.003974
Chinese Yuan	0.043352	0.046852
Hong Kong Dollar	0.036783	0.039533

Indian Rupee	0.004247	0.004935
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000018	0.000024
Japanese Yen	0.002622	0.002802
Kenyan Shilling	0.002911	0.002911
Korean Won	0.000260	0.000275
Malaysian Ringgit	0.067319	0.073319
Nepalese Rupee	0.002983	0.003153
Pakistan Rupee	0.002676	0.002966
Philippine Peso	0.005931	0.006231
Sierra Leone	0.000037	0.000043
Singapore Dollar	0.216373	0.226373
South African Rand	0.017435	0.025935
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001602	0.002182
Taiwan	0.009861	0.010041
Thai Baht	0.008667	0.009217
Arab		
Bahraini Dinar	0.797806	0.806306
Egyptian Pound	0.015158	0.021066
Iranian Riyal	0.000084	0.000085
Iraqi Dinar	0.000190	0.000250
Jordanian Dinar	0.432391	0.432391
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000151	0.000251
Moroccan Dirham	0.019702	0.043702
Nigerian Naira	0.000391	0.001026
Omani Riyal	0.781762	0.787442
Qatar Riyal	0.079060	0.084000
Saudi Riyal	0.079833	0.081133
Syrian Pound	0.001286	0.001506
Tunisian Dinar	0.121409	0.129409
Turkish Lira	0.081072	0.091372
UAE Dirhams	0.081193	0.082893
Yemeni Riyal	0.000986	0.001066

INDEBTED UK TO SCRAP CREDIT CARD CHARGES

LONDON: The British government yesterday said it would ban companies from charging consumers for paying by debit and credit cards, as the country struggles to bring down its debt.

"This is about fairness and transparency, and so from next year, there will be no more nasty surprises for people at the check-out just for using a card," Economic Secretary to the Treasury, Stephen Barclay, said in a statement. Consumers making purchases in Britain are being asked to pay up to 20 percent more on their bills, such as for flights, for using a card rather than cash, the Treasury said. "With many feeling the squeeze in the cost of living, people shouldn't be hit with unexpected fees," said Guy Anker, managing editor at consumer website, MoneySavingExpert.com.

But he cautioned that following the change, some companies would likely raise prices of their goods and services "to compensate for the loss, which could hit those who currently pay in cash". Currently, businesses face charges from card companies for non-cash transac-

tions. According to the Treasury, the total value of surcharges for debit and credit cards was an estimated £473 million in 2010. "This action forms part of our wider help for families with the cost of living by helping to raise their incomes and keep more of what they earn," the Treasury said. Britain's economy is slowing as high inflation and low wage growth cuts consumer spending and raises household debt.

The Bank of England last month noted that UK consumer credit for items such as cars jumped by 10.3 percent in the year to April, or much faster than growth in household incomes.

Meanwhile in May, union umbrella group, the TUC, said in a report that unsecured, or non-mortgage, debt per household would reach a record high of £13,900 this year (£18,118, 15,708 euros). Britain's Conservative government is meanwhile struggling to bring down the national deficit and debt, which ballooned following the global financial crisis that sparked bank bailouts. —AFP



GAHARA, Rwanda: A man chops wood at a small factory in Gahara in the Southeast of Rwanda on April 28, 2017. Last year, Rwanda exported around 14 tons of essential oils — geranium, moringa, patchouli and tagetes — bringing in \$473,000, according to the National Agricultural Export Development Board. —AFP

RWANDA'S ESSENTIAL OILS OFFER BIG PROFITS FROM LITTLE LAND

GAHARA, Rwanda: Inside a metal shed in southeastern Rwanda, Nicholas Hitimana brandished a plastic container holding a green liquid: geranium essential oil, freshly distilled and ready for export at more than \$200 (175 euros) a kilo.

The pioneer of essential oils in Rwanda, Hitimana said he understood over a decade ago "the need to develop high-value crops" in his hilly nation of just 2.6 million hectares (6.4 million acres).

Agriculture accounts for nearly a third of GDP and employs four-fifths of the population and, as a result, there is "little arable land" remaining. "On a hectare, if we grow beans, we earn about \$2,000 a year, whereas on the same land, if we grow geranium, the income can reach \$6,000 or even \$8,000," Hitimana says. The trained agronomist embodies Rwanda's ambition of diversifying its agriculture and increasing the value of exports by getting into the lucrative global market for essential oils. To this end, Hitimana has been importing geraniums from South Africa since 2004.

At the time the flower was virtually unknown in Rwanda, but Hitimana was convinced of the "great potential" of the essential oil sector.

Four crops a year

"In South Africa there can only be two harvests a year, but here, as there is no winter, it is possible to get up to four crops a year," says Hitimana, whose company Ikirezi Natural Products has since grown and diversified. With 25 hectares of plantations, it produces 1,000 kilograms of essential oils derived from patchouli, lemon grass and eucalyptus as well as geraniums. The oils are exported to Canada, South Africa, the US and elsewhere for use in the perfume industry. The company employs 70 farmers.

Growth market

According to the India-based firm Market Research Future (MRFR), essential oils are increasingly in demand in richer countries for use in cosmetics, food and pharmaceuticals. The world market is forecast to grow by seven percent between 2017 and 2022, says MRFR. To get its share of the cake, Rwanda opened an essential oil laboratory three years ago, the first of its kind in the region, allowing quality control.

"One of the main challenges facing Rwanda is a growing trade deficit and a limited number of competitive companies that can meet regional and international export standards," says Patience Mutesi, Rwanda director for TradeMark East Africa, which promotes regional trade and helped fund the lab project. — AFP



Builders work on the roof of a home under construction at a housing plan in Jackson Township, Butler County, Pa. The Commerce Department reported on US home construction in June. —AP

US HOUSING STARTS REBOUNDED IN JUNE

WASHINGTON: US homebuilding rebounded more than expected in June after declining for three straight months, but construction activity remains constrained by rising lumber prices and labor and land shortages.

Housing starts jumped 8.3 percent to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 1.22 million units, the highest level since February, as both single-family and multi-family construction increased, the Commerce Department said yesterday. May's sales pace was revised up to 1.12 million units from the previously reported 1.09 million units.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast groundbreaking activity rising to a rate of 1.16 million units last month. Homebuilding rose 2.1 percent on a year-on-year basis.

Despite the bounceback, homebuilding has lost momentum after strong gains in both the fourth and first quarters. Economists blame the slowdown on supply bottlenecks.

A survey on Tuesday showed confidence among homebuilders hit an eight-month low in July amid complaints about high lumber prices and shortages of building lots and labor. Lumber prices have surged after the government in April imposed anti-subsidy duties on imports of Canadian softwood lumber. The dollar was trading slight-

ly higher against a basket of currencies, while prices for US government bonds fell.

Single-family homebuilding, which accounts for the largest share of the residential housingmarket, surged 6.3 percent to an 849,000 unit-pace last month, also the highest level since February. Single-family construction has lost ground since vaulting to a near 9-1/2-year high in February, despite strong demand for housing.

Single-family starts increased 9.3 percent in the Northeast and but fell 3.6 percent in the Midwest. They climbed 7.2 percent in the South, where more than half of new homebuilding occurs, and advanced 10.6 percent in the West to their highest level since last October.

Starts for the volatile multi-family housing segment increased 13.3 percent to a 366,000 unit-pace, after five straight months of declines. Construction had slowed amid a jump in multi-family homes coming on the market. Building permits last month shot up 7.4 percent to a 1.25 million-unit rate, the highest level since March. Single-family home permits rose 4.1 percent after three straight months of declines. Permits for the construction of multi-family homes surged 13.9 percent in June to a five-month high. Building completions surged 5.2 percent to their highest level since November 2016.—Reuters

AFTER THROWING IN KITCHEN SINK, WHAT'S A CENTRAL BANK TO DO?

CBS ARE NOWHERE NEAR READY TO DEAL WITH A RECESSION

LONDON: Central banks struggling to lift historically low interest rates and rein in stimulus programs may have more on their minds than just getting back to normal - they are, by some accounts, nowhere near ready to deal with the next recession or crisis. Start with a then-and-now comparison. When the global financial system nearly collapsed about a decade ago, the world's major central banks launched a series of aggressive counter-measures, including trillions of dollars' worth of asset-buying. The global economics team at Bank of America-Merrill Lynch - in a report that argues central banks are not currently capable of responding to a new crisis - calculate that from 2006 to 2009 the five major central banks cut rates by an average of about 350 basis points.

Could they do that now? Short answer, no. BofAML reckons the current average nominal policy rate is just 50 basis points, with the European Central Bank and Bank of Japan in particular at the bottom limit of what they can do.

It is not the first time this concern has been raised. The Bank for International Settlements, often called the central banks' bank, fired a warning shot two years ago.

"In some jurisdictions, monetary policy is already testing its outer limits," it said in its 2014/2015 annual report. In the same vein, Stephen King, HSBC's senior economic adviser, has noted that in all U.S. recessions since the 1970s, the benchmark Federal Reserve interest rate has fallen by a minimum of 5 percentage points. It is currently at a range of 1 percent to 1.25 percent.

Similarly, central banks have been buying up the shop since 2008, when the financial crisis hit and the Great Recession began. Between them, the US, Swiss, British, Japanese and euro zone central banks have balance sheets - essentially cash and asset holdings - totalling roughly \$15 trillion. That compares with only around \$4 trillion at the start of 2008. They could and probably would expand this in a crisis; central banks have shown great innovation in the past. But with the store of assets available to buy dwindling as a result of the \$15 trillion, any expansion would have to be far broader. Doable, but relatively untried and possibly politically difficult.

Inflation key

Despite the huge monetary largesse, inflation remains low and well below target in all major industrialized economies bar Brexit-hit Britain - and even there it may be easing back because of the ebbing of base effects from sterling's fall.

This means that central banks such as the Fed, ECB, Bank of England and Bank of Japan are all making noises of varying hawkishness without necessarily having solved their main problem.

The Fed has already started tightening and is talking about cutting its balance sheet, the Bank of England is at least thinking about raising rates, and the ECB is hinting at tapering its asset-



NEW YORK: In this Oct 16, 2014 file photo, a screen at a trading post on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange is juxtaposed with the Goldman Sachs booth. Goldman Sachs, the most Wall Street of Wall Street firms, is pushing quietly into the realm of consumer banking. —AP

buying. Even the Bank of Japan, or some members, have been quietly retreating from its radical monetary experiment. Ironically, it is this desire to normalize that some economists believe is the main risk for global economic growth and for the next downturn.

"In the past, some recessions have been caused by central banks acting too aggressively," Sarah Hewin, chief European economist at Standard Chartered Bank, said, adding that her firm did not see any sustained inflation pressures to rationalize tightening. BofAML econo-

mists Ethan Harris and Aditya Bhawe go further, saying central banks should prepare for the next recession by keep the taps open to overshoot their inflation targets, not make do with bumping up close to them. In other words, let inflation spike, then tighten. What then, if a downturn hits first, before normalization of monetary policy? Innovation. The idea of "helicopter money" has already been floated, involving anything from direct transfers to the private sector to monetizing government deficits by direct bond sales between government and central bank. —AP

TRUMP NAFTA PLAN 'WORKABLE' BUT ANALYSTS WARN OF PITFALLS

WASHINGTON: The Trump administration's plan to reframe the landmark North American Free Trade Agreement faces significant hurdles and includes some elements Canadians and Mexicans may find hard to swallow, analysts warn. And an aggressive push by the White House on its toughest demands could reduce Washington's ability to achieve a successful outcome.

"If the US pushes Mexico too hard, they might make it impossible to reach an agreement," Antonio Ortiz-Mena, former head of economic affairs at the Embassy of Mexico in Washington, told AFP.

The three nations are due to start the talks next month on the 1994 pact that President Donald Trump once called "the worst trade

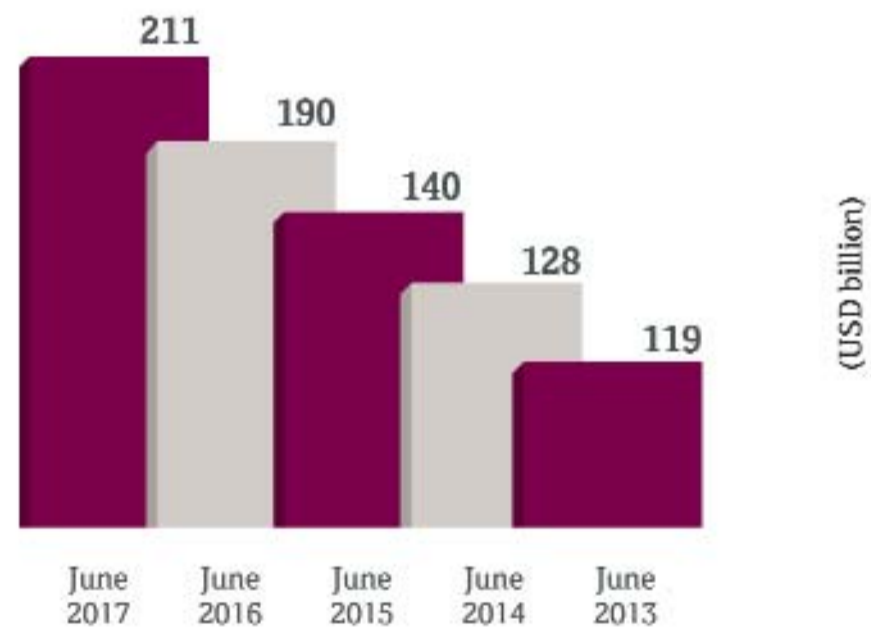
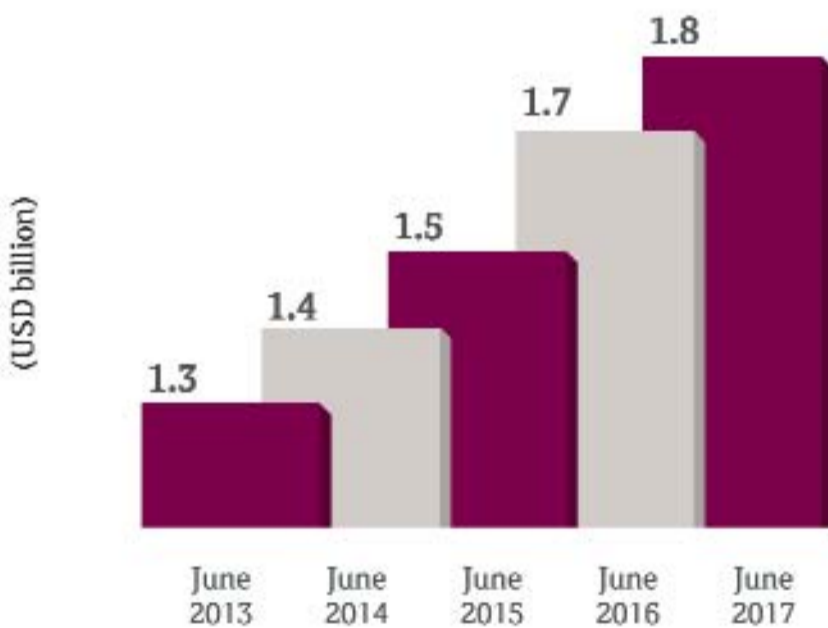
deal maybe ever signed anywhere." In the negotiating goals released Monday, the White House said it will focus on reducing its bilateral trade deficits with each of its neighbors. But Canada and Mexico already face bigger trade deficits as a share of their economies than the United States. Last year, the US trade deficit amounted to 2.5 percent of GDP, but Mexico's was 2.6 percent and Canada's 3.3 percent.

