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SUCCESSFUL BOND SALE REVEALS KUWAIT'S ECONOMIC STRENGTH

BUDGET SURPLUS LIKELY • SALEH HAILS STATE'S STRONG CREDIT STANDING



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MAIDS COULD OUTNUMBER CITIZENS BY 2022: ASHOUR

MPS LASH OUT AT GOVT PROGRAM

By Blzzak

KUWAIT: Lawmakers lashed out at the government yesterday as they debated its annual development program, charging that the plan included repetitive issues that were never implemented. The lawmakers also accused the government of failing to halt widespread corruption which has been on the rise, strongly opposed privatization plans and criticized the government's failure in creating sufficient jobs for citizens.

MP Saleh Ashour warned that if the current growth rate of expatriates continues, the number of certain communities like Indians, Egyptians and Filipinos will increase sharply to new proportions. The lawmaker said that based on current growth rates, domestic helpers could outnumber Kuwaiti citizens by 2022. He

provided no details. Domestic helpers number just under 700,000 at present while Kuwaiti nationals are 1.35 million. Expatriates number 3.1 million. Ashour added Kuwaitis are fooling themselves by saying their country is democratic when there are thousands of court cases against freedom of expression.

Islamist opposition MP Mohammad Al-Dallal said the problem with the government program is that it is a repetition of old programs, adding that Kuwaitis are capable of developing better programs. He said that we want the minister of development to explain why previous programs failed. Dallal said the government's administration is incapable of delivering, and claimed the "deep state" and "fat cats" do not want to see Kuwait progressing.

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AMIR HONORS NEW CADETS



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah honors a police cadet during a graduation ceremony at the Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences yesterday. — KUNA (See Page 3)

By Sara Ahmed

KUWAIT: Kuwait scored big with international investors this week with an estimated four-time oversubscription of its first international bond issue. According to a Bloomberg report, the interest in Kuwait's bond sale points to the significant underlying strength in the country's economic position. Kuwait sold \$3.5 billion in five-year bonds and \$4.5 billion in 10-year debt on March 12. Orders for the bonds totaled a massive \$29 billion, according to bankers quoted by Reuters.

Kuwait is expected to be the only Gulf state with a budget surplus this year. "IMF figures show the current oil price, at about \$52 barrel, is more than enough for the country to balance its budget and current account, unlike its neighbors. Which is why when the OPEC member raised \$8 billion from the sale of five-year and 10-year notes this week, and attracted \$29 billion in bids, it paid less than what Qatar, Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia offered last year," reported Bloomberg.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Anas Al-Saleh yesterday said Kuwait's successful bond issuance reflected the country's strong credit standing. "We are delighted with the successful pricing of this transaction and the positive response we have received from international investors. This highlights Kuwait's strong credit standing amongst its international peers," Saleh told KUNA.

Continued on Page 13

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KUWAIT CALLS FOR COLLABORATED EFFORTS TO COMBAT TERRORISTS

'DIALOGUE WITH IRAN BASED ON NON-INTERVENTION IN GCC AFFAIRS'

By Faten Omar and agencies

KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah called on the international community to collaborate on implementing a broad strategy to combat the so-called Islamic State (IS) and other terrorist groups. Jarallah made the remarks during the opening session of the Foreign Terrorist Fighters Working Group meeting held yesterday at Sheraton Hotel. "This meeting will be an opportunity for coalition partners to discuss ways to further accelerate the campaign against Daesh," he said, using the Arabic acronym for the terrorist group.

He affirmed pursuing action at various levels for facing IS, noting the terrorist threats posed by IS to the region and beyond and identifying and laying down the measures that coalition members and the international community should undertake in the fight against Daesh.

Jarallah congratulated Iraq for recapturing the eastern half of Mosul from IS. He said developments to combat terrorism underscore the effectiveness of mass confrontation and the importance of coordination against terrorism. He praised Kuwait's efforts and its international role in facing IS, considering that several meetings have been held to support the international coalition in its campaign to wipe out Daesh.

He assured on the need to improve the strategic applications that work under this important group and follow the coalition's efforts in the face of the damages caused by the flow of foreign fighters into conflict zones and find a mechanism for a clear return policy. He said the gathering addresses the issue of preventing fighters leaving and preparing an adequate environment for their return to their countries. Moreover, Jarallah said Kuwait has begun implementing a strategy to espouse moderation and stifle extremism. Kuwait remains "vehemently opposed" to all forms and manifestations of terrorism, he added.

Iran

Jarallah emphasized that the dialogue with Iran must be based on non-intervention in the domestic affairs of the regional states. He stressed the need for continued teamwork and coordination in all fields to address these issues and rid the world of terrorism, preserve what has been achieved and move forward to achieve a common goal. He called for the enactment of legislation and laws to counter terrorist crimes.

Kuwait has always stressed on halting such intervention "because it affects dialogue as well as the region's security and stability," he said, noting that the Kuwaiti authorities "have been dealing and following up with profound interest" contents of a message given to the First



KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah speaks to reporters on the sidelines of the Foreign Terrorist Fighters Working Group. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah from the Iranian authorities. Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled received a message last Monday addressed to His Highness the Amir from the Iranian president-contents of which have not been officially declared. It was conveyed by the Iranian envoy in the country. "We hope to see halt of any form of meddling in the affairs of the States of the region," he reiterated.

Asked about reported deployment of some 1,000 US troops in Kuwait as part of the war against "Daesh," Jarallah said that efforts by the United States and other coalition States are ongoing and will not stop in facing these organizations." Asked to react to remarks by the new Iraqi envoy in the country on Kuwait's stance concerning Mina Abdullah, he said, "the file dealing with the port is open on regulating navigation."

Kuwaiti and Iraqi officials have been holding continuing meetings regarding the issue of the port on the basis of the 2012 agreement, he said. The two neighboring countries inked an agreement for regulating maritime navigation via Mina Abdullah in 2012, stipulating formation of a commission to organize the navigation, ensure safety of the waterway and conserve the environment.

Jarallah also stressed that Kuwait is relentlessly exerting efforts and playing its positive role in

wiping out Arab tensions and differences. "The State of Kuwait is still continuing efforts and its positive role in clearing Arab atmospheres from any tension or disagreements that undermine fraternal Arab relations," Jarallah indicated.

Terror supporters

On the US Department of the Treasury's listing of a Kuwaiti citizen on the list of terror supporters, Jarallah said: "Kuwait is coordinating with the US in this regard. Thus, this coordination did not and won't stop. Regardless of the nationality, there is cooperation among the coalition's countries over (terror) suspects."

On the coming Arab summit in Jordan next month, the Kuwaiti official said: "The State of Kuwait is hopefully and optimistically looking forward to this summit which will create a quantum leap in common Arab action with the participation of GCC leaders. We are convinced that this participation will constitute a push for common Arab action." Jarallah noted that His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah will visit Turkey next week, and that contacts are underway for setting a date for the Turkish president's planned visit to Kuwait. He also pointed to a planned visit by His Highness the Amir to Egypt within the framework of fraternal relations between both countries' leaders.

PUBLIC HOSPITALS TO GRADUALLY BECOME EXCLUSIVE FOR CITIZENS

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The government told MPs that their demand to resolve the demographic imbalance problem is a top priority for the Cabinet, informed sources said. The sources also explained that demands to restrict public hospital services' to citizens alone would be done gradually, because private hospitals are currently incapable of absorbing the huge numbers of expats. "The government plans to start by increasing expat health service fees and denying them access to some services such as MRIs and endoscopies," the sources said, adding that stopping public hospital services for expats would take at least three years until the private health insurance hospitals for non-Kuwaitis start operating.

The sources said the government would provide lawmakers with plans to do away with expat administrative employees in various government sectors, but stressed that it would be difficult to do the same with technical and specialized ones like doctors, teachers and nurses. In addition, the source said that the government would work on mandating employers to deport expat laborers as soon as their mission concludes, as well as ban residency transfers for those terminated. "Visit visas will be soon controlled once the parliament passes imposing health insurance fees on visitors," the sources said.

Finally, the sources stressed that it would be impossible to rely on bedoons to replace expats because they are mostly not specialized or

trained. "In addition, such a step contradicts the state's policy in treating them as illegal residents. Therefore, they have to legalize their stay, especially those who now know for sure they have no right to get citizenship," the sources concluded.

Power bills

Minister of Electricity and Water and Minister of Oil Essam Al-Marzouq stressed that out of the ministry's keenness on collecting overdue bills, an agreement has been made with the Interior Ministry to link its services with the ministry's system and stop providing indebted citizens with services unless they pay their power bills. In a different concern, Marzouq stressed that he will never approve dismissing any nationals working in the oil sector as they have been 'brothers, children and coworkers for long'. In response to an inquiry made by MP Faisal Al-Kandari, Marzouq denied any intention to privatize the petroleum labs in Manaqaesh, remarking it is impossible predict the future.

Cairo Road

The Ministry of Public Works (MPW) said that Cairo Road is very vital because it serves several residential areas. The ministry also stressed that a 4-year project to develop the road will start within two months once all approvals are given by the Audit Bureau and a contractor is selected. MPW added that the project would include replacing all traffic lights with flyovers and tunnels to facilitate traffic flows.

SIX DRUG TRAFFICKERS ARRESTED

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: The Interior Ministry's Relations and Security Information Department said detectives arrested a gang of six Bangladeshis for trading in drugs. They were also found in violation of the residency law. They all confessed to trading in drugs for money.

Meanwhile, the ministry announced that residency affairs detectives arrested a female employee at the labor contracts department at the ministry of social affairs and labor, who processed transactions illegally in exchange of money. Detectives received information about the employee's

involvement in this illegal activity, so investigations were held and an undercover agent was sent to her. She agreed to pass transactions for a bribe of KD 400. She was caught in the presence of policewomen with the marked currency notes. The woman confessed to all charges.