And economists say there is little that governments can do to make an impact on the deficit in any case. It is true the US trade balance with Mexico became a deficit under NAFTA—swinging from a \$1.7 billion surplus in 1993 to a \$55.6 billion deficit in 2016 but total trade with Canada and Mexico more than tripled, reaching \$1.2 trillion by last year. —AFP

QNB Group affirms its position as the largest financial institution in the MEA region

Net Profit US\$1.8 billion, up by 7% on June 2016

Total Assets US\$211 billion, up by 11% on June 2016



QNB Group achieves record financial results for the period ended 30 June 2017.

- QNB Group, the largest financial institution in the MEA region, is currently present in more than 31 countries across three continents
- QNB Group staff exceeds 27,900 serving more than 21 million customers through 1,250 locations and 4,300 ATMs
- QNB Group enjoys one of the highest credit ratings: Capital Intelligence: AA-, Fitch: AA-, Moody's: Aa3, Standard & Poor's: A

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GULF BANK ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF AL-DANAH DAILY DRAWS

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank held its Al-Danah daily draws on 16 July 2017 announcing the names of its winners for the week of 9 July - 13 July 2017. The Al-Danah daily draws include draws every working day for two prizes of KD 1,000 per winner.

The winners are:

- (Sunday 9/7): Hamad Fahad Hamad Al-Mutairi, Mohammad Arshad Tajeldeen
 - (Monday 10/7): Fuad Essa Al-Awad, Anwar Saleh Al-Nuwaiti
 - (Tuesday 11/7): Tareq Abdulla Soud Al-Eryan, Saleh Ahmed Al-Rakaf
 - (Wednesday 12/7): Turki Maiah Ali Saleh, Nawal Khalaf Mesfer Al-Shelahi
 - (Thursday 13/7): Nemshan Saod Nemshan Al-Nemshan, Abdulaziz Shaker Hussain Al-Ostath
- Gulf Bank's Al-Danah 2017 draw lineup includes daily draws (2 winners per working day and each receive KD 1,000). Al-Danah's 3rd Quarterly Draw for the prize of KD500,000 will be held on 28 September. The final Al-Danah draw for KD 1 million will be held on 11 January, 2018 whereby the Al-Danah millionaire will be announced.
- Gulf Bank encourages you to increase your chances by depositing more into your Al Danah account, immediately from any local bank, using the new ePay (Self-Pay) service, which is available on Gulf Bank's Online and Mobile Banking.

Five reasons why the Al-Danah account is the best:

- 1) Kuwait's single biggest yearly cash

prize of KD 1 Million and the largest international bank prize according to Guinness World Records

- 2) Kuwait's biggest quarterly cash prizes, up to KD500,000
 - 3) Two winners of KD1,000 every working day
 - 4) The most chances to win
 - 5) Only Bank that transfers your chances to win from the previous year to the current year Only Al-Danah makes millionaires.
- Al-Danah also offers a number of unique services including: the Al-Danah Deposit Only ATM card which helps account holders deposit their money at their convenience; as well as the Al-Danah calculator to help customers calculate their chances of becoming an Al-Danah winner.

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is open to Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. Customers require a minimum of KD200 to open an account and the same amount must be maintained as for customers to be eligible for the upcoming Al-Danah draws. If the customer's account balance falls below KD 200 at any given time, a KD2 charge will be made on a monthly basis to the account until the minimum balance is met. Customers who open an account and/or deposit more will enter the daily draw within two days.

To take part in the Al-Danah 2017 upcoming quarterly and yearly draws, customers must meet the required hold period for each draw; customers can visit one of Gulf Bank's 56 branches for assistance and guidance.

HOUSE BUDGET BLUEPRINT KEY TO SUCCESS OF TRUMP TAX AGENDA

REPUBLICANS PRESS AHEAD WITH A PLAN

WASHINGTON: Despite opposition from Republican moderates and conservatives, House leaders are pressing ahead with a budget plan whose success is critical to the party's hopes to deliver on one of President Donald Trump's top priorities - a GOP-only effort to overhaul the tax code.

The importance of the measure has been magnified by the cratering in the Senate of the Trump-backed effort to repeal President Barack Obama's health care law, leaving a rewrite of the tax code as the best chance for Trump to score a major legislative win this year. The measure would require about \$200 billion worth of cuts to benefit programs and other so-called mandatory spending coupled with the tax plan.

The budget plan unveiled on Tuesday is crucial because its passage would pave the way to pass a tax overhaul this fall without the fear of a filibuster by Senate Democrats.

But it also proposes trillions of dollars in cuts to the social safety net and other domestic programs and puts congressional Republicans at odds with Trump over cutting Medicare. It also would sharply boost military spending.

"In past years, the budget has only been a vision. But now, with the Republican Congress and a Republican White House, this budget is a plan for action," said Budget Committee Chair Diane Black, R-Tenn. "Now is our moment to achieve real results."

Unclear, however, is whether GOP leaders can get the budget measure through the House. Conservatives want a larger package of spending cuts to accompany this fall's tax overhaul bill, while moderates are concerned cuts to programs such as food stamps could go too far.

"I just think that if you're dealing with too many mandatory cuts while you're dealing with tax reform you make tax reform that much harder to enact," said Rep. Charlie Dent, R-Pa.

Black announced a committee vote for yesterday, but was less confident of a vote by the entire House next week; a delay seems likely because of the ongoing quarrel between the GOP's factions.

The House GOP plan proposes to turn Medicare into a voucher-like program in which future retirees would receive a fixed benefit to purchase health insurance on the open market. Republicans have proposed the idea each year since taking back the House in 2011, but they've never tried to implement it - and that's not going to change now, even with a Republican as president.

"Republicans would destroy the Medicare guarantee for our seniors and inflict bone-deep cuts to Medicaid that would devastate veterans, seniors with long-term care needs, and rural communities," said Democratic leader Nancy

Pelosi of California. The plan promises to balance the budget through unprecedented and politically unworkable cuts across the budget. It calls for turning this year's projected \$700 billion-or-so deficit into a tiny \$9 billion surplus by 2027. It would do so by slashing \$5.4 trillion over the coming decade, including almost \$500 billion from Medicare and \$1.5 trillion from Medicaid and the Obama health law, along with sweeping cuts to benefits such as federal employee pensions, food stamps and tax credits for the working poor.

But in the immediate future the GOP measure

lizes a lot of gimmicks and vagueness to reach some semblance of theoretical balance and also hides a lot of the draconian cuts would be inflicted on the American people."

All told, the GOP plan would spend about \$67 billion more in the upcoming annual appropriations bills than would be allowed under harsh spending limits set by a 2011 budget and debt agreement. It pads war accounts by \$10 billion. And, like Trump's budget, the House GOP plan assumes rosy economic projections that would erase another \$1.5 trillion from the deficit over 10 years. The budget resolution is nonbinding. It



WASHINGTON: In this March 10, 2017 file photo, House Budget Committee Chair Rep Diane Black, R-Tenn. speaks on Capitol Hill in Washington. —AP

is a budget buster. It would add almost \$30 billion to Trump's \$668 billion request for national defense. The GOP budget plan would cut non-defense agencies by \$5 billion. And of the more than \$4 trillion in promised saving from mandatory programs like Medicare and Medicaid, the plan assumes just \$203 billion would actually pass this year.

Democrats focused their fire on the plan's sweeping promises to cut from almost every corner of the budget other than Social Security, defense and veterans' programs. At the same time, they have little fear those cuts would actually be implemented.

Top Budget Committee Democrat John Yarmuth of Kentucky told reporters the GOP "uti-

would allow Republicans controlling Congress to pass follow-up legislation through the Senate without the threat of a filibuster by Democrats. GOP leaders and the White House plan to use that measure to rewrite the tax code.

As proposed by House leaders, tax reform would essentially be deficit-neutral, which means cuts to tax rates would be mostly "paid for" by closing various tax breaks such as the deduction for state and local taxes. However, the GOP plan would devote \$300 billion claimed from economic growth to the tax reform effort. But conservatives are insisting on adding cuts to so-called mandatory programs, which make up more than two-thirds of the federal budget and basically run on autopilot. —AP

MOHAMMAD QASEM WINS KD 4,000 IN BURGAN BANK'S VALUE ACCOUNT DRAW

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank yesterday announced Mohammad Ahmad Qasem as the winner of the Value Account KD 4000 draw. The winner expressed his excitement of winning the cash prize of KD 4,000.

Dedicated to offer the best in-class services, Burgan Bank's Value Account presents customers with exceptional features which were specifically designed to suit the needs of expatriates living in Kuwait. Account holders will be able to enjoy matchless benefits that include receiving a free credit card for one year, application for a loan, in addition to a chance to enter the quarterly draw to win KD 4000 as well as other discounts from selected merchant stores.

Burgan Bank will continue presenting exclusive services and draws with an aim of exceeding customers' expectations while offering them chances to win valuable cash prizes all year round.

Opening a Value account is simple, interested Individuals with salaries starting from KD 150 and above are eligible to open a Value



Account. Established in 1977, Burgan Bank is the youngest commercial Bank and second largest by assets in Kuwait, with a significant focus on the corporate and financial institutions sectors, as well as having a growing retail, and private

bank customer base. Burgan Bank has majority owned subsidiaries in the MENAT region supported by one of the largest regional branch networks. The Bank has continuously improved its performance over the years through an expand-

ed revenue structure, diversified funding sources, and a strong capital base. The adoption of state-of-the-art services and technology has positioned it as a trendsetter in the domestic market and within the MENA region. Burgan Bank's brand has been created on a foundation of real values - of trust, commitment, excellence and progression, to remind us of the high standards to which we aspire. 'People come first' is the foundation on which its products and services are developed.

The bank was re-certified with the prestigious ISO 9001:2008, making it the first bank in the GCC, and the only bank in Kuwait to receive such accreditation for the third consecutive year. The Bank also has to its credit the distinction of being the only Bank in Kuwait to have won the JP Morgan Chase Quality Recognition Award for twelve consecutive years.

Burgan Bank, a subsidiary of KIPCO (Kuwait Projects Company), is a strongly positioned regional Bank in the MENA region.



KFH ANNOUNCES CARDS SUMMER CAMPAIGN 5TH DRAW WINNERS

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) announced 7 winners of the fifth draw of the new banking cards summer campaign themed "Get Back Double the Value of your Purchases". The campaign was launched in an attempt to encourage clients to use KFH credit, prepaid and debit cards while making purchases in Kuwait and overseas.

The winners are: Raed Altaher, Tareq Almouharji, Jamal Alazmi, Dalal Boursely Nour Alfara, Essam Alojail, and Munirah Aldahesh. The campaign that lasts for 120 days gives KFH customers chances to enter draw to win double cashback up to KD 2000 daily. KFH Credit and Prepaid cards used for domestic and international purchases and KFH Debit cards used for international purchases are eligible for the draw. For every KD 1 spent locally earns 1 chance and every KD 1 spent internationally earn 3 chances to enter the daily draw.

This campaign is part of KFH efforts to reward its clients and grant them additional value; thus achieving customer satisfaction and boosting their confidence. The campaign also aims at enhancing the bank's presence especially that it dominates the largest market share in the field of banking cards. KFH strives to continuously offer its clients new promotions and discounts in order to distinguish them among peers, not to mention to further bolster bank's leading position in the field of banking cards.

KFH marketing campaigns play a significant role in underlining KFH's principles that include boosting sales, and benefiting clients and merchants. It is

worth noting that KFH has won several awards in the field of banking cards which reiterates its success and efficiency in banking cards market. KFH enjoys high confidence and leadership in the market in addition to high quality products which have enabled it to achieve growth in cards market and increase the number of customers.

KFH was established in Kuwait in 1977 and is enlisted in the Kuwait Stock Exchange. KFH Group is a global pioneer in the field of Islamic banking services, where it offers a wide array of Islamic products and services, not to mention a high standard of innovation and client service. KFH manages its operations in the GCC, Asia, and Europe through over 480 branches, including KFH-Turkey, in order to offer services for the bank's clients in Turkey, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Germany, Jordan, and Dubai.

KFH's mission is to achieve highest levels of excellence and innovation in the field of client service, while developing common interest for all those concerned with the financial institution. KFH's vision is to spearhead the global development in Islamic financial services, and to upgrade the bank into the level of becoming the most sustainable profitable Islamic bank in the world. KFH's values include cementing leadership through all its businesses, including leadership in the Islamic banking services worldwide, through innovation and in client service and the development of its employees. In addition, KFH is committed to all its procedures, and to setting up long-life partnerships with the concerned authorities.

WANT TO ESCAPE SAO PAULO'S TRAFFIC? TAKE A FLYING TAXI

SAO PAULO: While Uber has changed ground transport in many cities, Sao Paulo's infernal traffic jams have sparked a new app that opens the sky to commuters: Voom, a helicopter taxi service that charges according to distance and the passenger's weight.

It's a godsend for those in a rush-but only if the weather permits. Gustavo Boyle, a Brazilian

living in the United States who goes to Sao Paulo for business, is one of those who says the hops above the city are the only way to get around. "I've opted for helicopters," he said, pointing to the metropolis sprawling beyond the horizon as he choppered from a chic central district to the airport. Sao Paulo-South America's biggest city, home to 12 million residents within

its municipal limits and millions more in satellite towns-is regularly choked by gargantuan traffic jams. There are 5.9 million vehicles, or one for every two people. At peak hour, traffic can be backed up as much as 576 kilometers (358 miles).

Not so pricey

A new venture launched in April by Europe's Airbus, Voom has taken a page out of Uber's marketing manual to put clients above it all-at a competitive price. The app asks passengers to enter their weight and that of any baggage, then immediately sends the calculated fare.

Boyle's run, from the southeastern neighborhood of Itaim Bibi to the airport some 30 kilometers (20 miles) away, takes nine minutes and costs \$150. Compare that with the market rates before Voom became available. Individual helicopter companies wanted 10 times more-and trips needed to be booked at least two days in advance. "Our goal is to make helicopter transport accessible to more people, so that the helicopter is seen as an alternative," said Voom's executive director, Uma Subramanian. In Boyle's case, taking a helicopter through the app was a no-brainer. Using a traditional taxi on the clogged roads would have cost him \$50 and an hour and a half of frustrating stop-and-go.

"I chose Voom because it fits within my travel budget, it's economical and it's practical," Boyle said. "Those are two hours I can now use for work, which is handy given the tight schedule I have," he said. According to Subramanian, saturated roads in Latin America mean that "people lose up to 10 hours a week" stuck in traffic. — AFP



SAO PAULO: Brazilian businessman Gustavo Boyle disembarks from the helicopter upon arriving in Guarulhos, some 20 km from Sao Paulo. Airbus' subsidiary Voom gives an alternative for those willing to avoid Sao Paulo's heavy car traffic, offering a helicopter service similar to the car service offered by Uber. —AFP

MIMECAST ROLLS OUT SYNC & RECOVER FOR EXCHANGE AND OFFICE 365 NEW SERVICE STREAMLINES RECOVERY OF LOST OR CORRUPTED EMAIL DATA

DUBAI: Mimecast Limited, a leading email and data security company, yesterday introduced Sync & Recover for Exchange and Office 365. As more organizations move email and its data to Office 365, they need to better protect this data against malicious or accidental loss. Sync & Recover offers unified management of compliance, archiving and data resilience. The new service also provides organizations with protection against downtime in the event of a ransomware or other malware attacks, while cloud-based efficiency can quickly restore corrupted or lost email data.

Organizations have long deployed backup and recovery systems in conjunction with Exchange on-premises mail servers, however with thousands of organizations moving to Office 365 they are left without an integrated backup of email data. Sync & Recover enhances

the data protection capabilities of Microsoft Exchange Online and Office 365 by leveraging Mimecast archive data to provide intuitive point-and-click recovery of email data in the event of accidental loss, malicious attacks or technical failure.

Offered as an add-on option for archiving customers, Sync & Recover offers simplified administration and streamlined recovery taking out the need for organizations to acquire additional software or hardware. Organizations can manage compliance archiving and data resiliency from a single Administration Console, without the need for dedicated backup and recovery solutions. Additionally, IT admins can configure recovery and search easily, to recover individual items, entire mailboxes or folders. Sync & Recover, in conjunction with Targeted Threat Protection (TTP) and



Glenn Brown, senior product manager at Mimecast

Mimecast Continuity services, allows organizations to combat ransomware and other email-borne malware attacks on Exchange Server data. This layered ransomware strategy combines prevention of email-borne cyber exploits, simplified recovery of email data in case of

breach, and email service continuity, all managed from a single intuitive administrative console.

The new Mimecast feature also helps simplify migration from local Exchange servers and Office 365, as well as the management of complex, global messaging environments and hybrid cloud environments.

"With adoption of Microsoft Office 365 steadily rising, organizations have more to worry about than just the impact in the event of an outage. While an outage could take an organization offline for a couple of hours, malicious or accidental data loss could have even bigger consequences - some that companies can't recover from," said Andrew Smith, senior research analyst at IDC. "Organizations must ensure their data governance and management strategy includes a combination of archiving,

backup, and data protection capabilities, so they have the appropriate tools in any recovery situation - whether that be the aftermath of a ransomware attack or if an employee accidentally deletes an email file."

"To strengthen their cyber resilience strategy, organizations need to ensure they have a backup-and-recovery capability to help protect email data and maintain business continuity, in case of an incident resulting in data loss," said Glenn Brown, senior product manager at Mimecast. "Sync & Recover for Exchange and Office 365 offers organizations a simple, streamlined way to recover deleted or corrupted email, calendar, and contact information by leveraging archive data."

Sync & Recover for Exchange and Office 365 will be generally available in August 2017.



QNET KICK-STARTS LIMITLESS EXPO 'QNET CARNIVAL' IN GULF

CONCEPT PROPAGATES 'ABSOLUTE LIVING' AMONG FAMILIES, INDIVIDUALS



KUWAIT: Prominent Asian direct selling company QNET launched the Limitless Expo in the GCC region at the Marina Mall, Kuwait City. Themed 'QNET Carnival', the expo propagated QNET's concept of 'Absolute Living' among families and individuals by displaying a wide and exciting range of lifestyle enhancing and wellness products.

The concept of 'Absolute Living' was formulated to help people achieve a well-balanced life with a healthier body, mind, and spirit. Some of QNET's best-selling products including the newly launched HomePure Nova Water Filtration System, Qafe green coffee for weight loss, supplements like OIE (made from pure olive leaf extracts), LifeQode Sun & Moon, and LifeQode EDG3, as well as its skincare range, Physio Radiance and DEFY, are put on display for the public at the mall all day. Mall-goers can get acquainted with QNET and its products and services through the product demonstrations, the product samples that are being given away, and their cordial interaction with expo staff.

"QNET's products and services have the predominant goal of making complete well-being accessible to all. Through the Kuwait Expo, we would like people to see and learn about the wide range of products that we offer and encourage them to proactively take care of their physical and mental health by using naturally healthy products," said Khaled Diab, QNET's Regional General Manager, MENA. The 'QNET Carnival' is open until 10 PM every day.

As a prominent Asian direct selling company, QNET provides a wide range of life enhancing products that are offered through its proprietary e-commerce platform to customers and distributors in more than 100 countries. The company has over 25 offices and agencies worldwide, and more than 50 stockists, apart from localized operations or franchisees in a number of countries. In the UAE, QNET operates from 3 locations, offices in Dubai and Abu Dhabi as well as a logistics hub in Dubai.

Established in Hong Kong in 1998, QNET is a member of the Direct Selling Associations of Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Indonesia. QNET is also a part of the Hong Kong Health Food Association, and the Health Supplements Industry Association of Singapore, among others.

QNET is active in sports sponsorships around the world, including football, badminton and more, due to the company's strong belief that the drive, passion, and teamwork of sports mirror those of QNET. QNET recently signed a new and exciting partnership with Manchester City Football Club (MCFC) as its official direct selling partner for three years.



KASPERSKY LAB INTRODUCES NEW FREE APP FOR ANDROID DEVICE BATTERIES

DUBAI: Kaspersky Lab has introduced a new solution for Android device users - Battery Life. This free application is designed to save a mobile user from that dreaded unpleasant situation - when their phone battery starts getting low at the most inopportune moment.

According to a survey, 9 out of 10 people feel panicked when their phone battery is getting low. This is not surprising, given that people feel more distressed when they are without these mobile companions, than when they are without their real partners.

In many cases, having an uncharged smartphone is not only an unpleasant experience, it might also be unsafe - for example, it might be risky to be without mobile communication in an emergency, or if a user is in an unfamiliar environment. Battery Life is designed to solve this problem once and for all.

The Kaspersky Lab solution analyzes all applications on the user's device and identifies those that are consuming the most energy. This is especially important, considering that 96 percent of apps on Android devices run in the background, even if the user has not launched them. Battery Life can stop these "battery gluttons" with one touch, thereby extending the device's bat-

tery life. Battery Life will also show the user an urgent message if any application starts using more energy than usual.

Another useful feature of Battery Life is its ability to calculate the time remaining before a smartphone's battery is completely low. This information gives users the opportunity to urgently find a way of charging their phone, so that they are not left without mobile communication when they might need it most. Similarly, during charging, Battery Life calculates the time left until the battery is full.

"Our approach to protecting users includes reducing digital risks to a minimum on all fronts, not just in the field of cyberthreats. Battery Life helps people stay connected. However, it is also important to remember about internet security whenever you are online. And, it is especially important to consider the protection of your privacy from prying eyes, and the protection of your device from loss or theft. For all of these concerns, we have also prepared solutions," reminds Elena Kharchenko, Head of Consumer Product Management at Kaspersky Lab.

Kaspersky Battery Life takes only 15 Mb and runs on the Android 4.1 - 6.0.1 platform in a limited number of languages.



NEW YORK: In this file photo, the Bixby function of the new Samsung Galaxy S8 is demonstrated in New York. Samsung Electronics says its Bixby voice assistant will start speaking English but only in two countries: South Korea and the US. —AP

HI BIXBY: SAMSUNG PHONE'S VOICE ASSISTANT NOW SPEAKS ENGLISH

SEOUL: Samsung Electronics said its Bixby voice assistant for smartphones will start speaking English but only in two countries: South Korea and the US.

The South Korean tech giant said started yesterday, users of the Galaxy S8 smartphones can speak in American English to their phones to turn on the flashlight, take a selfie or make the phone search for say, pictures from a summer vacation, and create an album.

Samsung did not say why it could not make Bixby in English available to users outside South Korea or the US or when it will become available in other languages in other countries. The service, comparable to Apple's Siri or Google Assistant, was previously available only in Korean.

Samsung says its virtual assistant can be activated by saying "Hi Bixby" to the phone

or by clicking a button on the side of the S8 phones. The rollout of the Bixby English version was delayed by a couple of months. Samsung's mobile chief Koh Dong-jin had earlier told reporters that the service would be available in English before June.

It also comes about one month before Samsung is widely expected to announce its latest iteration of the Galaxy Note smartphone after the discontinuation of its fire-prone Galaxy Note 7 phone last year.

Samsung, the world's largest smartphone maker, is a latecomer in the virtual assistant race. Its rivals introduced their versions several years ago but the company said it believes its status as the world's dominant mobile device manufacturer will give it an edge. Bixby also enables users to find more information about real-world items by pointing a phone's camera. —AP

SILICON VALLEY MOSTLY QUIET IN INTERNET SURVEILLANCE DEBATE

WASHINGTON: Facebook Inc, Alphabet Inc's Google, Apple Inc and other major technology firms are largely absent from a debate over the renewal of a broad US internet surveillance law, weakening prospects for privacy reforms that would further protect customer data, according to sources familiar with the matter.

While tech companies often lobby Washington on privacy issues, the major firms have been hesitant to enter a fray over a controversial portion of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA), industry lobbyists, congressional aides and civil liberties advocates said.

Among their concerns is that doing so could jeopardize a trans-Atlantic data transfer pact underpinning billions of dollars in trade in digital services, the sources said. Technology companies and privacy groups have for years complained about the part of FISA known as Section 702 that allows the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) to collect and analyze emails and other digital communications of foreigners living overseas. Though targeted at foreigners, the surveillance also collects data on

an unknown number of Americans - some privacy advocates have suggested it could be millions - without a search warrant.

Section 702 will expire at the end of the year unless the Republican-controlled Congress votes to reauthorize it. The White House, US intelligence agencies and many Republican senators want to renew the law, which they consider vital to national security, without changes and make it permanent.

A coalition of Democrats and libertarian-leaning conservatives prefer, however, to amend the law with more privacy safeguards. Reform Government Surveillance, a coalition of tech firms established after the 2013 leaks by former NSA contractor Edward Snowden, said reforming the law remains a priority. A spokeswoman declined to comment further but referred to two letters sent earlier this year by technology companies urging Congress to consider changes to the law.

Snowden exposed the spy agency's program that collected US phone call metadata in bulk and also the extent of spying under Section 702,

embarrassing some US technology firms.

The companies, working with privacy rights activists, successfully lobbied Congress two years ago to pass legislation that curtailed the NSA's bulk collection of call records. For example, Facebook chief executive Mark Zuckerberg wrote on his Facebook page that he had personally called then-President Barack Obama to express "frustration over the damage the government is creating for all of our future."

Now, however, Silicon Valley's reduced involvement frustrates civil liberties groups because of a widely held view that Section 702 poses a far greater threat to privacy than the telephone program, which did not harvest actual content. Facebook declined comment. Google and Apple did not respond to requests for comment.

Privacy shield agreement

The companies' relative inactivity is explained by several legal challenges in Europe to an agreement between the United States and the European Union, known as the Privacy

Shield, the sources said. The litigation hinges on whether US surveillance practices afford enough privacy safeguards. A coalition of human rights organizations has urged Europe to suspend Privacy Shield unless Section 702 is substantially reformed.

US technology companies have privately bristled at those efforts, three industry lobbyists said, in part because expectations that 702 reforms will pass Congress are low. "If you link them and you lose one, you lose both," said one of the lobbyists, who like the others requested anonymity to discuss private conversations with technology companies.

The lobbyist added that several major firms were more interested in making deals with the Trump administration that could affect their bottom lines, such as tax repatriation, than getting caught in politically charged fights over government surveillance.

Another industry lobbyist said Section 702 surveillance is "not a C-suite issue" that concerns chief executives in Silicon Valley like other issues, including encryption.

Companies have also been limited in how they can lobby for changes to the law because no comprehensive reform bill has been introduced yet in Congress, said Alex Abdo, a privacy advocate and staff attorney at the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University.

A bipartisan group of lawmakers in the House Judiciary Committee is not expected to introduce such legislation until after Congress returns from its August recess.

The schism between tech companies and privacy groups was on display earlier this year in litigation in Ireland - Facebook argued customer data was sufficiently protected from US spying programs, while an attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union testified that more protections were needed.

Snowden's leaks showed that Section 702 collects content of digital communications directly from the internet backbone and through a program formerly code named Prism where the NSA gathered data directly from several companies, including Facebook, Google, Apple and Microsoft Corp. —Reuters

CHILE MOVES TO EASE STRICT ABORTION LAWS

VALPARAISO, Chile: Chile's senate early yesterday took a major step towards lifting the socially conservative country's total ban on abortions by agreeing to decriminalize the procedure in certain cases. The measure, supported by President Michelle Bachelet, allows abortion in cases of rape, if the mother's life is at risk, or if the fetus presents a deadly birth defect. After hours of tense debate and more than two years in the making, the senators approved the proposal by voting separately on each measure. Chilean conservatives have rallied against the abortion bill ever since

Bachelet introduced it in January 2015. Nevertheless polls show that 70 percent of Chileans support legalized abortion under those three conditions. Abortion of any type has been strictly outlawed since 1989, during the final days of the Augusto Pinochet dictatorship. Under current law abortion is punishable by up to five years in prison. Prior to that, for more than 50 years, Chile permitted abortion if the mother's life was in danger or if the fetus was not viable. The abortion measure still needs approval by the Chamber of Deputies to be signed into law by

Bachelet, a pediatrician who returned to office in March 2014 after serving as Chile's first woman president from 2006 to 2010.

Police kick out protesters

The approval "is a great contribution to the history of Chile," said Claudia Dides, spokesperson for Miles, a pro-sexual and reproductive rights group. Supporters gathered outside Congress clapped and cheered when news broke that the measure was approved. Debate however continues over finer points, such as what role parents will play in the case of pregnant

minors. The approval comes ahead of November presidential elections in which Bachelet will not participate.

She said that she will make the measure's approval and full implementation a priority before she leaves office in March 2018. "It's an act of cruelty to not allow women to decide," said pro-government Senator Guido Girardi during the debate. Conservative Senator Ena Von Baer warned that she would send the measure to the Constitutional Tribunal for review, claiming that it denies protection to the child that is about to be born. During the debate police

were called in to remove religious activists from the chamber because they kept interrupting debate with anti-abortion chants.