In other news, the department announced that the centers that issue e-passports will start receiving patrons from Saturday, March 18 from 9:00 am until 2:00 pm. It reminded that the centers are: Capital (Shamiya), Hawally (West Mishref), Farwaniya (Ishbiliya), Mubarak Al-Kabeer (Adan), Jahra (Saad Al-Abdullah), and Ahmadi (Fahd Al-Ahmad).

STORES, RESTAURANTS CLOSED DOWN FOR FRAUD

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry and Acting Minister of State for Youth Affairs Khaled Al-Roudhan issued 21 ministerial decisions closing down a large number of vegetable outlets, restaurants, and commercial, foodstuff and department stores. The minister's assistant undersecretary for commercial control and consumer protection Eid Al-Rasheedi stressed that the ministry will carry on monitoring the market and tracking down all violators taking advantage of consumers. Rasheedi explained that the closure decisions were made for committing commercial fraud over weights, country of origin and selling expired and foul food items in various areas of Kuwait.

E-services

Chairman of the Municipal Council's reform and development committee Osama Al-Otaibi said the new electronic municipality services project is a substantial leap towards online issuance of construction licenses. Speaking at a workshop organized by the committee to review the new services, Otaibi said that the new services include construction licenses, electric power connection and specification certificates. He added that Kuwait Fire Services Directorate (KFSD) had already archived over two million

files and that was ready to connect with Kuwait Municipality system. Otaibi added that another meeting would be held in a few months to review the latest developments and statistics, in addition to obstacles the project might face and possible solutions. The municipality's assistant undersecretary for financial and administrative affairs Waleed Al-Jassem said that the municipality explained its role in using e-services during the workshop.

Development plan

The supreme planning and development secretariat general yesterday launched its first workshop on assessing the annual development plan projects for 2018-2019, to be followed other daily workshops till the end of March. Secretary General Khaled Mahdi said that this was the first time such a method was used in evaluating the state's development projects, by holding assessment or evaluation workshops and inviting NGOs and the private sector to attend along with government bodies. "The aim of these workshops is to enroll various sectors of citizens in assessing and selecting the projects," he underlined, pointing out evaluation would be done by an outside panel comprising of 14 members representing NGOs and the private sector and an internal one including the secretariat's experts and consultants.

SNATCHING INCIDENTS ON THE RISE

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Snatching incidents are apparently rising in Kuwait, and the crime sections of newspapers have almost daily reports about them. In recent days, Kuwait Times met two victims of such muggings in two separate locations - in Shaab and Mubarakia. Incidentally, both work for the same company. The snatching incidents took place in broad daylight. Pervez, a Bangladeshi, was walking on a side street during the dust storm on Monday on his way to his second job in Shaab when a black sedan with two young men stopped beside him. The men asked for his civil ID. He hesitated at first, but complied after the men introduced themselves as officers from the Criminal Investigation Division (CID).

"They introduced themselves to me as CID officers. I was afraid, so I immediately showed them my civil ID. The young man then saw my sling bag and accused me of having illegal drugs in it. I said I can never be involved in such a crime, and told them to check my bag. When they found nothing in my bag, they grabbed my wallet and drove off," Pervez said.

"I was pleading with them not to take my wallet, but even before I finished speaking, they drove off. A moment later I saw them tossing my wallet from the window of their car. My civil ID was there, but they took about KD 210. This was the rent of my apartment and they took it," he said. "I didn't jot down the car's license plate number because there wasn't any." Pervez immediately went to the nearby Maidaan Hawally police station to report the incident. "The police recorded the incident and told me they might call me any time, since cameras are installed there. They will check the footage to identify the suspects," Pervez explained.

Another snatching incident took place just before the celebration of the national days last month. Jenny, a Filipina, withdrew her salary from an ATM near Mubarakia.

On the way home, four young men poured a bucket of water on her head. She tried to run, but wasn't able to. "I thought it was a simple prank, but it was a snatching incident. I wrestled with the youths because I didn't want to get wet. But they were four and I was alone - they were trying to grab my bag containing the money. I begged and fought hard for it, but finally gave up when one of the men pointed a kitchen knife at me. I sustained bruises and cuts on my hand," she said.

Passersby at that time thought she was jousting with kids who were in a celebratory mood because of the holidays. "I was pleading and shouting at people nearby, but they didn't respond because they thought it was a simple water spraying thing. They fled when an Arab man told them to stop the harassment. I went home in a fazed state because they took my bag containing the money. Thank God, I had my cellphone in my pocket," she recalled.

ICRC SEARCHES FOR KUWAITIS' REMAINS

BAGHDAD: The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) resumed efforts to look for the human remains of Kuwaitis' in Dhi Qar Governorate, southern Iraq. A security source in the Iraqi police said yesterday that a team from ICRC arrived late on Tuesday to Al-Nasiriyah, the largest city of Dhi Qar, to resume the operation. The team included experts from Colombia, Australia, Lebanon, and Iraq. The Iraq Ministry of Defense offered a prize to any person who provides any information regarding the human remains of Kuwaitis in Iraq and also stolen goods from Kuwait during the Iraqi invasion. — KUNA

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KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and other top state officials attend the graduation ceremony of police cadets at the Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences yesterday. — Photos by Amiri Diwan and Joseph Shagra



Policemen perform during the ceremony.

AMIR PATRONIZES, ATTENDS POLICE ACADEMY CEREMONY

KUWAIT: In a ceremony attended and patronized by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences celebrated the graduation of its police cadets yesterday. Upon arrival at the ceremony, His Highness the Amir was warmly welcomed by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah, the Ministry of Interior's (MoI) Advisor Lieutenant General Sulaiman Al-Fahad, Deputy Undersecretary of the MoI Major General Mahmoud Al-Dosari, the MoI's Assistant Undersecretary for

Educational and Training Affairs Major General Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Sabah, and other senior MoI officials.

The ceremony was also attended by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, Sheikh Faisal Al-Saud Al-Sabah, Deputy Chairman of the Kuwait National Guard (KNG) Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, President of the Supreme

Judicial Council, President of the Constitutional Court, and Head of the Cassation Court Justice Yousef Al-Matawa, First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Mohamad Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah and other state officials.

In a speech, the MoI's Assistant Undersecretary for Educational and Training Affairs said that the graduating cadets are bonded by common patriotic

ardor and an unflinching desire to protect the nation's best interests.

Moreover, he said that the police officers have acquired skills that will serve them well, as he wished Kuwait persistent development and prosperity under the sage leadership of His Highness the Amir. Afterwards, awards and certificates were bestowed upon the graduating cadets and His Highness the Amir along with His Highness the Crown Prince were given honorary plaques to commemorate the occasion. — KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah honors a graduate policeman from Yemen.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah honors a policeman.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah honors a policewoman.



Policewomen participate in the parade.



Newly graduated policemen participate in a parade during the ceremony.



Lieutenant Thenwah Al-Saad celebrates with her family.



A graduate is thrown in the air in celebration.



Lieutenant Bashayer Al-Mubarak celebrates with her family.



Policemen participate in the parade.



Lieutenant Yousef Al-Misbah celebrates with his family.



A policeman celebrates with his family.



Lieutenant Hosam Osama Abudurrahman, a graduate from Jordan, celebrates with his family.



Newly graduated policewomen pose for a group photo.

In Brief

PALESTINE DISTRIBUTES \$4.5M OF KUWAITI GRANT FOR CITIZENS

GAZA: The Palestinian government announced yesterday that hundreds of citizens affected by the 2014 Israeli war on the Gaza Strip would start receiving financial aid from the \$200 million Kuwaiti grant agreement signed in 2015. In a press statement published by Palestine's official news agency (WAFA), Minister of Public Works and Housing Mufid Al-Hasayna said the government would provide \$4.5 million for citizens with destroyed houses. — KUNA



IICO DISTRIBUTES 18,000 FOOD PARCELS TO SOMALIS

KUWAIT: President of the International Islamic Charitable Organization (IICO) Dr Abdullah Al-Maatouq said Tuesday the Organization distributed 18,000 food parcels to 3,050 families suffering from food shortage resulting from drought in Somalia. "IICO's aid campaign comes in response to an appeal for helping the victims of famine in the northern, eastern and southern parts of the East African country," said Dr Al-Maatouq who is also an Amiri Diwan Advisor and vice-chairman of the Cairo-based International Islamic Council for Da'wa (call). — KUNA



KRCS DELIVERS AID TO SYRIANS IN LEBANON

BEQA: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) delivered, in coordination with the Lebanese Red Cross (LRC), relief aid to some 400 Syrian refugee families in Lebanon. KRCS's official Qassim Ahmad said that the relief aid consisted of food-stuff with one package being sufficient to feed a family of five for a whole month. KRCS is keen on intensifying aid for Syrian refugee families in Lebanon, particularly those living in the country's southern region, he affirmed. — KUNA



Photo

of the day



KUWAIT: Buildings in Kuwait City silhouetted by the sunset. — KUNA Photo

KUWAIT 126TH IN MERCER'S QUALITY OF LIVING SURVEY

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Kuwait City ranked 126th in Mercer's 19th annual Quality of Living survey, which was released Tuesday and topped by Vienna, Austria for the eighth consecutive year. Kuwait's ranking, which is two spots down from last year's survey, also puts it ninth among Arab cities. The rest of the top-ten list mostly filled by European cities: Zurich is in second place, with Munich (4), Dusseldorf (6), Frankfurt (7), Geneva (8), Copenhagen (9), and Basel, a newcomer to the list, in 10th place. The only non-European cities in the top ten are Auckland (3) and Vancouver (5). The highest ranking cities in Asia and Latin America are Singapore (25) and Montevideo (79), respectively.

Mercer's survey also includes a city infrastructure ranking that assesses each city's supply of electricity, drinking water, telephone and mail services, and public transportation as well as traffic congestion and the range of international flights available from local airports. Singapore tops the city infrastructure ranking, followed by Frankfurt and Munich both in 2nd place. Baghdad (230) and Port au Prince (231) rank last for city infrastructure.