Lawmakers from Bachelet's Socialist party have tried in the past to introduce abortion bills, but they have always been voted down by the legislature. Bachelet, who was a senior United Nations official working on female empowerment issues after her first term in office, has seen her support wane due to administration scandals. Opinion polls show that in November voters will likely re-elect right-wing former president Sebastian Pinera. —AFP

PIONEERING PROCEDURE IN LONDON OFFERS HOPE TO KUWAITI CHILDREN

KUWAIT: Kuwait children with hydrocephalus have been offered new hope through a revolutionary technique, ETV-CPC, which reduces the risk of fluid production in the brain, and often means less follow-ups for patients compared to the traditional brain shunt procedure. The procedure, now available to Kuwaiti patients treated at Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH), is set to improve the lives of thousands of babies with hydrocephalus, one of the most common birth defects. Hydrocephalus is a condition where the patient has a build-up of fluid in the brain, this causes an abnormal widening of spaces in the brain.

treat hydrocephalus and the only options are surgical. "The traditional way to treat hydrocephalus is with a shunt. While it is still a very good operation that is conducted commonly, it leaves the patient with a permanent tube in the body to allow for the draining of the fluid. The limitations with any tube or mechanical device is that it can snap, it can get blocked, it can get infected and cause problems. ETV-CPC gives the patient the chance to avoid the lifelong burden of care that comes with having a shunt," Dr James added.

ETV-CPC is a well-established procedure that was originally designed to create a cost-effective and permanent solution for children in Africa as it results in less follow-ups. "The procedure is well-tolerated and only takes an hour or two. The child can then go home within a day or two of the operation. There is reassurance for Middle Eastern families that with ETV-CPC, there is less chance that they will need to access specialist care very quickly. Unlike with a shunt, for example, which can get blocked and then needs to be treated immediately by a specialist neurosurgeon - which is not always possible to access locally," he says.

Dr James points out that every case is different and it is important to choose the right operation for the child. "ETV-CPC is less likely to work for children who need an immediate solution and sometimes the child will have to have to come back and have a shunt. But if ETV-CPC works, it is a relief from a long-life of follow-ups. We need to have a discussion as part of a multidisciplinary team and with the family to make the right choice for the patient," he explains. Dr James estimated that the majority of cases GOSH sees are still undergoing shunt surgeries, however half of them are good candidates for ETV-CPC. Dr James believes that this operation, which is now available at GOSH, offers international patients from Kuwait the chance to have a better quality of life and limits the life-long burden of care which often comes with having the traditional shunt procedure.



Dr Greg James

The widening can cause harmful and possibly fatal pressure in the brain. An unusually large head is the main sign of congenital hydrocephalus. The condition is common in babies who have spina-bifida and children who get infections such as meningitis in their early childhood. One to two of every 1,000 babies are born with hydrocephalus, which makes it as common as Down's syndrome and more common than spina bifida or brain tumors. A study conducted in Abu Dhabi over a period of three years showed that 16.6 per 1000 births have severe malformation with 72 percent of newborns being Arab. GOSH performs approximately 400 hydrocephalus surgeries every year, of which 10-20 cases are patients from the Middle East. Consultant pediatric neurosurgeon, Dr Greg James, from GOSH explains that there are no medical therapies available to

VIETNAM TO RESCUE 1,000 BEARS AND END BILE TRADE

HANOI: Vietnam agreed yesterday to rescue more than 1,000 bears from illegal farms across the country, in a move to end the traditional medicine trade in the creatures' bile. Though bile farms are already outlawed in Vietnam, bears are still captured and caged in illicit facilities where their bile is extracted using invasive and painful techniques. Vietnam's Administration of Forestry (VNFOREST) and non-profit group Animals Asia signed an agreement yesterday to rescue all remaining bears from farms, committing to end bile trade and close all facilities within five years.

"This is a truly historic day," Animals Asia CEO Jill Robinson at the signing in Hanoi, adding that the decision "will lead to the definitive end to bear bile farming here in Vietnam".

Bear bile farming has been outlawed in Vietnam since 1992. But many bile farms use a legal loophole allowing them to raise the animals as pets. There are about 1,200 bears in captivity in Vietnam today, down from more than 4,000 in 2005, caged in more than 400 bear farms across the country. Animals Asia estimates it will cost up to \$20 million to rescue and build enough sanctuaries to house the bears, and called on donors, companies and the government to pitch in.

"We cannot do this by ourselves, the government needs to take responsibility for the wildlife in the country," said Tuan Bendixsen, Vietnam director for Animals Asia. Officials said funding is the main hurdle to rescuing the bears and putting an end to the trade. "We face difficulties finding funds to prevent and stop the hunting and rescue of wild animals," VNFOREST deputy director Cao Chi Cong said. Bendixsen warned that bile farms could move into neighboring Laos or Cambodia,



HANOI: Bears search for fruit and vegetables during feeding time at the Vietnam Bear Rescue Centre near Tam Dao National Park in Vinh Phuc province, some 70 kms north of Hanoi. — AFP

and urged countries to adhere to an international convention that bans cross-border bear and bile trading.

Yesterday's agreement follows an announcement in 2015 from Vietnam's Traditional Medicine Association to remove bear bile from its list of sanctioned prescriptions by 2020. The bears are often kept in small cages,

and their bile is 'free dripped' via a hole in the animal's gall bladder or a catheter. Many are starved, dehydrated, wounded and psychologically scarred when they are rescued. Bear bile contains an acid which can help treat liver and gall bladder illnesses, though effective herbal alternatives are available. —AFP

RISKY BUSINESS FOR FISH IN OIL-POLLUTED REEF WATERS

SYDNEY: Coral reef fish are more likely to engage in risky behavior and be unable to identify predators if they swim in waters contaminated with petroleum-based oil, researchers said. Concentrations equivalent to only "a couple of drops in a swimming pool" could be enough to impair their judgment, scientists said in the study published Tuesday in the journal Nature Ecology & Evolution. "The fish were unable to identify friend from foe and they stopped travelling in groups," study co-author Jodie Rummer from Australia's James Cook University's ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies said.

"The fishes also had trouble selecting suitable habitats, swam toward open waters, and could not swim away quickly from danger." The research, which the scientists described as the first of its kind, focused on larvae-the juvenile stage when fish are especially vulnerable-and on six fish species from Australia's Great Barrier Reef. The oil concentrations used in the study reflect-

ed "many polluted coastlines in industrialized regions worldwide", the scientists from Australia, Norway and the United States said. The scientists said the oil exposure appears to "impair higher-

order cognitive processing and behaviors necessary for the successful settlement and survival of larval fishes".

"This emphasizes the risks associated with industrial activities within at-risk

ecosystems," they added. "Each year, over six million metric tons of petroleum products are estimated to enter global oceans from anthropogenic sources such as industrial discharge, urban run-off and shipping operations." The scientists said when the fish were exposed to increased oil concentrations in the lab tests, there were higher death rates and changed behavior. With ecosystems such as the Barrier Reef already under pressure from coral bleaching and development, they added that limiting pollution-particularly oil-near reefs was key to preserving such biodiverse sites.

"If an oil spill were to occur, this study suggests there could be major consequences for reef fish, coral reefs, and the people working in fisheries and tourism," lead author Jacob Johansen from the University of Texas said. "Over the past 35 years, many of the world's coral reefs have declined. Still, many governments continue to allow industrial activities, including oil drilling and exploration, in sensitive reef habitats." — AFP



QUEENSLAND: A handout photo received from the ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies at James Cook University shows blue-green chromis on the Great Barrier Reef near Lizard Island in Queensland. — AFP

CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times
248 33 199

Dr. Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem
ر. فهد علي المخيزيم

استشاري أطفال
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ANNAHAR MANAGING EDITOR CELEBRATES SON'S WEDDING



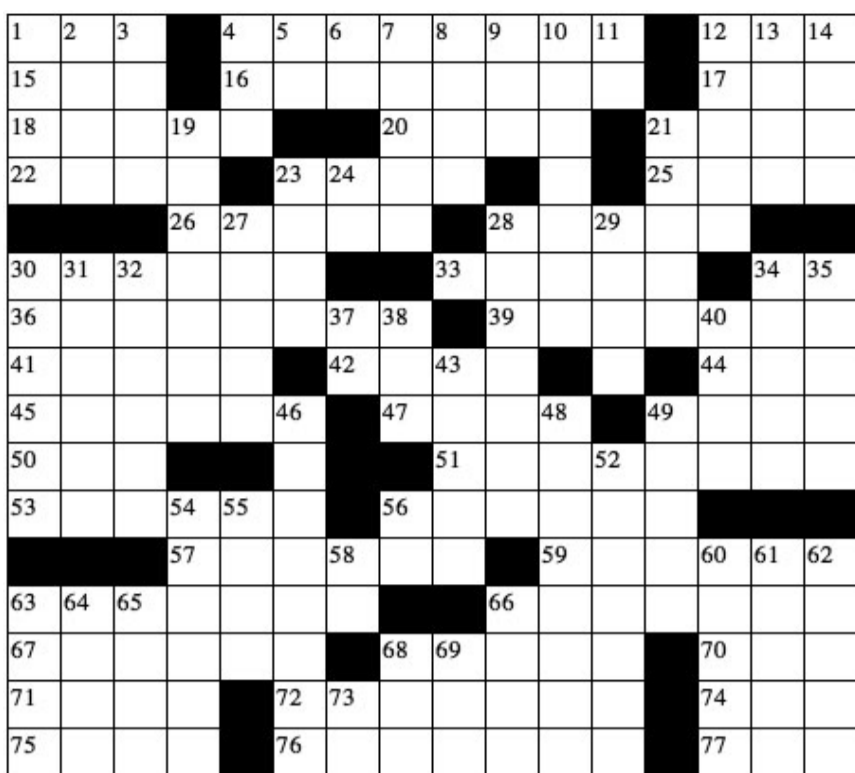
Managing Editor of Annahar daily Hussein Abdullah Al-Fadhli celebrated the wedding of his son Yousof at the Abu Ramiya Hall in Andalus this past

Monday. Officials, media and society personalities were among the guests at the wedding.

— Photos by Joseph Shagra



CROSSWORD 1664



ACROSS

1. Preserve of crushed fruit.
4. Low stinging nettle of Central and South America having velvety brownish-green toothed leaves and clusters of small green flowers.
12. A syndrome that occurs in many women from 2 to 14 days before the onset of menstruation.
15. A dark-skinned member of a race of people living in Australia when Europeans arrived.
16. The quantity contained in a crate.
17. Any of various long-tailed rodents similar to but larger than a mouse.
18. Elevated open grassland in southern Africa.
20. Predatory black-and-white toothed whale with large dorsal fin.
22. On or toward the lee.
25. According to the Old Testament he was a pagan king of Israel and husband of Jezebel (9th century BC).
26. Any of several short-billed Old World rails.
30. Earnest or urgent request.
33. Formerly a gold coin of various European countries.
36. A nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (trade name Clinoril).
39. A Russian soup usually containing beet juice as a foundation.
41. A horizontal beam that extends across something.
42. A member of a Finnish people living in the northwestern Urals in Russia.
44. A statement that deviates from or perverts the truth.
45. The condition of being honored (esteemed or respected or well regarded).
47. Minute floating marine tunicate having a transparent body with an opening at each end.
50. European strong-scented perennial herb with gray-green bitter-tasting leaves.
51. Having accumulated or become more intense.
53. (Akkadian) God ruling with his consort Ereshkigal the world of the dead.
57. A region in southeastern Italy on the Adriatic.
59. The basic unit of money in Finland.
63. North American republic containing 50 states - 48 conterminous states in North America plus Alaska in northwest North America and the Hawaiian Islands in the Pacific Ocean.
67. An alloy of copper and zinc (and sometimes arsenic) used to imitate gold in cheap jewelry and for gilding.
70. A master's degree in business.
71. Fleishy and usually brightly colored cover of some seeds that develops from the ovule stalk and partially or entirely envelopes the seed.
72. A common complex mineral consisting of calcium fluoride phosphate or calcium chloride phosphate.
74. A decree that prohibits something.
75. Not widely known.
76. A machine that inserts staples into sheets of paper in order to fasten them together.
77. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.

DOWN

1. An island in Indonesia south of Borneo.
2. Norwegian mathematician (1802-1829).
3. The molecular weight of a substance expressed in grams.
4. A proportion multiplied by 100.
5. A colorless and odorless inert gas.
6. A silvery soft waxy metallic element of the alkali metal group.
7. Eaten as mush or as a thin gruel.
8. Being nothing more than specified.
9. A United Nations agency that invest directly in companies and guarantees loans to private investors.
10. Wild llama.
11. A silvery ductile metallic element found primarily in bauxite.
12. Capital and largest city of the Czech Republic.
13. Type genus of the Majidae.
14. A thrusting blow with a knife.
19. Be false to.
21. A large number or amount.
23. With no effort to conceal.
24. (informal) Being satisfactory or in satisfactory condition.
27. (the feminine of raja) A Hindu princess or the wife of a raja.
28. A special anniversary.
29. An agenda of things to do.
31. Carry out or participate in an activity.
32. A skilled worker who coats articles with a film of metal (usually silver or gold).
34. A percussion instrument consisting of vertical metal tubes of different lengths that are struck with a hammer.
35. The function or position properly or customarily occupied or served by another.
37. A state in northwestern North America.
38. Ratio of the adjacent side to the hypotenuse.
40. Group of people related by blood or marriage.
43. Genus of sticky herbs with yellow flowers open in morning or evening but closed in bright light.
46. A group of island in eastern Indonesia between Celebes and New Guinea.
48. Spread or diffuse through.
49. Acquire or gain knowledge or skills.
52. A mettlesome or fiery horse.
54. Make false by mutilation or addition.
55. The capital of Western Samoa.
56. A complete metric system of units of measurement for scientists.
58. A white soft metallic element that tarnishes readily.
60. A Bantu language spoken by the Kamba people in Kenya.
61. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
62. A city in southern Turkey on the Seyhan River.
64. God of death.
65. An independent ruler or chieftain (especially in Africa or Arabia).
66. Precipitation of ice pellets when there are strong rising air currents.
68. A plant hormone promoting elongation of stems and roots.
69. Standard temperature and pressure.
73. A heavy precious metallic element.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

You will be extremely busy today. There will be many times where you will have to supply a solution to a particular problem. Be prepared to work hard. This is not a great time to attempt to plan a noon break with friends as you may find yourself less conversational. It would be good to walk or visit a pet or music store, if possible. Transferring your concentration to a lighthearted arena would do wonders for your energy level and enthusiasm as you return to the work expectations. Take care to examine all aspects of your work or dealings today-there is success! A long-awaited dialogue with an older person may take place later. You enjoy keeping up-to-date with the news regarding your friends, relatives or neighborhood events.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Today is a fine day... Your work benefits from your total concentration. This may be a good thing as you will be able to forget about personal plans for a while and relax your expectations of the day. Surprises happen all day long and, you are able to finish what you start in the work world. The noon break is fun with co-worker friends and somewhere in the visit there is talk of metaphysics, horoscopes and telling fortunes. You are also interested in the subject of writers and teachers that talk about self-help techniques. You might spend time in a bookstore after work for a short while. Young people want some of your time this afternoon and you enjoy their company. Later this evening you will want to have a camera handy. Happy birthday!