Dubai (74) continues to rank highest for quality of living across Africa and the Middle East, rising one position in this year's ranking, followed closely by Abu Dhabi (79), which climbed three spots. Sana'a (229) in Yemen, Bangui (230) in the Central African Republic, and Baghdad (231) in Iraq are the region's three lowest-ranked cities for quality of living.

Dubai also ranks highest for infrastructure in 51st place. Only five other cities in this region make the top 100, including Tel Aviv (56), Abu Dhabi (67), Port Louis (94), Muscat (97), and upcoming host of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, Doha in Qatar, which ranks 96th for infrastructure. Cities in African and Middle Eastern countries dominate the bottom half of the table for infrastructure, with Brazzaville (228) in the Republic of the Congo, Sana'a (229), and Baghdad (230) ranking the lowest.

Singapore (25) remains the highest ranking city in the Asia-Pacific region, where there is great disparity in quality of living; Dushanbe (215) in Tajikistan ranks lowest. In Southeast Asia, Kuala Lumpur (86) follows Singapore; other key cities include Bangkok (131), Manila (135), and Jakarta (143). Five Japanese cities top the ranking for East Asia: Tokyo (47), Kobe (50), Yokohama (51), Osaka (60), and Nagoya (63). Other notable cities in Asia include Hong Kong (71), Seoul (76), Taipei (85), Shanghai (102), and Beijing (119). There is also considerable regional variation in the city infrastructure ranking. The highest-ranked city is Singapore (1), whereas Dhaka (214) is near the bottom of the list.

City infrastructure plays an important role when multinationals decide where to establish locations abroad and send expatriate workers. Easy access to transportation, reliable electricity, and drinkable water are all important considerations when determining hardship allowances based on differences between a given assignee's home and host locations, Mercer said in a press statement.

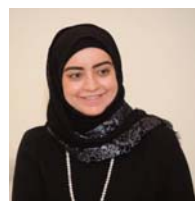
IBTIKAR INITIATIVE PARTICIPATES IN SCIENCE, MATH'S CONFERENCE

BEIRUT: The Saad Foundation for Knowledge and Scientific Research, represented by the 'Ibtikar Al-Kuwait Initiative' for female public education student's researches and projects, participated in a science and mathematics conference which was organized by the American University in Beirut. They participated with a paper presented by Dr Fatima Al-Hashim, Director General of Ibtikar Al-Kuwait Initiative, in which she expressed the method followed by the foundation's chairperson Sheikhha Fadiya Saad Al-Abdallah Al-Salem Al-Sabah who works on instilling the pillars of empowering Kuwaiti women and improve their social status.

She said investing in the human female element is the first means of achieving sustainable knowledge and science that is attained by teachers and students, Dr Hashim



Sheikhha Fadiya Saad Al-Abdallah Al-Salem Al-Sabah



Dr Fatima Al-Hashim

said. The scientific competition organized by Sheikhha Fadiya annually also benefits them, since it encourages them to do research, which serves as a catalyst to launch innovations, she added. And how to benefit from the research aspect with teachers through creating a catalyst to launch innovations through the scientific competition of Sheikhha Fadia Al-Saad Al-Sabah is the first means of sustainable knowledge and science by teachers and students and their effect on the students gain.

The science and mathematics conference organized by the American University in Beirut is an annual event that seeks to instill the importance of science and mathematics in education. It also calls for benefiting from the scientific experiments that are important in the Arab world.



KUWAIT EXHIBITS VINTAGE CARS FOR AMIR, QUEEN ELIZABETH

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is currently holding an exhibition displaying vintage cars, paintings and unique stamps, on sidelines of the Kuwaiti-British guidance commission' meetings, proceeding for two days. A number of the priceless cars on display belonged to His Highness the Amir and Queen Elizabeth of England. — KUNA



KUWAIT: This March 16, 1954 photo shows Kuwaitis participating in a celebration held for the receiving the Kadhema aircraft at the old airport in the Nuzha area. —KUNA



The Kadhema 3 aircraft (Airbus-300).

KADHEMA: KUWAIT'S FIRST TWIN-ENGINE PLANE

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways Corporation commemorates today the anniversary of the Kadhema aircraft, the first airplane delivered to the national carrier on March 16, 1954. The twin-engine bluebird Kadhema was the first locally owned plane that was officially received, while landing in the old airport in the Nuzha area, which has become a residential suburb later.

The 32-seat Dakota DC-3 then inaugurated its flights with a demonstration test in Kuwait airspace with a number of VIPs onboard. The plane's pilot was a British national. Kadhema, built by Douglas Aircraft Company, was one of two DC-3 aircraft airlifting passengers between Kuwait and city of Basra, Southern Iraq. Kuwait Airways could not operate flights to other countries because it did not have agreements with other airlines. The carrier started operating three flights a week to Basra, one to Beirut, Lebanon, and then started flying to Al-Quds (Jerusalem), Damascus in Syria, and Abbadan in Iran. Kuwait Airways decommissioned the DC-3 in 1959 and gave it to Bahrain where it was operated for two years, then was given to the Fire Department for training on aircraft accidents.

Kuwait asked Bahrain to return the DC-3. Kuwait Airways Corporation then restored the plane and put it on display in the Scientific Museum in 1986. The plane retired but the name, Kadhema, returned on a new plane. Kuwait Airways bought new planes in the early 1980s and one of them, an Airbus-300, carried Kadhema name.

Hijack

A group of terrorists hijacked Kadhema on December 4, 1984 when the plane was en route from Kuwait to Karachi, Pakistan, via Dubai. The terrorists forced the captain to land in Tehran, Iran, and held the plane and passengers hostage for six days, during which hijackers killed two Americans.

Security forces stormed the plane, liberated remaining hostages and arrested the terrorists. The plane remained grounded in Tehran for 17 months, and flew back to Kuwait on

May 4, 1986. Kuwait Airways suffered from the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Iraqi forces looted 15 passenger planes causing \$1.2 billion losses. Immediately following the liberation in February 1991, the carrier began the rebuilding of its fleet by purchasing planes from Boeing and Airbus. The company also named one of its new planes, an Airbus-300-310, Kadhema reflecting the importance of the name to the carrier's history.

The very plane, ending 13 years of Kuwait Airways' non-flying in Iraqi airspace, started on May 18, 2003 delivering medical supplies for the Iraqi people. The plane, carrying 20 tons of aid, was the first civilian Kuwaiti aircraft landing in Baghdad airport since the invasion. The airlines launched its new vision in 2014, aimed at purchasing 10 long-range Boeing-777 ER 300 planes, each with a capacity of 334 passengers. The planes started arriving and the third one was received on January 31, again named Kadhema.

Symbolic name

Rasha Al-Roumi, Kuwait Airways Board Chairperson and CEO, said the name Kadhema was nationally and historically symbolic for our country. "We are proud to have this name placed on one of our new planes," Roumi said in a statement.

Kadhema is a historic site in northwest of Kuwait Bay, used to be inhabited by Arab tribes in ancient times. The site witnessed the famous That As-Salasel battle when the Muslims defeated the Persians in the year 633.

Asked about the new planes, Roumi said Kuwait Airways has received five Boeing-777 since last December and the entire 10 would be delivered in the third quarter of 2017. The five planes carried the names of Kuwaiti Islands: Failaka, Umm Al-Maradem, Kubbar and Warba, in addition to Kadhema, she said. The carrier, she added, was also awaiting delivery of 10 new Airbus 350 and 15 Airbus Neo 320. Delivery is scheduled to start in 2019 until 2021. Roumi said the new fleet would fly to long-distance destinations as well as busy routes like



Archive photos taken from the 1984 hostage crisis which began with the hijacking of the Kadhema 2 aircraft and forcing it to land in Tehran, Iran.



The Kadhema 4 aircraft (Boeing-777).

London, New York, Paris and Bangkok. Kuwait Airways Company was born in March 1954, but suffered financial difficulties in a year time, forcing the government to purchase 50 percent of its shares, doubling its capital and changing its name to Kuwait Airways Corporation. Having entered the rough and tumble world of aviation, the government finally took out 100 percent share in Kuwait Airways.

Kuwait Airways entered the jet age in 1962 by leasing a

Comet 4-C, the world's first jet-engine airliner. In the 1960s, the national carrier rapidly expanded its route map, and scheduled services to London began three times a week. To keep pace with fast-moving aviation needs, three Boeing 707s were delivered in 1968. Ten years later, Kuwait Airways had an all-Boeing 707 fleet of eight aircraft. The carrier continues connecting Kuwait with major cities like Paris, Dubai, New York, and Manila. —KUNA

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Crime

Report

WORKER ARRESTED FOR LEADING MUTINY

KUWAIT: An Indian driver became enraged and refused to carry out his duties, and asked those who work with him to disobey their sponsor. The sponsor took him to Sabahiya police station. Police were suspicious he may have consumed something illegal, but did not find anything. Police decided to send him to the forensics department over suspicions of being on drugs.

Newborn found in dumpster

A lady was drawn to an infant that was left in a trash dumpster near her home in Adan. The woman heard the baby crying and followed the direction of the sound, which led her to the dumpster. She called police, who arrived with forensics men and paramedics who took the baby to Adan Hospital. Detectives are working on the case.

KD 70,000 stolen

A bedoon man was shocked when he discovered that KD 70,000 he had left in his car was missing along with an expensive watch. The bedoon was hysterical when he arrived at the police station, saying the window of his car was broken and the bag containing the money was stolen. Police are investigating.

Drunks fight

A fight broke out at dawn Tuesday in front of building, so residents called police. Officers arrived to the scene and controlled three citizens who were drunk, then took them to Maidan Hawally police station for further action.

Theft

Two young men entered a grocery store, attacked the grocer, stole a carton of cigarettes and some money and escaped. The Indian told Jahra police that one of them was carrying a stick and beat him, before stealing the cigarettes and money. Detectives are working on the case.

Drunk driver caught

An Indian man became nervous when he saw a police patrol, and ended up damaging eight cars in his botched escape attempt. He was found to be drunk, and had 130 locally-brewed liquor bottles with him. The patrol officers noticed a car being driven unsteadily, which hit another vehicle moments later. The suspect then attempted to escape and hit cars that were in his way.

—Translated from the Arabic press



Al-Jarida



KUWAIT: The Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) participated in a forum organized recently at the Kuwait International Fairground under the patronage of Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education Dr Mohammad Al-Faris. The event, entitled 'How to Determine my Future,' was visited by nearly 4,000 visitors. It allowed students to receive guidance that helps them decide the major they want to study in college.

القباس

Al-Qabas

QUESTIONS LEFT UNANSWERED

By Qais Al-Usta

I do not know how this country can stand things! Questions are many, and we do know the answers in advance for some, while others are talismans that we work hard to decipher. Citizenships were revoked, and now they are being restored. Why were they revoked and how will they be restored if the revocation was legal? Are we sympathizing with families who harmed the country and posted videos online challenging the authority? We talk about reform and discover that the concerned department on reform is being run by the same group since 40 years. So are those who speak about reform aware that the continuation of most of those leaders is the biggest denial of the true reform intention?

What about the undertaking not to grill His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah? Is this constitutional? Officials come out with statements and promises to resolve problems, then discover a few

Where is the role of MPs? Was our optimism about the new Assembly justified?

months or even years later that the same situation remains! Some time ago, an official from the General Department of Civil Aviation said the problem of the stopover of Kuwait Airways' Flight 117 to New York was resolved by 99 percent, and despite this, the flight still stops at Shannon airport, which is a clear insult to more than one state authority.

Was the sports problem resolved by the resignation of former information minister Sheikh Salman Al-Hmoud Al-Sabah, or is the problem still there? Where is the role of MPs? Was our optimism about the new Assembly justified? Are we going to spend the next four years with each one of us blaming the other about a cell that is spending its punishment in jail, and leave priorities to only talk about article 79 of the constitution? What about the diversification of sources of income and red tape? All these questions and others are being asked, and officials are making promises and promises... So, was the message delivered? I hope so.

—Translated by Kuwait Times

KFH SPONSORS GCC'S UNIFIED TRAFFIC WEEK

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) announced its sponsorship of the Gulf Cooperation Council GCC's Unified Traffic Week 2017 in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior's General Department of Traffic. This comes in line with KFH endeavors and keenness to support the official authorities' efforts while participating in the society-oriented activities as part of its corporate social responsibility and pioneering role in serving the society. A delegation from KFH officials visited the Ministry of Interior and reiterated the support of KFH to the Ministry's efforts in all fields, yet emphasized the important role KFH assumes towards the society.

KFH participates in sponsoring the activities of the GCC's Unified Traffic Week for the 8th consecutive year. The event that takes place from 12-17 March is aimed at increasing the awareness and

achieving safety and security for the residents and citizens of the GCC countries as safety and security traffic is important factor in achieving development and prosperity in any country.

KFH has firm belief in the importance of synergy and concerted efforts of both private and public sectors for the sake of urging drivers and pedestrians to adhere to traffic rules and respect the law, which highlights the country's civilized face. Moreover, the bank hails the efforts of the Ministry of Interior, underscoring the key role of policemen in minimizing traffic congestions and achieving the highest levels of traffic security. The GCC traffic week is filled with activities that encompass workshops, seminars, distributing leaflets and awareness brochures for road users in collaboration and coordination with ministries and official bodies.



ZAIN RECOGNIZES VALUE ADDED SERVICES PARTNERS AND HOLDS EIGHTH WORKSHOP

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading telecommunications company in Kuwait, held its quarterly honoring ceremony to recognize and celebrate the efforts of its high-performing Value Added Services partners during Q4 and throughout the year 2016.

Zain Kuwait's Wholesale and Partner Relations Director Muzamil Shaikh, along with officials from the Value Added Services Department, recognized the company's distinguished partners for their excellent efforts in providing the highest quality VAS services to the largest family of subscribers in Kuwait. Zain is keen on offering the most advanced and competitive services to reflect the company's leading position in the telecom sector.

During the honoring ceremony, the

company also held the 8th VAS workshop, where it discussed along with its partners the latest developments and challenges faced by the Value Added Services sector, as well as the upcoming strategic roadmap to offer Zain's customers the top quality services.

During the event, Zain recognized its top-performing partners for the year 2016, including Numbase Limited for achieving Zain's VAS net revenue, and One Global for achieving overall performance and the least amount of complaints, and Media Phone Plus for achieving Zain's Bulk SMS revenues, and Qanwat for achieving Sam3ni service performance, as well as Beeceell for achieving best account manager.

As for the fourth quarter for 2016, Zain

recognized Numbase Limited for achieving Zain's VAS net revenue, as well as Concept for achieving best technical support team.

Zain prides the strategic partnership it has with its Value Added Services partners, and is keen on recognizing their performance on a quarterly basis to shed light on their efforts to offer the best products and services to its customers.

Zain's relationship with its partners and authorized distributors is based on a strategy that aims at providing the highest levels of customer service and the most competitive offerings in the telecom sector. Zain encourages its VAS partners to maintain their performance and continue offering the best services and products to its customers.

KIPCO SUPPORTS 3RD GULF STUDIES SYMPOSIUM AT AUK

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Projects Company (KIPCO) and its Group companies are supporting the 2017 Gulf Studies Symposium, organized by the Center for Gulf Studies at the American University of Kuwait. The event, themed 'Mobilities and Materialities of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula,' will be held on 17-19 March at the university campus.

The biennial symposium, which is being held for the third time, provides a platform for regional and international scholars to discourse on timely research contributions that are particular to both the region and the field of Gulf studies. This year, the focus is on the movement of people into, out of, across, and within the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula in historical and contemporary contexts, and the various material forms that enable, restrict, or are produced by these mobilities.



Eman Al-Awadhi

Eman Al-Awadhi, KIPCO's Group Communications Director, said: "We are delighted to continue to support the Center for Gulf Studies' efforts in organizing an international academic conference of such scale. This event is an ideal platform for scholars to contribute and add value to the growing field of Gulf studies. As part of our Group approach, KIPCO encourages its companies to leverage opportunities to work on corporate citizenship projects. Burgan Bank, Gulf Insurance Group, KAMCO Investment Company and United Real Estate are the lead contributors to this important meeting." This year's symposium was developed in collaboration with the George Washington University's Institute for Middle East Studies in Washington, DC, as part of a broader project focusing on 'Mobilities and Materialities of the Middle East.'



Bringing orphaned Islamic State baby 'home' to Sudan



PHILADELPHIA: In this file photo, firefighters battle a blaze onboard a UPS cargo plane at Philadelphia International Airport in Philadelphia. The International Civil Aviation Organization, a UN agency that sets global aviation safety standards, decided last year to ban shipments of lithium ion batteries on international passenger flights and require that the batteries be no more than 30 percent charged on cargo flights. As a result, countries around the world have been adopting the new international safety standard for their domestic flights as well. The United States is a notable exception. —AP

HEADPHONE BATTERIES EXPLODE ON AUSTRALIA FLIGHT

SYDNEY: A woman whose headphones caught fire on a plane suffered burns to her face and hands, Australian officials said yesterday as they warned about the dangers of battery-operated devices in-flight. The passenger was listening to music on her own battery-operated headphones as she dozed about two hours into the trip from Beijing to Melbourne on February 19 when there was a loud explosion.

"As I went to turn around I felt burning on my face," she told the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) which investigated the incident. "I just grabbed my face which caused the headphones to go around my neck. I continued to feel burning so I grabbed them off and threw them on the

floor. "They were sparking and had small amounts of fire." Flight attendants rushed to help and poured a bucket of water on the headphones, but the battery and its cover had both melted and stuck to the floor. Pictures show the woman, who was not named, with a blackened face and neck and blisters on her hands.

Fellow passengers had to endure the smell of melted plastic, burnt electronics and singed hair for the remainder of the flight. "People were coughing and choking the entire way home," the woman added. The transport safety bureau, which did not identify the airline or brand of headphones involved in the incident, said the lithium-ion batteries in the device likely caught fire. "As the range of products

using batteries grows, the potential for in-flight issues increases," it said, adding that such devices needed to be stored safely if they were not being used. Spare batteries should be kept in carry-on luggage, and not checked in, the bureau said.

Belching smoke

The ATSB's Stuart Godley said it was the first report of headphones catching fire in Australia, but there have been a number of other phone and device battery incidents. Last year, a flight due to leave Sydney had to be evacuated when smoke was seen coming from a passenger's hand luggage. It was later found that lithium batteries had caught fire. Also last year, an electronic device

began belching smoke then caught fire on a Qantas flight from Los Angeles to New York, with a crew member needing to use a fire extinguisher to put it out, the ATSB reported.

In another Qantas incident in 2016, attendants were alerted to smoke on a flight from Sydney to Dallas. They found a crushed and burnt out device wedged tightly in the seat. "We've also had a case of a person using personal air purifier and the batteries in that have caught on fire on a flight," Godley told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Many airlines last year barred all Samsung Galaxy Note 7 smartphones over fire risk concerns, following reports of exploding lithium-ion batteries. The South Korean electronics giant, which prides itself on inno-

vation and quality, was forced to recall all its Note 7s, costing it billions of dollars.

Lithium-ion batteries are prized for hand-held electronics because they can pack a considerable amount of energy for their weight. Like all batteries, they use different materials, one holding positive ions the cathode and the other holding negative ions—the anode. These ions move one way when charging, and back again when discharging—being used. Manufacturing flaws affecting the separators are one potential source of fires. Another is damage to the battery. In addition, overcharging the packs or charging them too fast can also lead to overheating and a short circuit that can cause a fire.—AFP

PHILIPPINE VICE PRESIDENT SLAMS DUTERTE'S DRUG WAR

MANILA: Philippine Vice President Leni Robredo said yesterday the nation's drug war had left Filipinos feeling "hopeless and helpless", with trust in the police eroded by thousands of summary executions. In a video message to a United Nations meeting on extrajudicial killings posted online, Robredo also called for international scrutiny of President Rodrigo Duterte's controversial crackdown. "Some of those who have told us that when there's crime, they normally go to the police. Now, they don't know where to turn," Robredo said in the message, which was released to the media ahead of its scheduled screening at the UN gathering in Austria today. "Our people feel both hopeless and helpless: a state of mind that we must all take seriously." Duterte won presidential elections last year after promising to eradicate illegal drugs in society with an unprecedented crackdown in which tens of thousands of people would die. But the vice president is elected separately in the Philippines and Robredo, who belongs to a rival political party, has in recent months stepped up her criticism of the drug war.