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Whether you are working in a place of business or at home, your attention is in getting things completed. If you find yourself working within a group today, you will be productive. You expect praise for your good works but this may not come on your time schedule so do not push. Emotions and feelings of those around you may be very clear allowing you to know what is expected of your energies and your time. If you have things you want to accomplish that might be a separate interest from the people you are with-set reasonable time limits before obligating yourself to new projects. This is a good time to use your writing skills as you can communicate with real originality. Learning ways to release the restlessness is beneficial to your health.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

You waste few words when you describe or give instructions. You could be in a hurry, so if someone has a lot of difficulty in understanding what you want, be wise with your response. You have a natural sense of organization and come across as disciplined and careful, perhaps a little too sober. An inner vision, coupled with the ability to see the big picture, may find you working as a go-between with others. You could even have a special gift for spanning the generation gap, bringing older and younger spirits together. A love of animals, children, older people and the needy, is a life-long trait that is visible today. It is easy for you to work with people in authority. There are opportunities for outdoor activity with friends this afternoon.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Opportunities may go against your own sense of security and you may feel it is best not to take chances. This is a tough call when it comes to business and some compromise is perhaps the best way to a workable solution. Your career, practical vision and skills are of central importance to you now. You feel there is a waste of time if there is no organization and your actions are deliberate in this area of your life. Your reputation and image are a source of concern and you do everything you can to make them solid. You appear perhaps more charming and refined than usual this evening as people gather to celebrate or just simply gather together away from the workplace. Putting your best foot forward may take on a greater importance this evening.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Your work or career is in true harmony with the rest of your life. Much can be accomplished. You could gain from subordinates or young people just now as information or help is available for whatever you want to complete. You make your way through ideas and concepts, and you have a good ability to communicate and express them to others. Reading or attending a lecture on law, politics, education, travel or religion may be part of your day, which is productive. Your creative side is showing this afternoon when you help a friend decorate or update an old look. Your home environment, friends and surroundings in general become simplified and receive encouragement. Things may seem almost magical in the way they work out in your favor.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Self-sacrifice and an understanding attitude on your part could have far-reaching effects on your own life-path and career during this time. You have improved your working abilities and higher-ups are taking note. This may mean that you are working more efficiently with others and this helps you to achieve bigger and more encompassing goals. Outer circumstances are favorable and it should be easy for you to push forward with regard to developing your career. You will have no problem moving up the professional ladder. Now is the time when personal insight into your most secret and psychological self may be possible. There is the possibility of new visions or sudden insights into your self-image or into your beliefs and dreams.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Your idea of where you want to be in this life and where you really are with your goals are very close. You are progressing well with your goals and you will want to set some new goals soon. Do not be afraid that present goals will be forgotten as you begin to look into toward the future-they will soon be realized. This is a time of good fortune-when things open up in a very natural way for you. Situations are within your reach and it is easy to see which path is the one for you to take. Opportunities to improve and enlarge your friendships are available to you now. You may find yourself wanting to do almost anything today. This is a good time to project your image. Give yourself more credit for the original ways you handle family matters.



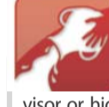
Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Go with the flow today. Trust in your own instincts. Your ideas are just as good, if not better, than someone else's ideas. Take a chance-try out your new ideas-you will have a feeling of accomplishment. Perhaps you are improving or updating a piece of technical equipment or some new computer software. Your perseverance pays off, particularly when you stop occasionally for a break or two-all work and no play, etc. A person that you were close to in the past may contact you this afternoon. An earnest effort in letting go of hard feelings can free you to move forward. This person has something special to offer you. This is a day of good surprises, opportunities, money and romance. A new game fills your evening hours.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Investigating and examining results and statistics find you at your mental best. Your analytical abilities are at a high. This can be an expansive, creative and successful time-a time you may remember with much fondness. You are your warm, loyal and generous self today and others follow your example as you deal with the public and interact with others in the workplace. Your need for admiration and appreciation will certainly be met as you entertain and visit with friends this afternoon. Others could seek you out for your psychological insight and understanding. This could be a time to make changes in your environment. Any work toward creating a balance in your life will be beneficial. Good vibes are present all week long.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

You will make practical decisions concerning group issues today. A supervisor or higher-up is listening to your intelligent summations about how things should be run. You have a natural sense of what the public wants. You are always making new discoveries. Clear decisions affecting others are requested and triumphant. You have a great appreciation of how your life is going and this afternoon you will be able to enjoy the company of a good friend. You will both enjoy talking about what each of you has accomplished. Perhaps you will even be evaluating and reassessing your plans for the future. Life, like a good painting, has to be looked at occasionally to really appreciate the true essence. Friends may visit this evening.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Money, money, money-it seems to occupy your mind much of this day. You could be applying for a loan or looking to purchase a vehicle or home and there is almost a feeling of static electricity in the air. Easy does it, meaning, have more confidence. If you really need this new item to make your life work better, it will be yours! Be aware, however, that time and process may not meet with your own idea of how things should move along. Do not let these thoughts occupy your time-you will want to be attentive to your work. You are valued for your ability to make practical decisions and you could find yourself representing co-workers in sensitive issues. Clear decisions affecting others could be made by higher-ups as a result of your input.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Meryl Streep Movies

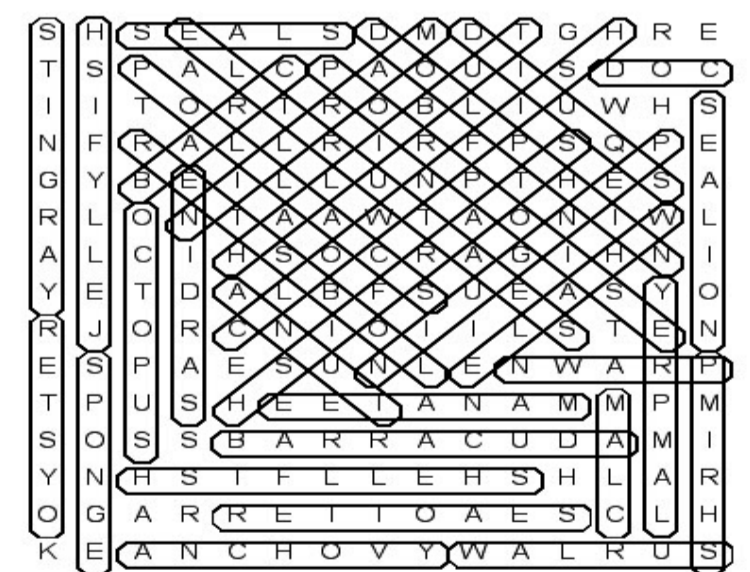
Find and circle all of the Meryl Streep movies that are hidden in the grid. The remaining 40 letters spell an additional Meryl Streep movie.



- A CRY IN THE DARK
- ADAPTATION
- BEFORE AND AFTER
- DANCING AT LUGHNASA
- DARK MATTER
- DEATH BECOMES HER
- DEFENDING YOUR LIFE
- DOUBT
- EVENING
- FALLING IN LOVE
- HEARTBURN
- IRONWEED
- JULIA
- KRAMER VS. KRAMER
- LIONS FOR LAMBS
- MAMMA MIA
- MANHATTAN
- MARVIN'S ROOM
- MUSIC OF THE HEART
- ONE TRUE THING
- OUT OF AFRICA
- PLENTY
- PRIME
- RENDITION
- SHE-DEVIL
- SILKWOOD
- SOPHIE'S CHOICE
- STILL OF THE NIGHT
- THE DEER HUNTER

Yesterday's Solution

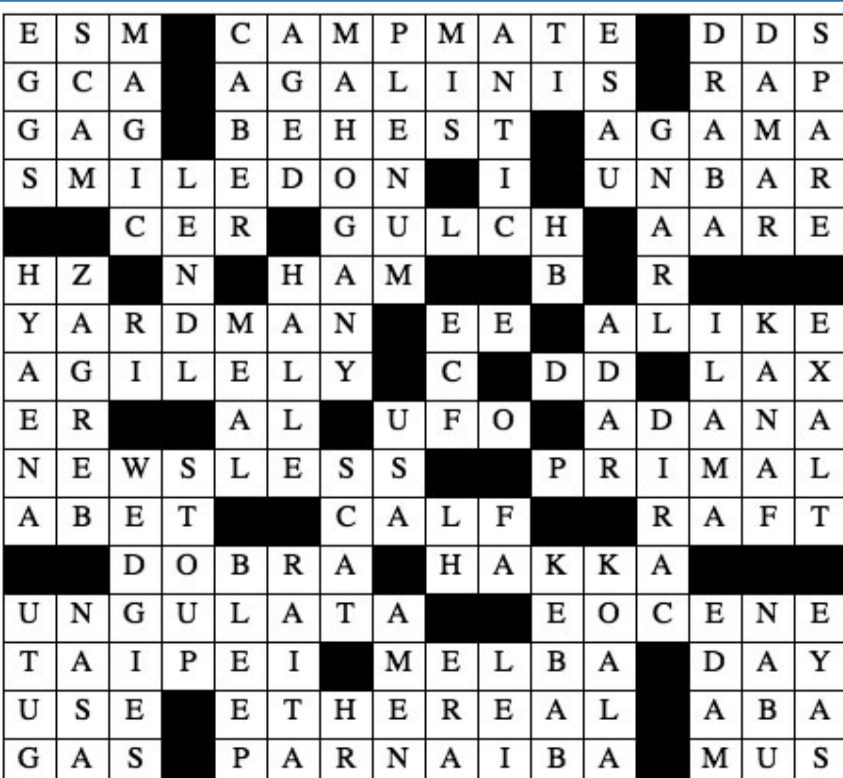
Marine Life



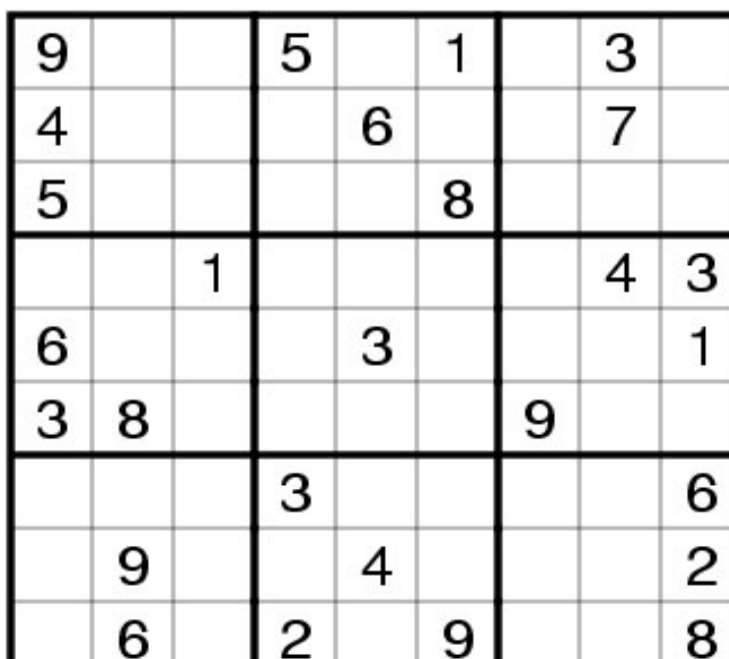
- ANCHOVY
- BARRACUDA
- CLAM
- CLOWNFISH
- COD
- CRAB
- DOLPHIN
- HALIBUT
- JELLYFISH
- LAMPREY
- LOBSTER
- MANATEE
- MARLIN
- OCTOPUS
- OYSTER
- PENGUIN
- PORPOISE
- PRAWN
- SARDINE
- SCALLOP
- SEA LION
- SEA OTTER
- SEA TURTLE
- SEALS
- SHELLFISH
- SHRIMP
- SPONGE
- SQUID
- STARFISH
- STINGRAY
- TUNA
- WALRUS
- WHALE

The hidden message is: GREAT WHITE SHARK

Yesterday's Solution



Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution



CLASSIFIEDS



KNCC PROGRAMME FROM THURSDAY TO WEDNESDAY (20/07/2017 TO 26/07/2017)

Table listing cinema programs for SHARQIA-1, SHARQIA-2, SHARQIA-3, MUHALAB-1, MUHALAB-2, MUHALAB-3, and FANAR-1.

Table listing cinema programs for LONDON HEIST, TISBAH ALA KHAIR, FANAR-2, FANAR-3, FANAR-4, FANAR-5, MARINA-1, MARINA-2, and MARINA-3.

Table listing cinema programs for AVENUES-1, AVENUES-2, AVENUES-3, 360-1, and 360-2.

Table listing cinema programs for AVENUES-1, AVENUES-2, AVENUES-3, 360-1, and 360-2.

Table listing cinema programs for AVENUES-1, AVENUES-2, AVENUES-3, 360-1, and 360-2.

Table listing cinema programs for AVENUES-1, AVENUES-2, AVENUES-3, 360-1, and 360-2.

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DIAL161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Table with columns: Airlines, Flight, Route, Time, Arrival Flights on Thursday 20/7/2017, and Departure Flights on Thursday 20/7/2017.

'Dunkirk,' 'Get Out' may give Oscars a crowd-pleasing punch

The stranglehold that autumn prestige films have on Oscar season just might be wilting in the summer sun. Christopher Nolan's World War II epic "Dunkirk" hits theaters Friday, but the overflowing reviews have already made it abundantly clear: It's a major Oscar contender and a best-picture front-runner - even in July. And "Dunkirk," which analysts expect to debut this weekend with \$60 million-plus in domestic ticket sales, might not be the only box-office hit to crash this year's awards season. The zeitgeist-grabbing sensations "Get Out" and "Wonder Woman" could also be players come Academy Awards time.

It is, of course, exceptionally early to handicap the Oscars. And it's far from uncommon for early breakouts to recede once the fall film festivals start firing out heavily anticipated releases from Hollywood's most acclaimed directors. Steven Spielberg, Paul Thomas Anderson and Alexander Payne are just some of those waiting in the wings this year. But any influx from the rest of the calendar year would be a welcome change of pace for an awards season that has in recent years only further solidified as a predominantly September-December affair. Last year, August's "Hell or High Water" was the earliest best-picture nominee.

Major motivation

Aside from spreading out what are potentially some of the year's best movies, any awards love for the likes of "Dunkirk," "Get Out" or "Wonder Woman" would give the Oscars something it has



This image released by Warner Bros Pictures shows a scene from "Dunkirk." — AP

often lacked in recent years: major release crowd-pleasers. "It's not really a factor for us, the awards thing," says Emma Thomas, producer of "Dunkirk." "This film we primarily thought of as an entertainment. For us, we make films for audiences. My feeling is always: If your film works and people engage with it, anything that comes later is a huge bonus."