Since Duterte took office at the end of June, police have reported killing 2,500 people in anti-drug operations while about 4,500 others have died in unexplained circumstances. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have warned Duterte may be overseeing crimes against humanity, with state-sanctioned killings. Duterte and his police chiefs have insisted security forces are not breaking any laws. They have said nearly all of those killed by police were in self-defense while the unexplained deaths were likely due to drug gangs eliminating rivals or others who could implicate them.

'Grim statistics'

In her message to the United Nations, Robredo described all those deaths as "summary executions". "We are now looking at some very grim statistics: since July last year, more than 7,000 people have been killed in summary executions," Robredo said. Robredo also said police were detaining innocent people in a scheme known as "exchange heads". In this, if police officers could not find a drug suspect, they would detain one of his or her relatives instead, according to Robredo. —AFP



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BRINGING ORPHANED IS BABY GIRL 'HOME' TO SUDAN

KHARTOUM: When Sudanese security agents came to call on businessman Alithi Yousef at his home in Khartoum, he knew immediately that his worst fears had been realized. "They told me on January 17 that my daughter Aya had been killed in fighting in Sirte," he said. The Libyan city on the Mediterranean coast was a former bastion of the jihadist Islamic State group, of which his daughter was a member. Pro-government forces retook it last December. But they also said they had some good news—Aya had a four-month-old baby daughter, Yousef said.

On August 30, 2015, Aya, then a 20-year-old medical student at a Khartoum university, disappeared from a restaurant in the city just hours after finishing her exams. For two months her whereabouts were unknown. But then Yousef received a call from Aya to say she had joined IS in Libya along with four female friends from Khartoum. Officials say dozens of Sudanese students—some also holding Western passports—have joined IS in Syria, Iraq and Libya. Sudanese media have reported the deaths of some of them. Yousef said some of Aya's friends who joined IS had American or British passports. "I was sure Aya couldn't go because she had a Sudanese passport, but I didn't understand," Yousef said at his luxurious two-storey house in a Khartoum suburb.

'Her own world'

Aya travelled to Libya by road—her passport was found in a Khartoum apartment a few days after she went missing. In Libya she married a Sudanese IS member who had also been to the same university, Yousef said, showing a

marriage certificate registered by the jihadist group in Sirte. Details of their deaths remain sketchy, but Yousef and his wife Manal Fadlallah vividly remember the rapid changes they saw in their daughter before she joined IS. Educated partly at an English primary school in Abu Dhabi where the family lived years ago, Aya had grown up listening to Western music and reading English novels. But Aya's journey to "radical Islam" was swift.

Her personality changed in her second year at university, said Yousef as his wife fed milk to their granddaughter Lojien. Although she used to dress casually in trousers and T-shirts, Aya began wearing conservative clothes, and donned an Islamic headscarf. Praying five times became a daily norm, and she was heard reciting Koranic verses late into the night, Yousef said. Aya soon stopped visiting relatives or exchanging greetings with men. "She just went into a shell, into her own world which was hidden from us," Yousef said. Almost every day there was some further change in Aya, said her mother. "When we asked her who was behind this, she told us 'Now I know my God'," Fadlallah said.

A life unraveling

Yousef said he had trusted his daughter and never checked her mobile phone or laptop. "If I'd had any idea about her plans, I would have stayed in her room all the time and never left her alone," said the father of four, dressed in a Sudanese traditional white jelaboya. The couple's shock at how Aya's life unravelled is evident from their family albums and her room. Beside her bed is a small side table and a wooden cupboard, its shelf lined



KHARTOUM: Four-month-old Sudanese infant Lojien is fed baby formula by her grandmother, Manal Fadlallah, as the latter gives an interview with AFP journalists at her home in a suburb of the capital Khartoum. — AFP

with English novels including renowned Afghan writer Khaled Hosseini's "The Kite Runner". Next to it are school textbooks and medical journals. "She loved going to school wearing new clothes for celebrations like Christmas," said Fadlallah, showing some childhood photographs. In one, Aya is pictured sitting next to a Santa Claus while celebrating Christmas at school in Abu Dhabi. In another, she is seen holidaying on a beach with her family in the Egyptian city of Alexandria. "Our shock will last for years," said Yousef, looking at the only photograph of Aya wearing a headscarf. Her parents now have the task of raising Lojien themselves. Yousef initially refused to bring her from Libya when Sudanese officials offered to escort him to the war-torn country.

Easing the pain

"I'd lost my daughter. What was the point of bringing the baby here?" But he relented, and a few days later decided to go after all. Two Sudanese female officials accompanied him to Misrata, east of Tripoli, where Lojien was being cared for by the Libyan Red Crescent. "As women we were very concerned about the security situation there," one of the officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "This was also our first experience of bringing a baby back to its family." Lojien was brought to Khartoum in February, and in a way, bringing her "home" has helped to ease the family's pain. "We have a major responsibility," said Yousef, vowing to make sure his granddaughter wants for nothing. "Lojien is very dear to us. She is Aya's daughter and Aya was special." — AFP



MOSUL: Iraqi federal policemen open the road towards the government complex as Iraqi security forces advance during fighting against Islamic State militants in Dawasa neighborhood in western Mosul, Iraq. — AP

HEAVY FIGHTING AS IRAQI FORCES SET SIGHTS ON MOSUL'S GRAND MOSQUE

CAR BOMBS, SNIPERS, MORTAR FIRE HAMPER PROGRESS

MOSUL: Government forces set their sights on reaching the Grand Mosque in Mosul's Old City yesterday and the prime minister said the battle to drive Islamic State from its last urban stronghold in Iraq was reaching its final stages. Losing the city would be a huge blow to Islamic State as it has served as the group's de facto capital since its leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi proclaimed himself head of a caliphate spanning Iraq and Syria from the Grand Mosque in the summer of 2014.

Troops were also concentrating on capturing the Iron Bridge linking eastern Mosul with the Old City on the western side of the Tigris river, where Islamic State fighters are preparing to make a last stand. Heavy fighting was reported around the Mosul Museum by journalists and combatants. An Islamic State suicide car bomb exploded near the museum.

The intense combat, much of it street-by-street, marked a decisive stage in the battle for Mosul which started on Oct 17 last year. As well as waging jihad in Iraq and Syria, the militants have also inspired attacks in cities in Europe, Africa and elsewhere that have killed hundreds of civilians. "Our forces are advancing towards their targets. The main objective will be seizing the Iron Bridge and after that we will start an operation to set off the area near the bridge to clear it from Daesh fighters," said a spokesman for the Interior Ministry's Rapid Response units, one of the elite forces spearheading the offensive, using an Arab acronym for the group.

"We will be heading towards the old market

in Bab Al-Tob and advance deeper to reach the location of Mosul's Grand Mosque." The capture of the mosque would be a huge symbolic victory as well as a concrete gain but that may take some time yet. The attacking forces faced sniper and mortar fire as well as the threat of suicide car bombs and grenade-dropping drones. Iraqi officers said cloudy weather was hampering air cover yesterday morning.

Securing the Iron Bridge would mean Iraqi forces hold three of the five bridges in Mosul that span the Tigris, all of which have been damaged by the militants and US-led air strikes. In Baghdad, Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi said: "Daesh become day after day surrounded inside a tight area and they are in their final days." "Speaking at a news conference on Tuesday night, he warned the insurgents that they must surrender or be killed although he also pledged to treat the militants' families fairly. "Let me be very clear, we will preserve families of Daesh who are civilians but we will punish the terrorists and bring them to justice if they surrender," he said. "They are cornered and if they will not surrender they will definitely get killed."

However, many hard days of fighting could still lie ahead as government forces try to make headway in the streets and narrow alleyways of the Old City. Islamic State fighters have booby-trapped houses, and government forces will also be fighting amongst civilians, ruling out the extensive use of air and artillery support. Residents have streamed out of western neigh-

borhoods recaptured by the government, many desperately hungry and traumatized by living under Islamic State's hardline rule.

As many as 600,000 civilians are still trapped with the militants inside Mosul. The Ministry of Immigration and Displacement said on Tuesday that in recent days, almost 13,000 displaced people from western Mosul had been given assistance and temporary accommodation each day, adding to the 200,000 already displaced. Staff Brigadier Falah al-Obeidi of the Counter Terrorism Service (CTS) told Reuters his troops had taken control yesterday over the Dor Al-Sikak and the Al-Nafat areas, site of the militants' main weapons stores in Mosul just west of the Old City. "Yesterday resistance was very strong in that area. It's where their stores are, and the people living there, both men and women, are with them (supporters or members)," he said.

Aerial surveillance photos showed women carrying guns. CTS troops also brought in a Russian-made missile and two warheads. They had found 40 more such missiles stored in homes in Dor Al-Sikak. Government forces on Tuesday killed the military commander of the Old City, Abu Abdul Rahman Al-Ansary, during operations to clear Bab Al-Tob district, a blow to the militants, many of whose leaders have already retreated from Mosul. Abadi said he would visit Washington next week and meet US President Donald Trump to discuss the war. The United States is providing air, artillery and other support in the offensive. — Reuters

'PRO-ERDOGAN HACKERS' UNLEASH TWITTER ATTACK

EUROPEAN UNION BLASTS TURKEY

ISTANBUL: Hackers supporting Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday defaced Twitter accounts of top individuals and institutions with Nazi jibes, as the EU hit back at Ankara's behavior in an escalating crisis. Turkey and the European Union are going through their most explosive crisis after key EU members The Netherlands and Germany blocked Turkish ministers from holding rallies to back constitutional changes expanding Erdogan's powers. Erdogan has repeatedly accused the two countries of behaving like "Nazis," comments that have left The Hague and Berlin aghast.

EU chiefs yesterday blasted his comments as "detached from reality" and incompatible with Turkey's ambitions to join the bloc. The strong reaction from Brussels came as The Netherlands was voting in an election where Prime Minister Mark Rutte is facing a strong challenge from far-right populist Geert Wilders. Analysts believe Erdogan is exploiting the crisis to the full to bring out nationalist votes and ensure victory in the April 16 referendum on the new constitution that opponents fear will create one-man rule in Turkey.

'Ottoman slap'

Several top Twitter accounts, including those of a German football club, the French economy ministry and BBC North America, were defaced by pro-Turkey hackers with a message slamming "Nazi Germany" and "Nazi Holland". "NaziGermany. #NaziHolland. This is a small #Ottomanslap for you. See you on #April16. I wrote what? Learn Turkish." The message also featured a swastika and was followed by a video showing extracts of speeches by Erdogan. According to legend, an Ottoman slap was a barehanded technique

used in the Ottoman army that was strong enough to kill an opponent on the spot. Twitter confirmed the attack. Several nationalist Turkish hacking groups have claimed hacks in recent days but there was no immediate claim for the current mass cyberattack. "We are aware of an issue affecting a number of account holders this morning," a Twitter spokesperson said, adding the source of the attack had been tracked to a third party application, whose permissions had been removed. Germany's Borussia Dortmund football club, tennis legend Boris Becker and Amnesty International were also targeted.

'Taking distance from Europe'

Turkey has suspended high-level relations with The Netherlands and blocked its ambassador—currently outside the country—from returning to his post. Many in The Netherlands—a country bombed and occupied by the Nazis in World War II—were hugely offended by Erdogan's comment that the country still had "vestiges of the Nazis". European Union president Donald Tusk said the comparisons were "completely detached from reality." European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker said he was "scandalized".

"The one who is doing this is taking distance from Europe and not trying to enter Europe," he said. Erdogan sought to rub salt into the wound Tuesday by bringing up the Srebrenica massacre of 1995, where Dutch UN peacekeepers failed to prevent the killing of 8,000 Bosnian Muslims by Bosnian Serbs. "The Netherlands and the Dutch, we know them from the Srebrenica massacre," he said, telling The Hague "not to give us a lesson in civilization". — AFP



ISTANBUL: A man pulls a cart in front of a huge portrait of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Taksim Square in Istanbul yesterday. — AFP

LIBYAN GOVERNMENT FORCES OVERRUN TRIPOLI MILITIA HQ

TRIPOLI: Forces loyal to Libya's UN-backed unity government seized the headquarters of a rival militia yesterday in a third day of intense fighting for control of Tripoli. The capital has seen exchanges of rocket and artillery fire between unity government forces and a militia loyal to former Prime Minister Khalifa Ghweil. Libya has experienced years of violence and lawlessness since the NATO-backed ouster of longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, with rival parliaments and governments vying for influence and militias fighting over territory and the country's vast oil wealth.

Since taking power from Ghweil's administration in March 2016, the Government of National Accord has secured the backing of powerful militias in the capital, but some districts remain outside its control. Ghweil refuses to recognize the GNA's authority. Overnight, government forces launched an assault on his headquarters in the Guest Palace, a complex of luxury villas in the city centre, and overran it after heavy fighting. "It's over. Ghweil's forces have pulled out and GNA forces have taken control of the area," a witness said. A security source confirmed the militia's withdrawal, but had no immediate word on any casualties.

It was the third straight day of fighting between government forces and the militia,

who are mainly drawn from Ghweil's hometown, third city Misrata. Gunfire and explosions were heard from multiple parts of the capital. A rocket hit the Al-Khadhra Hospital without causing any casualties, a medic said. Overnight, gunmen stormed the headquarters of Al-Nabaa television, a privately owned channel known for its Islamist leanings, witnesses said. The channel remained off the air yesterday. The fighting brought life in the capital to a standstill, with schools and shops closed.

'Outlaw groups'

UN Libya envoy Martin Kobler on Tuesday tweeted an appeal for an "immediate ceasefire", saying the fighting put civilians at "grave risk". Clashes erupted in the neighborhoods of Hay al-Andalus and Gargaresh on Monday evening, prompting the government to deploy tanks.

Tripoli's GNA-allied police said security forces in Tripoli were battling "outlaw groups that are destabilizing security and inciting chaos". "It was our duty to eradicate them and fight them to stabilize the capital," the police added. Heavy fighting has also rocked the east of Libya where forces loyal to military strongman Khalifa Haftar announced their recapture of two key oil ports on Tuesday. — AFP

PIRATES DEMAND RANSOM FOR OIL TANKER SEIZED OFF SOMALIA

NAIROBI: Pirates off the coast of Somalia, who hijacked an oil tanker with eight Sri Lankan crew on board, are demanding a ransom for the release of the vessel, the EU Naval Force said. The pirates seized the Comoros-flagged Aris 13 tanker on Monday, the first such hijacking in the region since 2012, and took it to the port of Alula in the semi-autonomous northern region of Puntland.

"The EU Naval Force ... has received positive confirmation from the master of ... Aris 13, that his ship and crew are currently being held captive by a number of suspected armed pirates in an anchorage off the north coast of Puntland, close to Alula," the force said in a statement late on Tuesday. EU Navfor said as soon as it received an alert on the ship's seizure, it sent patrol aircraft from its Djibouti base to try to make radio contact and late on Tuesday its headquarters in London managed to contact the vessel's master by phone.

"The master confirmed that armed men were

on board his ship and they were demanding a ransom for the ship's release. The EU Naval Force has now passed the information regarding the incident to the ship's owners," EU Navfor said. It gave no details on the size of the ransom. The 1,800 deadweight ton tanker is owned by Armi Shipping, a company registered in Panama, and managed by Aurora Ship Management in the United Arab Emirates, according to the French transport ministry's Equasis shipping data website.

Experts said ship owners were becoming lax after a long period of calm, and that the vessel was an easy target because it was low, slow and close to the coast. Aid group Oceans Beyond Piracy said in a statement late on Tuesday the ship was carrying gas and fuel and was not registered with the Maritime Security Center for the Horn of Africa, which registers and tracks vessels in the region. The group said the Aris 13 was preparing to go through a route known as the

Socotra Gap, between Somalia and Socotra Island which vessels often use, regardless of the piracy risks, to save time and cost.

"This attack reinforces the need for vessels to follow shipping industry Best Management Practices (BMP) within the BMP specified High Risk Area," Oceans Beyond Piracy said. There was no immediate comment from the ship's owners and managers.

In their prime in 2011, Somali pirates launched 237 attacks off Somalia's coast, data from the International Maritime Bureau showed, and held hundreds of hostages. That year, Oceans Beyond Piracy estimated the global cost of piracy at about \$7 billion.

The shipping industry bore roughly 80 percent of those costs, the group's analysis shows. However, attacks fell off sharply after ship owners tightened security and vessels stayed further away from the Somali coast. — Reuters

TRUMP'S 2005 TAX BILL REVEALED IN FRESH LEAK

WASHINGTON: The White House acknowledged late Tuesday that Donald Trump paid \$38 million in taxes in 2005, a rare view into the president's jealously guarded finances that was leaked to the US media. Trump reported an income of \$150 million, and paid an overall tax rate of around 25 percent. But the leaked summary document does not show the sources of his income, which would confirm or deny allegations of controversial ties with Russian businesses.

The White House confirmed the details of Trump's 2005 taxes just before David Cay Johnston, a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist, and MSNBC said they would reveal the short filing. Trump has refused to release his full tax returns since he began his quest for the US presidency, shattering decades of tradition among candidates of all political parties. Trump also wrote off more than \$100 million in business losses to reduce his tax burden, the document shows.

The White House described it as a "large-scale depreciation for construction." The two-page snapshot was broadly favorable to the White House and appeared to back up Trump's claim that he paid his fair share of taxes, and no more.

"The documents show Trump and his wife Melania paying \$5.3 million in regular federal income tax—a rate of less than four percent," Johnston wrote in a post on the Daily Beast website. "However, the Trumps paid an additional \$31 million in the so-called 'alternative mini-

mum tax,' or AMT." The AMT was originally designed to prevent rich taxpayers from using excessive loopholes, and Trump has previously called for its elimination.

Mystery leaker

Appearing on MSNBC with center-left commentator Rachel Maddow, Johnston said that he did not know the source of the leaked return, which had been placed in his mailbox. "Let me point out it's entirely possible Donald sent this to me," he said.

"Donald has a long history of leaking material about himself when he thinks it's in his interests." Donald Trump Jr was quick to claim victory over those who speculated his dad paid no taxes. "I don't know much, but if I recall correctly \$38,000,000 is a lot more than \$0... right???" he wrote on Twitter.

The president has claimed, without evidence, that he would not release his taxes because he is under an Internal Revenue Service audit, and that US voters do not care. The IRS has not confirmed that he is being audited—and even if he were, there is a precedent: president Richard Nixon released his taxes in 1973 while he was being audited.

And a recent Langer Research poll showed that almost three-quarters of Americans believe Trump should release his tax returns. While campaigning for president Trump said that if elected he would release his taxes, but once in office he backpedaled.



This image released by NBC shows Rachel Maddow, host of 'The Rachel Maddow Show,' on MSNBC. Maddow was at the center of the political media universe with a story on President Donald Trump's tax returns. — AP

In a statement, the Democratic National Committee slammed Trump's "audit excuse" as a "sham." "If they can release some of the information, they can release all of the information," Zac Petkanas, a senior adviser to the DNC, said. "The only reason not to release his returns is

to hide what's in them, such as financial connections with Russian oligarchs and the Kremlin," he said, offering no evidence.