"Dunkirk" may bear the look and seriousness of an Oscar season film, right down to the wool coats. But shot in 70mm IMAX, it also has much of the visceral spectacle of a summer movie. Thomas and Nolan have also previously had success July. It's when they released "Inception" (which earned eight Oscar nods and won four

awards) and "The Dark Knight." The Oscar oversight of the latter, released in 2008, was seen as a major motivation for the expansion of the best-picture category the next year from five nominees to up to 10.

"We've had very good luck in July in the past and we like this date. It's an accessible movie," said Thomas. "When you put movies at the end of the year, you're sort of saying something about it. You're almost limiting it, in a way, and we don't want to limit the film." The Oscars haven't been without crowd-pleasers. "La La Land" made more than \$440 million globally. "Hidden Figures" charmed North American audiences to \$230 million. The year before, the May-

released "Mad Max: Fury Road" crashed the Academy Awards with 10 nominations and six wins. "Dunkirk" may be a similar force in craft categories. Its ensemble nature may leave less room for acting attention, though recent Oscar-winner Mark Rylance is a standout. More notably, Nolan seems likely to finally land his - some would say overdue - first directing nomination. He has already earned the praise of fellow filmmakers like Rian Johnson (who called the film "an all timer") and Jon Favreau ("believe the hype").

Digitized movie world

Other summer movies might also shake up the Oscars. The acclaimed romantic comedy "The Big Sick" has the backing of Amazon, which last year similarly acquired "Manchester by the Sea" at Sundance and made it an Oscar heavyweight. "The War for the Planet of the Apes" even has some buzz, including pleas for considering Andy Serkis' motion-capture performance as the ape Caesar. Such an honor, while unlikely, would be a game-changer in an increasingly digitized movie world. Jordan Peele's horror sensation "Get Out" (\$252 million worldwide after opening in late February) could well be the first horror film nominated for best picture since 1991's "The Silence of the Lambs." At the least, Peele should be a likely nominee for best screenplay.

Patty Jenkins' "Wonder Woman" has been an even bigger box-office dynamo and earned nearly as good reviews as "Get Out." Whereas Peele's film was received as landmark film for its fusion of genre with a satirical critique of race in

America, "Wonder Woman" set a new record for top-grossing film by a female director. Jenkins and star Gal Gadot could well be in the hunt. The unlikely awards run last season of "Deadpool" suggested voters may be open to awarding a superhero film. A campaign for Jenkins, who helmed the Oscar-winning "Monster," would be closely watched since only four women have ever been nominated for best director. Kathryn Bigelow, the sole winner of the four, also has a film upcoming: her ambitious Detroit riots drama "Detroit," out Aug. 4.

Usually, a highly relevant, socially conscious film from one of Hollywood's most celebrated filmmakers would be plunged right into awards season. But the calculus was different for "Detroit," which was deliberately timed to the 50th anniversary of the riots. And she, like many others, doesn't love the increased emphasis on Oscar season. "It's not why we make these films," said Bigelow. "The motivation behind the release has to do with the 50-year anniversary," she said. "I think it's important to honor that and the resiliency of the city of Detroit. Whatever happens along any other lines, I have no idea." Bigelow knows from experience. Her "The Hurt Locker" was a June release but went on to best "Avatar" at the Oscars. "To say that it was even a remote thought would be in inaccurate," she said, laughing. — AP



This image released by Universal Pictures shows, from left, Tiffany Haddish, Regina Hall, Queen Latifah and Jada Pinkett Smith in a scene from the comedy "Girls Trip." — AP

'Girls Trip' a wonderfully hilarious destination

Get ready to know the name Tiffany Haddish. If there were such a thing as Comedy Oscars, she would win for "Girls Trip." Like Melissa McCarthy in "Bridesmaids," Haddish steals this film from her big-name co-stars: Queen Latifah, Regina Hall and Jada Pinkett Smith. All four actresses have shining moments of comedy and heart in director Malcolm D. Lee's ode to female friendships, thanks to the winning script by Kenya Barris ("black-ish") and Tracy Oliver ("Barbershop: The Next Cut"), but Haddish emerges as the most memorable. She has a scene with a grapefruit that will go down in the annals of hilarious movie moments.

The "Girls Trip" here is to the Essence Festival in New Orleans. A group of friends who called themselves the Flossy Posse back in college in the '90s travel there for a long-awaited reunion after one of their members, self-help guru Ryan (Hall), is invited to give the festival's keynote speech. She's joined by her longtime besties: Journalist Sasha (Latifah), who runs a celebrity-gossip website; Lisa (Pinkett Smith), an uptight, divorced nurse with two young children, and brash, outspoken Dina (Haddish), who hasn't stopped partying since graduation.

Ryan and her retired football star husband Stewart (Mike Coulter) have billed themselves as the couple that has it all, and they have a lot riding on her Essence appearance: They're poised to sign a major corporate contract at the festival that would bring them Oprah-level success. Their agent (Kate Walsh), who insists on awkwardly using street slang, warns Ryan against getting too "turned" over her girls' weekend, lest she jeopardize the deal. The posse's trouble begins when Sasha receives a paparazzi picture of Stewart in a compromising position. Could it be the perfect couple isn't so perfect after all? What about their lucrative contract?

The women in "Girls Trip" are so distinct and well-drawn, they're universally relatable. Everyone has a wild friend they wish was like Dina or one as tightly wound as Lisa. Many of us know people so driven they might compromise their personal standards to achieve more

public goals. If only we were all as glamorous as Sasha, who consistently rocks incredible hairdos, as composed as Ryan or as riotous as Dina, who's like Id personified. Her enumeration of what she plans to do to Stewart in revenge for his scandalous photo is another scene-stealing moment. Her plans are so graphic, they can't be printed here. The Flossy Posse is #friendship-goals.

Nothing is gratuitous

"Girls Trip" definitely earns its R rating. There's crude language, overt sexual jokes, drug references, public urination, bar fights and full-frontal male nudity. And, girl, it is funny. Nothing is gratuitous. The story is both outrageous and realistic, grounded by the women's friendship. Because the film was actually shot during the Essence Festival, there are countless cameos. Look for Mariah Carey, Maxwell, Ava DuVernay, Terry McMillan, Iyanla Vanzant, Morris Chestnut, Faith Evans, Common, Diddy, Ne-Yo, Doug E Fresh and many others.

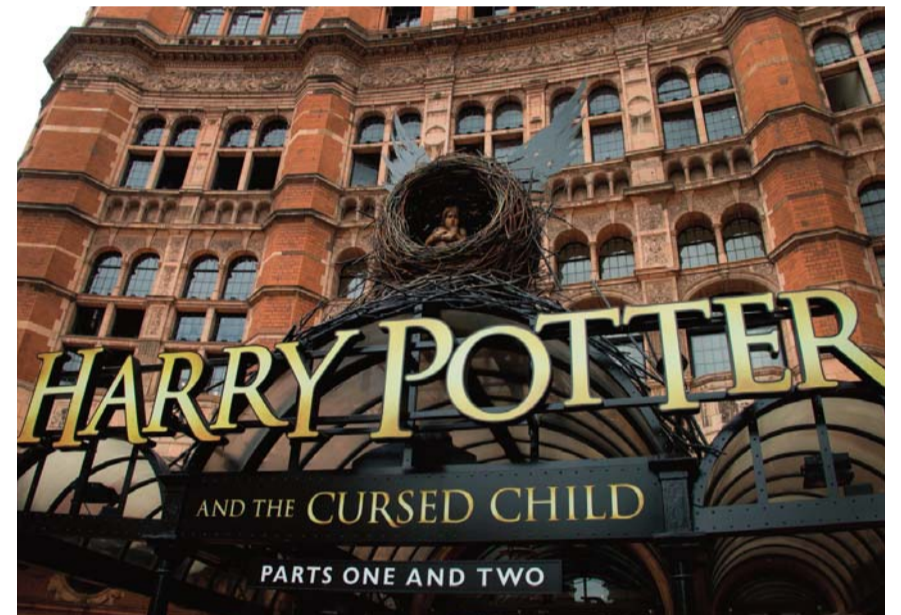
This film delivers for all adult audiences. Regardless of your race or gender, you'll be laughing all the way home. The members of the Flossy Posse are fully realized people: accomplished people trying to have fun and find themselves as they navigate their grown-up lives. They just do it with more outrageous swagger than most.

I can't wait to see this film again (and again), and to watch Haddish in whatever she does next. "Girls Trip," a Universal Pictures release, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America for "for crude and sexual content throughout, pervasive language, brief graphic nudity, and drug material." Running time: 122 minutes. Three and a half stars out of four. MPAA definition of R: Restricted. Under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian. — 'Despacito' declared most streamed song ever 'Despacito' declared most streamed song ever 'Despacito' declared most streamed song ever — AP

2 NEW HARRY POTTER BOOKS SET TO BE PUBLISHED IN OCTOBER

Two new books from the Harry Potter universe are set to be released as part of a British exhibition that celebrates the 20th anniversary of the launch of the series. The British Library's Harry Potter exhibition, "A History of Magic," opens in October and runs through February 2018. In an earnings statement released Tuesday, British publishing house Bloomsbury revealed that two new Potter books will be released in conjunction with the event.

"Harry Potter: A History of Magic - The Book of the Exhibition" promises to take readers through subjects studied at Potter's wizarding school, Hogwarts. "Harry Potter - A Journey Through A History of Magic" will touch on mystical things such as alchemy, unicorns and ancient witchcraft. Both books will be published in October. — AP



This file photo shows the Palace Theatre in central London which is showing a stage production of, "Harry Potter and the Cursed Child." — AP



In this Sept 4, 1996 file photo, Rapper Tupac Shakur arrives at New York's Radio City Music Hall for the 13th Annual MTV Video Music Awards. — AP photos



In this file photo, Madonna, left, sits with her adopted children David, Stella and Mercy, at the opening of The Mercy James Institute for Pediatric Surgery and Intensive Care.

Auction of Madonna's panties, love letter from Tupac halted

An impending auction of pop star Madonna's personal items, including a love letter from her ex-boyfriend the late rapper Tupac Shakur, a pair of previously worn panties and a hairbrush containing her hair, was halted by a judge on Tuesday. Manhattan state Supreme Court Judge Gerald Leibovitz ordered Gotta Have It! Collectibles to pull 22 items from its rock-and-roll-themed auction scheduled for yesterday. The Material Girl had earlier sought an emergency court order saying she was "shocked to learn" of the planned online auction of the Tupac letter and had no idea it was no longer in her possession.

The fact that I have attained celebrity status as a result of success in my career does not obviate my right to maintain my privacy, including with

regard to highly personal items," Madonna said in court papers. "I understand that my DNA could be extracted from a piece of my hair. It is outrageous and grossly offensive that my DNA could be auctioned for sale to the general public." Court papers said the Tupac letter was expected to fetch up to \$400,000. Tupac, one of the best-selling rappers of all time, dated Madonna in the early 1990s and died of injuries suffered in a Las Vegas drive-by shooting in 1996.

Madonna, behind such hit songs as "Like a Virgin" and "Vogue," has sold hundreds of millions of albums. Other Madonna items scheduled to be auctioned were private photographs taken at a bachelorette party at her Miami home, personal letters and cassette tapes of unreleased recordings.

Madonna's court papers name Darlene Lutz, a former friend, art consultant and "frequent overnight guest" in Madonna's home when she was "not in residence," as behind the sale of the property.

A spokesman for Lutz and the auction house said the allegations will be "vigorously challenged and refuted" in court. "Madonna and her legal army have taken what we believe to be completely baseless and meritless action to temporarily halt the sale of Ms. Lutz's legal property," spokesman Pete Siegel told the New York Post. "We are confident that the Madonna memorabilia will be back." — AP

'Despacito' declared most streamed song ever



In this file photo, singers Luis Fonsi, left and Daddy Yankee perform during the Latin Billboard Awards in Coral Gables, Fla. — AP

Puerto Rican singer Luis Fonsi's "Despacito," whose reggaeton beat has swept the globe, yesterday was named the most streamed song of all time. The song's label, Universal Music Latin Entertainment, said "Despacito" in its original and remixed versions had reached 4.6 billion streams across platforms including YouTube and Spotify. "Despacito" - a racy track full of sexual innuendo which features Puerto Rican rapper Daddy Yankee - went viral soon after its release in January and found an even wider audience in April when pop celebrity Justin Bieber appeared in a remix.

"Despacito" dethroned another track with Bieber, the Canadian's 2015 song "Sorry," which has 4.38 billion plays, according to Universal. "Despacito" - which means "slowly" in Spanish - has spent 10 weeks at number one on the US singles chart, the first Spanish-language song to reach the top spot since "Macarena" in 1996. "Streaming is a connector for audiences worldwide and it has helped my music reach every corner of the planet," Fonsi said in a statement.

Lucian Grainge, chairman and CEO of Universal Music Group, the world's largest label conglomerate, called "Despacito" the biggest hit of 2017. "Streaming has opened up the possibility of a song with a different beat, from a different culture and in a different language to become a juggernaut of success around the world," Grainge said in a statement.

Reggaeton - which has roots in Jamaican dance hall and hip-hop - has historically provided a voice to black Puerto Ricans and has been shunned by the US territory's elite. Streaming - the on-demand selection of music online - has rapidly grown in recent years. No central body combines streaming data across all platforms, giving leeway to labels to announce figures and feats. "Despacito" has soared on YouTube where it is already the fourth most watched video ever at 2.66 billion views. While popular on Spotify, it was in 39th place on the all-time list yesterday. — AFP



Chefs prepare sushi at a high-end French sushi chain that opened the previous week in northern Tehran. — AFP photos



(Above below) A waitress takes a plate of sushi from the kitchen at a high-end French sushi chain that opened the previous week in northern Tehran.



Iranians order at a high-end French sushi chain that opened the previous week in northern Tehran.



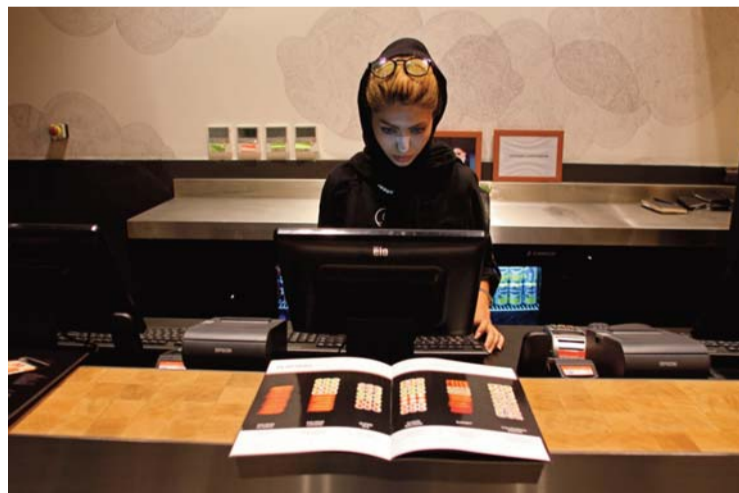
Iranians stand outside a high-end French sushi chain.