On the attack

The White House bashed media outlets for publishing the return even as it confirmed its authenticity and key figures. "You know you are desperate for ratings when you are willing to violate the law to push a story about two pages of tax returns from over a decade ago," an administration official said. Trump paid "no more tax than legally required," said the official, who refused to be identified. "That being said, Mr Trump paid 38 million dollars even after taking into account large-scale depreciation for construction, on an income of more than \$150 million."

The official said that Trump also paid "tens of millions of dollars in other taxes such as sales and excise taxes and employment taxes, and this illegally published return proves just that." "The dishonest media can continue to make this part of their agenda, while the president will focus on his, which includes tax reform that will benefit all Americans," the official said. In October, before Trump was elected, The New York Times published three pages of Trump's leaked 1995 tax returns. Those returns showed a \$916 million deduction that, according to IRS rules, could have resulted in Trump legally paying no taxes for up to 18 years. — AFP



NEW YORK: New Yorkers cross snow drifts on Park Avenue in midtown Manhattan yesterday after Winter Storm Stella dumped snow and sleet in New York. — AFP

LATE-SEASON SNOWSTORM WEAKENS IN US NORTHEAST

NEW YORK: A late-season snowstorm that swept the mid-Atlantic and northeastern United States began to weaken yesterday after closing schools, grounding flights and knocking out electricity supply to hundreds of thousands of customers.

Still, millions of people on the East Coast will face temperatures 10 to 25 degrees below average, wind gusts of 30 mph (50 kph) and slick roads and sidewalks as they return to work and school, the National Weather Service said.

"Residual snow and slush will refreeze early this morning, resulting in hazardous conditions on roads and walkways," it said in an advisory, urging extra caution by those venturing out early. The rare mid-March "nor'easter" was tapering off over upstate New York and northern New England after dumping as much as a foot (30 cm) of snow with gale-force winds throughout the region on Tuesday, the weather service said.

As life returns to normal for many, students in Boston Public Schools will have the day off while the city and surrounding area continues to dig out from heavy snowfall. Amtrak said its trains would operate on

a modified schedule between New York City and Boston and between New York City and Albany today. On Tuesday, snow fell from the lower Great Lakes and central Appalachians to the Eastern Seaboard and as far south as North Carolina. Some cities, such as Washington, DC, and New York, got just a few inches of snow, far less than the anticipated amounts that forced public officials to close schools, shut down commuter train routes and warn people to stay indoors on Tuesday.

Governors in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Virginia declared states of emergency at the outset of the storm. "Mother Nature is an unpredictable lady sometimes," New York Governor Andrew Cuomo told a news conference on Tuesday. "She was unpredictable today." More than 6,000 commercial airline flights across the United States were canceled for the day, said tracking service FlightAware.com. Utility companies reported widespread power outages, hitting more than 220,000 homes and businesses at the storm's peak. The storm capped an unusually mild winter, with otherwise below-normal snowfall on much of the Atlantic coast. — Reuters

A GROUNDSWELL OF ANTI-TRUMP FERVOR

BEHOLD THE 'RESISTANCE'

MIAMI: Until Donald Trump became president, Kelsey Thomas spent her time studying, hanging out with friends and lounging on the beaches of Florida. But not anymore. Now she has become fiercely political, joining the new activist movement in America that has come to be called the "Resistance." For Thomas, a 29-year-old university student, the turning point was the huge wave of women-led protests that filled Washington and other cities on January 21, the day after Trump's inauguration.

She traveled from Fort Lauderdale, where she lives, to the US capital to join the throngs protesting against the Republican billionaire president. "That was really inspiring and motivating. I just started worrying after the elections and really I got more involved after he took office and after the Women's March in Washington," Thomas said. Thomas now works with a local women's group that took part in that rally and is opposed to the Trump-backed Republican plan to replace the health care reforms known as Obamacare. Many services, such as those for people with mental illness or substance abuse problems, would be taken away, she said. "All of this motivated me to fight for all the injustices that I see and continue to see every single day," said Thomas.

'Fertile for activism'

Like Thomas, many in the "Resistance" movement feel their core values are being threatened by the Trump administration. And they are ready to fight back. Jose Parra, a political analyst at a consultancy called Prospero Latino, said "the public in general is beginning to become politically educated when they feel that there is a threat to their way of life and that is what is happening with the Trump administration's proposals." What is at stake for these new political warriors are the rights of women, immigrants and Muslims, equal treatment of gays and lesbians and progress in public health and environmental protection.

"There is a controversy for every taste," said Anthony Romero, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union, America's largest human rights advocacy group and a pillar of the new anti-Trump drive. "There are a lot of issues under threat." Romero, who was visiting Miami, said his organization had 400,000 members before the



WASHINGTON: Carrie Couey, from Colorado, listens at right as President Donald Trump speaks during a meeting on healthcare in the Roosevelt Room of the White House in Washington. — AP

presidential election and now has 1.2 million. "We are living in times that are very fertile for activism because people feel threatened," he said. "But at the same time there is nothing romantic about this. People know that the federal government in the hands of Trump wields vast power."

To harness all this grassroots energy, the ACLU created a platform called PeoplePower.org with the slogan "Join the Resistance." With this, the organization hopes to recruit more activists and lay the groundwork for political action against Trump. The movement was launched last Saturday in Miami at an amphitheater filled with 1,500 future activists. The event was broadcast live on Facebook. People of all ages who, like Thomas, had their political awakening four months ago, listened to lectures on how to convene rallies, what kind of activities are legal, the best places to gather and what rights police and immigration officers have in dealing with protesters.

Ideological zeal

This surge of political awareness that prompted the ACLU to create PeoplePower.org is seen all over. When the mayor of Miami-Dade County,

Carlos Gimenez, announced that the city would no longer be a sanctuary city—one that refuses to cooperate with federal immigration authorities seeking to deport people—a rally took place the very next day outside his office. Since then there have been many more protests against him. Late night talk and comedy shows are now rich in political satire that ridicules or lampoons Trump, and their ratings have risen sharply. Activists are even recruiting on the dating web site Tinder, where one can now find people eager to do something as unsexy as go to a town hall meeting. And NGOs are recruiting on new sites like MeetUp and that old-fashioned place called Facebook.

For instance, on Sundays the civil rights group MoveOn holds nationwide call-ins, known as "Ready to Resist," in which it trains people in the finer arts of grassroots resistance. Wilfredo Ruiz, spokesman for the Florida chapter of CAIR—America's largest Muslim rights advocacy organization—said that Trump's travel ban targeting people from an initial seven and now six mainly Muslim countries has caused people to rally to his group's defense. This is creating a kind of unified, organic resistance nationwide. — AFP

US WILDFIRES RAVAGE RANCHES IN 3 STATES

LIPSCOMB: When the Schwerzenbach family saw a wildfire racing toward their remote ranch in Lipscomb, Texas, there was no time to run. "We had a minute or two and then it was over us," said 56-year-old Nancy Schwerzenbach. The fire, moving up to 70 miles per hour, was one of several across more than 2 million acres that hit the Texas Panhandle, Oklahoma and Kansas last week, causing millions of dollars of damage and killing thousands of livestock.

Burning through nearly all 1,000 acres of the Schwerzenbach ranch, the fire killed some 40 cattle. A mile away, a young man in the rural community was killed. "The fire was about two miles away before we knew what happened to us," she said.

Numerous smaller fires burned in Colorado, Nebraska and the Florida Everglades, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

In Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas ranchers are returning home to survey the damage from the fires, fueled by tinder-dry vegetation and high winds. Local farmers from the Great Plains have helped those who have been affected by the wildfires by donating hay and fencing material. In Oklahoma, the fires scorched a Smithfield Foods Inc. hog farm in Laverne, killing some 4,300 sows. "When we drive down the road and look out on the pasture lands, there's no grass. There's dead deer, dead cows, dead wildlife, miles of fence gone away. It looks like a complete desert," said Ashland Veterinary Center co-owner Dr. Randall Spare, who is helping in relief efforts in Clark County, Kansas.

Oklahoma Department of Agriculture State Veterinarian Rod Hall said bulldozers were being used to bury dead animals. "They're digging large pits and burying the animals in there," he said. In Texas, state government agencies estimate about 1,500 cattle were lost, according to Steve Amosson, an economist at Texas A&M AgriLife Extension.

"When we value the deaths of cattle at market value, including disposal costs, we're talking about \$2.1 million at this point, and I expect that to go up," he said. "We're still dealing with chaos, they're still trying to find cattle." Amosson estimates it could cost \$6 million to recover 480,000 acres burned in Texas fires along with \$4.3 million to replace and repair fences in the northern Texas Panhandle either destroyed by the fire or by cattle trampling them to escape the blaze. Texas is the top US cattle producing state with some 12.3 million head and Kansas is third at 6.4 million. — Reuters

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DUTCH VOTE IN TEST OF ANTI-IMMIGRANT SENTIMENT IN EUROPE

THE HAGUE: The Dutch tested their own tolerance for immigration and Islam yesterday in an election magnified by a furious row with Turkey, the first of three polls in the European Union this year where nationalist parties are seeking breakthroughs. The centre-right VVD party of Prime Minister Mark Rutte, 50, is vying with the PVV (Party for Freedom) of anti-Islam and anti-EU firebrand Geert Wilders, 53, to form the biggest party in parliament.

As many as 13 million voters began casting ballots at polling stations across the country that will close at 2000 GMT. A charged campaign, plus clear skies and sunshine meant high turnout was expected. National broadcaster NOS said that by 0930 GMT in the morning, turnout was at 15 percent, 2 percent ahead of the previous parliamentary election in 2012. With as many as four out of 10 voters undecided a day before voting and a tight margin of just 4 percent between leading candidates, the outcome was unpredictable.