A waitress takes a plate of sushi from the kitchen.



Iranians eat at a high-end French sushi chain.



An Iranian woman works behind the counter.



Iranians are served at a high-end French sushi chain.

FOREIGN FOOD CHAINS BRAVE RISKS FOR A BITE OF IRAN

'THINGS ARE CHANGING AT FULL-SPEED HERE. I'M VERY EXCITED TO BE A SPECTATOR TO ITS EVOLUTION'

For years, Iranians have had to put up with the likes of "Mash Donalds" and "Pizza Hat". Now real Western food franchises have finally arrived, but doing business in Iran is not for the faint-hearted. Despite strict international sanctions being eased under a nuclear deal with world powers last year, the Iranian economy remains bogged down by red tape and struggles to attract foreign investors. But a couple of European food franchises have decided the risks are worth taking for a taste of the estimated \$7 billion (six billion euros) Iranians spend in restaurants each year, and which local consultancy ILIA says will double in the next decade.

Spain's Telepizza opened its first outlet this month through an Iranian consortium that plans to pump 100 million euros into expanding nationwide. But one of the first Europeans to really get his hands dirty on the ground is 41-year-old French entrepreneur Amaury de la Serre, who bought the rights to launch Sushi Shop in Iran after falling in love with the country during a visit in 2013.

The first branch of the high-end French chain opened last week in a chic north Tehran neighborhood, marking the culmination of a bruising 18 months of work. "There's a strong government will to bring foreign capital and know-how here, but at the day-to-day administrative level, it's hell," de la Serre told AFP.

'No pain, no gain'

"Everything takes time, everything is complicated. It is very, very difficult to deal with customs. But no pain, no gain. And things are changing at full-speed here. I love this country and I'm very excited to be a spectator to its evolution." Getting the supply chains running was certainly complex—the restaurant uses 150 mostly local suppliers and must ship fresh fish from Norway three times a week. It took a year just to get the license to import Japanese sauces, and navigating Tehran's notorious real estate rackets was a saga in itself.

The government says it is trying to streamline its bureaucracy, but Iran actually fell three places in this year's ease of doing business rankings from the World Bank, down to 120 out of 190 countries. Still, some of the

biggest headaches are back in Europe, where banks are so afraid of US penalties that they freeze accounts at the merest whiff of a link to Iran.

"It's crazy. We went to the French Ministry of Economy and they gave us a list of all the banks that would agree to work with Iran. But when we called them, every single one said no," said de la Serre. Eventually he found a small private bank willing to handle his transactions because they have no links to the US.

Iran's ballistic missile program and what it called Tehran's support for terrorist groups in the Middle East. Conservatives in Iran still rail against Western "cultural infiltration", even if the time in 1994 when the first post-revolution McDonald's was burned to the ground two days after opening seems a distant memory.

Today, Iran's affluent middle class has largely rejected ideology and is hungry for foreign brands, while fast-food has spread like wildfire even in remote villages. And even



Iranians look at the menu at a high-end French sushi chain.

'Then Mr Trump arrived'

But while he remains bullish on Iran's economic prospects, there are enough storm clouds on the horizon to keep him cautious. "We wanted to launch several brands at once, but then Mr Trump arrived so we're taking the foot off the pedal a little," said de la Serre. The US president has worried would-be investors in Iran with his aggressive stance against the country.

Just this week, he announced new sanctions over

conservatives recognize the urgent need for jobs with unemployment at 12.5 percent, and far higher for young people. "Expansion in the fast-food sector is a job creator precisely where Iran needs it most," wrote Esfandiyar Batmanghelidj, founder of the Europe-Iran Forum, in a recent briefing note. "After all, many of the world's greatest entrepreneurs got their start delivering pizzas." — AFP

In junta-ruled Thailand, critics turn to comedy

Dissent has been muted by Thailand's ruling generals since a 2014 coup. But there is one area where critical voices still have some space: humor. With political activity banned, internet censorship in force and activists and dissidents detained or summoned for "attitude adjustment", public discontent is being manifested in widely shared cartoons, internet memes, and parody music videos.

"Thais are becoming more open to what critics and humorists are saying about the junta and the military government," political satirist Winyu "John" Wongsurawat told Reuters. Winyu is the co-host of YouTube show "Shallow News in Depth", which uses humor to comment on politics.

Last week, Thai pop band Tattoo Color released a video for their single "Dictator Girl", which opens with a book titled "44

Rules" - a reference to Article 44, a measure that gives junta chief Prayuth Chan-ocha absolute power in the name of national security. "Dictator Girl" includes lyrics such as: "I must accept everything" and "there are no equal rights", not-so-subtle references to the ruling National Council for Peace and Order, which has broadly cowed opponents into silence.

"We're happy that people get it and try to interpret what we meant," Nittakarn Kaewpiyasawat, who directed the video, told Reuters. Also at the forefront of the trend is Facebook page, Kai Maew. Known for comic strips featuring prominent political figures, it has more than 350,000 followers.

It is produced anonymously.

In one of its most popular strips, Prayuth is depicted in a

tank - a nod to the junta's recent military spending - past a farmer struggling with falling commodity prices and a civilian who can't afford health care. Another Facebook page uses memes from the 2004 movie "Mean Girls" to tackle topics including a general election that has been pushed back several times.

"There is more talk, especially about the hypocrisy of the military government. There is laughter, but there is also an impact on people's feelings," said Winyu. Government spokesman Weerachon Sukhontapatipak warned against poking fun at the military government online because it could breach defamation and cybercrime laws.

"Before you do anything, please consider existing laws and regulations first," he said. In March, Veera Somkwamkid, an

activist and vocal coup critic, was charged over a mock poll that parodied the junta's theme song, "Returning Happiness to Thailand". There is also one area where comedy is always off limits. Thailand's monarchy is protected by one of the world's harshest laws against royal insult which says anyone who defames it can be punished with up to 15 years in prison for each offence.

Police have said they will target even those who look at online content critical of the royal family. — Reuters

FEATURES



Photo provided by Nike, shows the Nike VaporMax running shoe, which contains recycled material. — AP photos



A Cat & Jack bathing suit that is partially made from recycled plastic bottles hangs on display at a Target store, in New York.



Cat & Jack jeans, foreground, appear on display at a Target store in New York.



Photo shows Cat & Jack tops for girls made with Repreve polyester fabric created from recycled plastic bottles, on display at a Target store, in New York.

Retailers, brands see green for back-to-school shopping

For the back-to-school season, many parents and their kids are thinking green. Concerns about the environment have them looking for secondhand clothing or fashions made from reused material - but price still rules. Shoppers want quality and style in backpacks, jeans and the like without spending a lot more money. Retailers like H&M, Target and J.C. Penney are coming out with more clothes that use waste from all sorts of sources, like recycled denim or leather, nylon waste, remnants of old garments, or even plastic bottles.

J.C. Penney is delivering three styles of jeans this fall made from 20 percent polyester created from bottles under its Arizona brand, after seeing what it believes to be teen customers searching for "recycled jeans" on its site, the company said. Target started offering fashions made of polyester created from recycled plastic bottles with last year's launch of its children's brand Cat & Jack after focus groups of parents and children expressed interest in eco-friendly products.

James Reinhart, CEO and founder of the online used clothing marketplace Thredup, says he's finding that many of the site's shoppers aren't motivated just by price the way they used to be, but also because of environmental concerns. "If I was deciding between two items, I would pick up something more eco-friendly," said Ellen Abramson, the mother of an 11-year-old girl and 16-year-old twin boys. "But the price has to be comparable, and it has to be done in a fun, cool way."

Rubber and foam
Abramson, of Sandwich, Massachusetts, buys eco-friendly cleaning products and recycles plastic bottles. Her daughter Emma says she likes to help the environment by recycling, not littering, and bringing a thermos to school. She says she would be interested in recycled clothing. "If it looks the same, and it is better for the environment, I would want to buy it," said Emma, who likes to shop at Macy's, Justice and Old Navy. Many retailers are recycling. At Nike, 71 percent of its footwear and clothing contains recycled materials, and it says more than 31 million pairs of used shoes and 36,000 tons of rubber and foam have been reborn into high-performance products since 2010.

H&M, which is offering jeans this fall made from recycled fabric, says more than 26 percent of its clothing comes from sustainable sources like organic cotton or recycled materials like leather and denim. By 2030, the goal is for all its products to be eco-friendly, the company said. Deborah Weinswig, managing director at research firm Fung Global Retail & Technology, says she expects to see more major names introduce more sustainable products. However, she says the trend must be kept in context. "Back-to-school shopping remains driven, in large part, by frugality," she says. "So, retailers must continue to offer low prices alongside more sustainable product."

But people's style and quality expectations put pressure on retailers to keep prices the same, even though manufacturing through the recycling process can be more expensive. C. Britt

Beemer, chairman of America's Research Group, says 38 percent of 1,000 millennial shoppers polled in April said they would "respond positively" to environmentally friendly products. But they would spend, on average, just 3 percent more. Another survey by Deloitte Services found that parents of school-aged children would spend no more than 4 percent extra on "green" products for the back-to-school shopping season.

Remnants of old garments
Penney says the recycled Arizona jeans cost from \$36 to \$42, comparable to other jeans in that collection. "Value is important to the JC Penney customer, especially during the back-to-school shopping season, so we knew the jeans had to be affordable," said spokeswoman Sarah Holland. In cases when companies use remnants of old garments, keeping prices down is easier.

"Using old garments and textile leftovers, when making new clothes, means we can both save on raw materials and stop old clothes from going to waste," said Pernilla Wohlfahrt, head of design and creative director at H&M. H&M's jeans of recycled fabrics are priced from \$29.99 to \$49.99, the same range as its regular jeans. But recycling plastic bottles into fiber is more costly. Unifi Inc's Repreve business, which works with 250 companies including Target, Roxy and Fossil, says the recycled fiber sells at a 25 percent to 30 percent premium to non-recycled fiber.

A pair of men's dress pants or jeans can use up to six plastic

bottles, says Jay Hertwig, vice president of global brand sales, marketing and product development. The added cost comes from the collection, cleaning and converting to flakes and then to recycled polymer chips, Hertwig says. Marketing the green products can be tricky.

Target uses tags that say "Responsible Style" and "Better for All." It also provides information including how much of the fabric content incorporates Repreve, which varies from 20 percent to 90 percent. During the back-to-school season, store signs will better highlight the Cat & Jack products that use Repreve. Cat & Jack pieces that include Repreve are sold at the same price as the rest of the collection. "It's not terribly overt," said Joshua Thomas, a Target spokesman. "We're not trying to pat ourselves on the back. What we try to do is provide awareness of what goes into the garment."

Carry Gear Solutions produces backpacks and lunch bags made of recycled water bottles for store brands and most recently for Lego. After testing some bags and backpacks for Lego last year, it expanded the collection for fall and did focus groups with children and adults. The end result: a tag featuring an illustration of eight water bottles that add up to a backpack. "We wanted to know, how much do they want to know about the process and how much do they understand," said Jennifer Carroll, general manager at Carry Gear for Lego Bags. "There's a fine line." — AP



Natural immune boosters and ingredients to add to your recipes

By The Real Fouz

As it is now summer time, I'm all about staying healthy! What's worse than getting sick while on your summer vacation? Nothing. With my busy work schedule and everything going on, it's important for me to keep my immune system in the best shape. I always go for natural options to help boost my immune system because this way you can be sure you're not harming your body in anyway and you won't get any bad side effects. In this article, I'll be sharing my favorite ingredients that you can add to your recipes or incorporate into your diets that will do wonders for your health.

1. Turmeric powder
This powerful ingredient has been used in India for thousands of years as a spice and medicinal herb. It's one of the most effective nutritional supplements to ever exist. It is a powerful anti-inflammatory and antioxidant which helps the body to fight any diseases as well as getting rid of toxins that

are built in our bodies. It also has anti aging benefits and much more! I incorporate this ingredient into my diet by adding it to my salad and I've noticed a lot of difference in how I feel. You can also blend it into a smoothie or into your tea, whatever you prefer.

2. Ginger
Ginger is amazing for reliving digestive problems, nausea, and motion sickness. I always make sure to have ginger tea while I'm traveling to avoid the sick feeling we often get while traveling for long hours at a time. Ginger is also an amazing immune booster and I've found that I can feel the effects of it immediately; it's definitely one of my favorites.

3. Oregano Oil
The oregano plant is also a very powerful one and has antibacterial, antiviral, antioxidant and immune boosting properties. I love adding a few drops to my water or you can do a few drops under your tongue but it does burn a little bit which is why I prefer having it with water.

4. Echinacea
If you feel a cold or flu coming, this is the herb for you. It really helps to reduce any symptoms of cold and flu and other illnesses and infections. Its benefits are endless: reliving aches and pains, healing joint and muscle pains, reduces the appearance of wrinkles and other signs of aging, heals skin conditions such as eczema and acne, and more! I personally drink Echinacea tea but you can find it in chewable capsules too!

5. Garlic
Adding garlic into your meal can give you so many benefits like lowering cholesterol levels, regulating blood pressure and blood sugar levels, and boosting your immune system. It also contains Vitamin C, Vitamin B6, and fiber, which are all essential to our health. It also helps to detox your body from any toxins and even heavy metals that are built up in your organs so it's extremely powerful. Let's not mention it's also delicious and can add something to any meal. I personally use a little bit in my salad dressing and it tastes amazing! Stay healthy this summer the right and natural way!

Stylish decor and pets can co-exist

It's gotten easier to have a house full of pets without sacrificing the home decor you want. Interior designer Vern Yip, a judge on HGTV's "Design Star" and a dog person, says new technology has led to a variety of stylish AND pet-friendly home-furnishing options. "The furniture and home-decor industry has really rounded the corner and come to realize that this is a way of life for a lot of people," Yip says.

Durable, easy-to-clean paints,

that we can't have anything too precious. Then there are these really specific requests, like, "I'd like a built-in dog bed in my island in my kitchen." Often, the planning starts with the biggest elements: walls and floors. Paints have become much more pet-friendly (and kid-friendly) in recent years: "There are a lot of paint companies now that have flat paints that are wipe-able," a feature previously offered only with glossy paints, Burnham says.

pets used to be rough and often unappealing to touch, Yip says. Now, you can find stain-resistant and antimicrobial fibers in a range of styles and soft textures. Burnham suggests looking for textiles made with a finish called Nanotex, which makes the fibers stain-resistant and waterproof. If you have cats, it's also helpful to choose fabrics that are smooth. "We sort of embrace leathers and flatter weaves so that the cat can't get their claws into it," Burnham says. Leather is also a good choice because it's durable, and it can look even more attractive with a bit of time and wear.

Bechen suggests avoiding very light-colored fabrics if dark pet hair will frustrate you (or very dark fabrics if your pets have light hair). Print patterns are less likely to show pet hair than solids are, she says. And it helps to keep an attractive throw blanket on your pet's favorite furniture, and then remove it when guests come over.

Separate space
It's a luxury to have a room devoted to pets, or to have a large enough mudroom to create a sort of pet bedroom. But Yip says that's becoming more common. When guests come to visit, a dedicated room gives pets "a space that's theirs, that they can retreat to that doesn't feel like punishment," Yip says.

Even if the space does double-duty as an office or laundry room, you can create a secure area for a pet by keeping their bed, food dishes and familiar toys all in one place. Get creative by adding something to entertain your pet (Yip's dogs have an aquarium to look at), and create a sleeping space they'll love. — AP



This undated photo provided by Vern Yip shows Yip at his home in Atlanta with his family and dogs.

antimicrobial stain-resistant rugs and more mean that a beautiful home and a furry pet are no longer incompatible. Here, Yip and two other interior-design experts - Betsy Burnham, founder of Los Angeles' Burnham Design, and small-space expert Kathryn Bechen - offer some tips:

Pet planning

Many pet owners today "are designing a space around their animals," Burnham says. "Most of the time, I hear, 'Oh, we've got dogs and a couple of cats and three kids, so please be mindful

Flooring options have also expanded: Wood flooring companies have developed finishes that resist scratching, Yip says. Ceramic tile designed to look like stone flooring is another practical option. "It used to be, a few decades ago, that if you put down a ceramic tile floor, it just looked like ceramic," Yip says. This tile "looks like stone, but unlike stone it doesn't absorb urine or other things if your dog has an accident."

Fabric strategies

Fabrics that can withstand life with



This undated photo provided by interior designer Vern Yip shows Yip sitting on a couch with his dogs in his home in Atlanta. — AP photos



This undated photo provided by interior designer Vern Yip shows Yip's dogs at his home in Atlanta.



This undated photo provided by Vern Yip shows a mudroom for his pets in his home in Atlanta.



Picture of a boat known as "Trajinera" taken in a water channel amid the floating gardens of Xochimilco, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, during a symposium on biodiversity and gastronomy, in Mexico City. — AFP photos



Venezuelan chef Maria Fernanda Di Giacobbe cooks during a symposium on biodiversity and gastronomy.



View of a water channel amid the floating gardens of Xochimilco.



Picture of a boat known as "Trajinera" taken in a water channel amid the floating gardens of Xochimilco.

Star chefs in Mexico to defend biodiversity

Star chefs from around the world gathered in Mexico City's ancient floating gardens for a symposium on saving the world's threatened biodiversity, a bleak subject they peppered with breaks to savor the local cuisine. Joan Roca of Spain, Michel Bras of France and Gaston Acurio of Peru were among the big-name chefs who took part in the event Tuesday at Xochimilco, a UNESCO World Heritage Site criss-crossed with natural canals and artificial islands first created by the Aztecs.

Munching on hand-made tortillas stuffed with organic beans and quesadillas made from local corn, participants used the idyllic setting to tackle a grim problem: the threats that climate change, industrial agriculture and overexploitation pose to the world's plant and animal life. "I believe that solidarity is in a chef's DNA, along with the desire to create a commitment to preserve the environment and biodiversity," said Roca, whose restaurant El Celler de Can Roca has twice taken top place on the prestigious list of the World's 50 Best Restaurants.

The chefs were in town to pick the winner of the Basque Culinary World Prize, a 100,000-euro award for food-related projects that have made a positive difference beyond the kitchen. Roca presided over the jury

that named this year's winner on Monday: Colombian chef Leonor Espinosa of the restaurant LEO in Bogota, who is known for sourcing local ingredients and giving back to the communities that supply them. That was also a key theme at the symposium. To illustrate the point, participants toured the lettuce and cactus fields of Xochimilco's famous "chinampas," artificial islands created with age-old agricultural techniques used by the Aztecs and other Mesoamerican peoples.

The chinampas are one of the last reminders of how the Aztecs lived 500 years ago at the time the Spanish conquistadors arrived in the Americas, when Mexico City was mostly covered in water.

'Urban stain'

Today, the city has become a sprawling urban area of more than 20 million people. Xochimilco is one of the area's last vestiges of small-scale agriculture amid what the Mexican academic Refugio Rodriguez called "the growing urban stain of the Mexican capital." Seeking to help revive a more sustainable kind of agriculture to supply the city's food, some Mexican chefs have started sourcing fresh, organic ingredients straight from the chi-

nampas. They include the likes of Enrique Olvera, owner of the famed restaurant Pujol, and Ricardo Munoz Zurita, of "Azul y Oro."

Munoz Zurita, whom Time magazine has called a "prophet" of preserving culinary tradition, called for a return to niche local ingredients such as native Mexican corn, instead of the mass-produced basket of produce that dominates the world's supermarket aisles. "We're going to be the ambassadors of critically endangered products. We have to start cooking with them so people don't forget they exist," he said. To get to the event, which was held under a large thatch hangar, participants ventured to an artificial island by boat, a trip of about 30 minutes.

The symposium was sponsored by the Basque Culinary Center, a gastronomic university born off the back of a revolution in Spanish cuisine epitomized by the Basque country's plethora of Michelin-starred restaurants and by Ferran Adria, the father of molecular gastronomy. — AP

Art in the garden: Placing the right work in the right spot

For many landscape designers and homeowners, a garden isn't complete without the right art. But how do you find the right spot for a piece of outdoor art and choose the plants to complement it? The first step is finding a work that really speaks to you, and then "allow the art to help define the landscape," says landscape architect Edmund Hollander. He recommends working with an artist or gallery, when possible, to create a relationship between artwork and garden.

"It's really not so different from the relationship between a house and its surrounding landscape," he says. Susan Lowry, coauthor with Nancy Berner of "Private Gardens of the Bay Area" (The Monacelli Press, October 2017), says art in a garden should enhance its surroundings. "Scale, texture and light all play off the object, and there is also an emotional content that influences how we see the garden itself," she says.

Less is more, she cautions: "We have seen many a garden ruined by too many extraneous voices jumbled into the frame." The most common mistake when placing art in gardens, Hollander warns, is "sticking a work where there's too much other stuff. It's as if a museum hung a painting on a wallpapered wall instead of on a white one." So experts recommend that works be placed against quiet backdrops like evergreens, hedges or lawns.

Karen Daubmann, associate vice president for exhibitions and public engagement at the New York Botanical Garden, has helped design plantings around works by glass artist Dale Chihuly and others. The principles for selecting and showing art in a home garden are similar, she says.

"It's nice to go for something as a larger focal point - something you can see from your window and enjoy all year round, and then some smaller works that you only discover up close," she says. "And when you're decided where to place something, don't forget to look up. It's a nice surprise to look up and see a pergola, chandelier or lantern."



This undated photo provided by the Glass House and the Morgan Art Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS) shows Robert Indiana's "One Through Zero," left, at the Glass House in New Canaan, Conn.

Most important, Daubmann says, is to choose art you really love. "Chances are, if you're placing it in a garden you have designed and planted yourself, it will work, because it's the same aesthetic," she says. Keep in mind when and from where the work will be viewed. From the kitchen window? The living room? If you'll be viewing it at night, consider lighter colors, she says.

"White glass or white flowers make for a great moonlight garden, while dark blues will tend to get lost in the evening,"

Daubmann says. "A mossy, shaded garden can be spiced up quite a lot with light colored art." And the artwork doesn't have to be expensive. "I sometimes find wonderful pieces in antique shops or at barn sales that really spark my imagination," Daubmann says.

Hilary Lewis, chief curator and creative director at The Glass House, Philip Johnson's iconic house and surrounding landscape and structures in New Canaan, Connecticut, helps plan the installations there. She says works should be visible from

various parts of the property, should feel like an extension of the landscape, and should draw people in.

For inspiration, experts suggest visiting sculpture gardens, museums or botanical gardens. "There are lots of sculpture gardens of all kinds around these days, and the combination of landscape and art, when done right, can be very inspiring," Hollander says. — AP



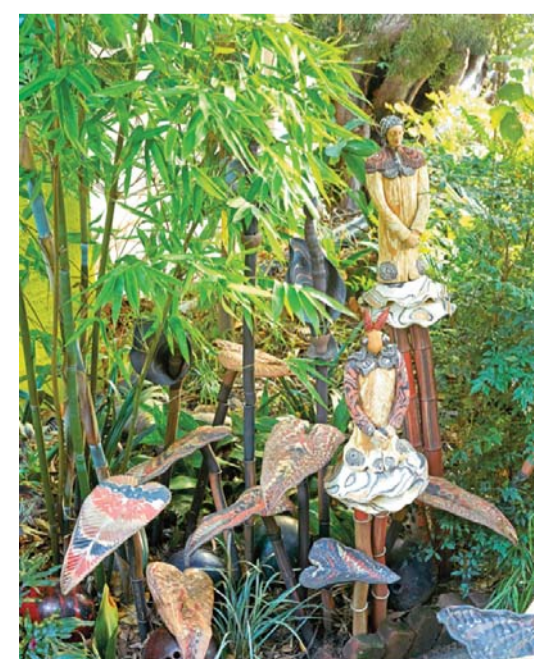
This undated photo provided by HOLLANDER design/Landscape Architects shows a sculpture by artist Robert Indiana in a residential garden on the east end of Long Island in New York.



This undated photo provided by The Monacelli Press shows "Per Adriano" by sculptor Igor Mitoraj in a residential garden on the east end of Long Island in New York. — AP photos



This undated photo provided by The Monacelli Press shows Viola Frey's "The Three Graces" in the Rena Bransten Garden, a private residential garden in San Francisco.



This undated photo shows sprites and colorful leaf-shapes atop bamboo-like stems are interspersed with the plants in the Marcia Donahue Garden in Berkeley, Calif.

Lifestyle

THURSDAY, JULY 20, 2017

Star chefs in Mexico to defend biodiversity

31



Members of the Sichuan Province Acrobatic Troupe practice outdoors in the evening to avoid the summer heat, in Suining, in China's southwest Sichuan province. The folk art troupe, established 43 years ago, has performed in France, Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong and other countries and regions. — AFP



Photo shows Clickenger riding her motorcycle in India, descending the mountains headed for Manali.



Photo shows Clickenger posing with her motorcycle in Namibia.



Photo shows Clickenger posing in front of the Che Guevara Mausoleum, a favored stop for visitors in Cuba.

Long-distance motorcycle trips seek to empower women

'My company tagline is life-changing experiences on two wheels'

A year ago Alisa Clickenger helped organize a cross-country motorcycle trip for women to commemorate the 100-year anniversary of a most amazing ride by two sisters from Brooklyn, New York. The Sisters' Centennial Motorcycle Ride honored the exploits of Augusta and Adeline Van Buren, who in 1916 rode motorcycles more than 5,000 miles (8,000 km) across the country to prove that women could be military motorcycle couriers, able to endure long distances and harsh conditions as well as men. For Clickenger, it was a breakthrough.

"The ride was important to me," Clickenger said. "It was the realization of a long-held dream of mine to lead a group of women across the United States on motorcycles. Seeing nearly 250 women on motorcycles in my rearview mirror riding over the Golden Gate Bridge was epic - something I'll never forget. It was very emotional for me." The ride also helped Clickenger demonstrate what her fledgling company, Women's Motorcycle Tours, could accomplish.

"For me, part of riding motorcycles still is the challenge of embracing the unknown, the mastery of machine and also facing my fears and meeting the challenges of an extended motorcycle adventure," said Clickenger, whose company focuses solely on tours for female motorcyclists. "It was the first time I've seen so many manufacturers (Indian and BMW among them) come together for a common goal - promoting women and motorcycling. It was wonderful."

Women own about 14 percent of registered motorcycles, up from 8 percent in 1998, according to the Motorcycle Industry Council's latest numbers. But Genevieve Schmitt, founder and editor of online magazine "Women Riders Now", says those numbers count only new registrations. She says women comprise nearly 25 percent of those who ride (including passengers), and that makes them major players in the riding business.

"Personally, I feel we've kind of seen an exponential growth in the 11 to 12 years that I've had the site," Schmitt said. "There is a whole new market of young girls in their 20s who have taken up riding that we haven't seen, really, in history." Why are more women taking up motorcycling? Schmitt calls it the "copycat effect." A woman sees another woman riding a motorcycle and says, "If she can do it, so can I!" Manufacturers such as Harley-Davidson produce entry-level motorcycles but it can still seem "intimidating getting on a powerful vehicle," said Pam



In this photo provided by Alisa Clickenger, Clickenger leads a group of women riders over the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco at the end of a cross-country trip to honor two sisters from Brooklyn, NY, who made a similar ride in 1916. — AP photos

Kermisch, a novice rider who works for Polaris, the company that owns Indian and Victory motorcycle brands. "I did all the classroom stuff.

Freedom from our fears

That's one thing, but it's another thing to actually get on and do it. Once you do it, it's very doable. I think for a lot of people, that's the scary part. I think the second piece of it is that in order to get confidence you have to do it more." Which is where Clickenger, who lives in Diamond Bar, California, but is on the road most of the time, comes in. Like just about everybody who rides a motorcycle, she identifies with the credo that the only way to travel is on two wheels. In March, she organized an all-female motorcycle tour of Cuba. That will be followed by the Colorado Backcountry Discovery Route during the last week of July and a tour of the American Southwest in October departing from Las Vegas.

"My company tagline is life-changing experiences on two wheels," Clickenger said. "The bottom line is it's about empowerment, and the feeling of freedom - freedom from our fears, freedom from societal constraints, freedom from our own self-constructed, pre-conceived constraints and breaking those boundaries." Clickenger says she isn't concerned that catering to women limits her company's potential. In fact, that's the ulterior motive to

her venture. "The joy I find bringing women together to ride and explore and become empowered through mastery over machine is what drives me," said Clickenger, who figures she's ridden at least 250,000 miles (400,000 km), including a seven-month solo trip from

New York to Argentina. "It's been really fun watching the ripple effect, how the cross-country trip affected them and their self-perceived limitations about what's possible for them in their own lives."

Swimming pool

Next year, Clickenger will offer several tours, including a motorcycle adventure in southern Africa dubbed "Waterfalls and Wildlife." She also plans a series of weekend retreats in San Diego, San Francisco, and Sedona, Arizona, and two teaching tours for women just getting started in touring on two wheels, as a way to inspire them to take big trips on their own.

Diane Huston, who served in the Middle East during a 20-year career in the Air Force, is long past the learning stage, and she wasn't deterred after the first ride on her new Harley-Davidson in 1995 ended up in a swimming pool. The lure of the open road is a powerful thing. "To me, riding a motorcycle is an absolute brain dump with the freedom of wide-open spaces," said Huston, who was on the centennial ride, toured Cuba, and hopes to go on Clickenger's Africa tour next year. "I do hope that women we encountered along the way have become empowered themselves to realize that no matter what we desire, we can have it. We just need to do it, against all odds." — AP



In this photo an aerial view shows a field in Utting am Ammersee, southern Germany, with a portrait of German theologian and seminal figure for the reformation Martin Luther which was created by farmers Corinne and Uli Ern to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the reformation. — AP