Wilders, who has vowed to "de-Islamicise" the Netherlands, has little chance of forming a government given that other leading parties have ruled out working with him. But a first place PVV finish would still send shockwaves across Europe. The vote is the first gauge this year of anti-establishment sentiment in the European Union and the bloc's chances of survival after the 2016 surprise victory of "America First" presidential candidate Donald Trump in the United States and Britain's vote to exit the EU.

"Whatever the outcome of the election today the genie will not go back into the bottle and this patriotic revolution, whether today or tomorrow, will take place," Wilders said after voting at a school in The Hague. Wilders won over Wendy de Graaf, who dropped her children off at the same school. "I hope he can make a change to make the Netherlands better... I don't agree with everything he says... but I feel that immigration is a problem," she said. France chooses its next president in May, with far-right Marine Le Pen set to make the sec-

ond-round run-off, while in September right-wing eurosceptic party Alternative for Germany, which has attacked Chancellor Angela Merkel's open-door refugee policy, will probably win its first lower house seats.

Rutte, who has called the Dutch vote a quarter-final before a French semi-final and German final said a Wilders victory would be felt well beyond the Netherlands. "I think the rest of the world will then see after Brexit, after the American elections again the wrong sort of populism has won the day," he said. Late opinion polls indicated a three percentage point lead for his party over Wilders, with a boost from a rupture of diplomatic relations with Ankara after the Dutch banned Turkish ministers from addressing rallies of overseas Turks.

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan accused the Dutch of behaving like Nazis, and Rutte's government expelled a Turkish minister who had traveled to the country to address Erdogan supporters at an impromptu rally without seeking permission. "I think Rutte did well this weekend with the Turkey row," said Dave Cho, a 42-year-old supply manager and long-time VVD supporter.

Yesterday morning, two major publicly subsidized voter information websites were offline, targeted by a DDoS cyber attack. It was not clear whether yesterday's attack was related to the row with Turkey, which also led to the temporary defacement of numerous small websites in the Netherlands. Separately yesterday, several large Twitter accounts including that of the European Parliament, Reuters Japan, Die Welt, Forbes, Amnesty International and Duke University were hijacked temporarily, apparently by Turkish activists.

No clear winner

Unlike the US or French presidential elections, there will be no outright Dutch winner under its system of proportional representation. Up to 15 parties could win a seat in parliament and none are set to reach even 20



THE HAGUE: Voters queue outside a voting station at The Hague yesterday, as polls open across The Netherlands. — AFP

percent of the vote. Experts predict a coalition-building process that will take many months once the final tally is known. Rutte's last government was a two-party coalition with the Labor Party, but with no party polling above 17 percent, at least four will be needed to secure a majority in parliament. It would be the first such multi-party alliance since three in the 1970s. Two of those fell apart within 12 months. In a final debate on Tuesday night, Wilders clashed with Lodewijk Asscher, whose Labor party stands to lose two-thirds of its seats in its worst defeat ever on current polling.

Asscher defended the rights of law-abiding Muslims to not be treated as second-class citizens or insulted, saying "the Netherlands belongs to all of us, and everyone who does his best." Wilders shot back: "The Netherlands is not for everyone. The Netherlands is for the Dutch." Front-runner Rutte, who is hoping Dutch economic recovery will help him carry the election, has been insistent on one thing - that he will neither accept the PVV as a coalition partner nor rely on Wilders to support a minority government, as he did in 2010-2012. "Not, never, not," Rutte told Wilders. — Reuters

SCOTTISH NATIONALISM, EUROSCEPTICISM RISING

REFERENDUM IN 2018/19 WOULD NOT BE LEGAL: UK MINISTER

LONDON: Support for Scottish independence is at a record high but still remains below 50 percent, according to a new study published yesterday after First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announced a new bid to break away. Sturgeon has said a second referendum was needed because of Scottish support for EU ties but the study found that rising euroscepticism in Scotland could undermine her argument. Sturgeon on Monday announced she would seek authority for a second referendum on leaving the United Kingdom, ideally before it leaves the European Union in early 2019.

A majority of Scots wanted to stay in the EU in last June's Brexit referendum, but were outvoted by the rest of Britain. The ScotCen long-term social attitudes study found that 46 percent of Scots now back independence from the rest of Britain, the highest level since the survey began in 1999. "Overwhelming support for independence among younger voters might mean there is majority support for independence in future," it said. But the survey, conducted between July and December last year, also found rising levels of euroscepticism, from 40 percent in 1999 to 67 percent last year. "Now might not be the best time for the SNP to hold a second referendum," the NatCen centre said, referring to Sturgeon's Scottish National Party. "High levels of euroscepticism in Scotland mean focusing on EU membership may not be the best way to swing voters in favor of 'Yes.'" A YouGov opinion poll for The Times newspaper found 43 percent would support independence and 57 percent would reject it, once those who did not know or were undecided were excluded.

It was largely conducted before Sturgeon's announcement. A similar survey last November put support for independence at 44 percent. British Prime Minister Theresa May has rejected the idea of a second vote as "divisive", less than three years after Scots voted by 55 percent to reject independence, and accused the SNP of playing politics. Angus Robertson, the SNP's most senior figure in the British parliament, told The Guardian newspaper that a referendum could be avoided if Scotland was allowed to stay in the EU single market.

Independence referendum

It would be impossible to hold a legal and decisive referendum on Scottish independence in the timeframe demanded by First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, the British government's Scotland minister said in a newspaper interview published yesterday. Sturgeon, leader of the pro-independence Scottish National Party (SNP), on Monday



EDINBURGH: A family walks down a street in Edinburgh, Scotland. Scotland's leader delivered a shock twist to Britain's EU exit drama on Monday, announcing that she will seek authority to hold a new independence referendum in the next two years because Britain is dragging Scotland out of the EU against its will. — AP

demanding a new referendum in late 2018 or early 2019, once the terms of Britain's exit from the European Union become clearer but before Brexit happens.

"It would be impossible for people in the timescale suggested by Nicola Sturgeon to make a reasoned view and, therefore, have a legal, fair and decisive referendum," Britain's Scotland Secretary David Mundell told The Herald. The United Kingdom as a whole voted last year to leave the EU, but Scotland, one of the UK's four constituent parts, voted to stay. Sturgeon has argued Scotland should not be dragged out of the bloc against its will.

Scots rejected independence by 55 to 45 percent in a referendum in 2014, but the SNP argue that the circumstances have changed since then, because of Brexit. The UK government has consistently argued that no new vote should be held, but the British parliament has the final word on whether any legally binding referendum can take place. Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May has

accused the SNP of "tunnel vision" and said it should focus on delivering good public services for Scotland rather than "playing politics" with Britain's future.

Conflicting polls

Recent surveys of Scottish public opinion give a complex picture of views on independence. An annual in-depth social attitudes survey, conducted from July to December last year and published on Wednesday, found that support for independence stood at 46 percent, the highest level since the series began in 1999. But the survey also found that skepticism about the EU was on the rise in Scotland, suggesting that, as a single factor, the commitment of some voters to the EU could be too weak for Brexit to persuade them to change their minds on staying in the UK. A separate opinion poll by YouGov, published in The Times newspaper yesterday, found support for independence at its lowest in two-and-a-half-years. — Agencies

WHAT'S AT STAKE IN DUTCH ELECTIONS?

THE HAGUE: Residents of the Netherlands vote yesterday in elections for the 150-seat lower house of parliament. A look at the key players and issues:

What's at stake?

The election is seen as a test of far-right populism ahead of national elections in far bigger European nations, France and Germany, where populists also are polling strongly. In the Netherlands, it's about what kind of coalition will run the country for the next four years and whether anti-Islam lawmaker Geert Wilders can win enough seats to force his way into coalition talks.

Who's in the running?

Prime Minister Mark Rutte of the right-wing VVD party holds a narrow lead in polls over Wilders' Party for Freedom. But while Rutte is leading, his party is set to lose seats and Wilders looks likely to increase the size of his parliamentary bloc compared to five years ago. But other parties also are making gains - including the increasingly right-wing Christian Democrats, the pro-European Union liberal democrats D66, and the left-wing Green Left party led by 30-year-old Jesse Klaver. The 12.9 million voters are spoiled for choice in the country's splintered political landscape: A total of 28 parties are fielding candidates.

What are the main issues?

Wilders' anti-Islam, anti-European Union platform and the reaction of mainstream parties to his one-page manifesto have dominated campaigning. Wilders wants to close Dutch borders to immigrants from Muslim countries, shut mosques and ban the Quran, as well as take the Netherlands out of the EU.

That radical platform goes too far for mainstream parties, but many have moved to the right in an attempt to appeal to Wilders voters. Other issues like the economy, health care and the environment have likewise been overshadowed by the populist agendas. In the final days of campaigning, the diplomatic crisis with Turkey over the past week and Rutte's handling of it has also taken center stage.

What happens next?

Unofficial results should be known by today. The official result will not be published by the country's electoral commission until March 21. A day later, the old lower house will meet for the last time and on March 23 new lawmakers will be installed.

A new government

Don't hold your breath. This could take a while. Polls suggest no obvious left or right-leaning majority coalition will emerge, meaning lengthy negotiations between party leaders to hammer out a new constellation to lead the country is likely. The talks could take months. — AP

GAME OVER FOR THE FRENCH TRADITIONAL LEFT AND RIGHT?

PARIS: With neither the mainstream left nor right tipped to win the French presidency, this year's election could end a lock on power that has defined the country's politics for decades.

Surveys show voters are fed up with a political class seemingly incapable of solving the problem of high unemployment and low growth amid widespread fears about the impact of globalization. Only 17 percent of those questioned in an Ipsos poll last month gave high marks to France's democratic system.

This general malaise finds the two big traditional parties-Socialists on the left and Republicans on the right-struggling for positives as the election clock ticks down. Instead, the centre and the far right are seen as frontrunners, with their candidates expected to lead the pack in the April 23 first round to qualify for the run-off vote on May 7. France is "coming to the end of a political order that started in the 1980s", said political scientist and pollster Jerome Sainte-Marie.

Over this time, the reins passed back and forth between the Socialists and the Republicans (previously known as the UMP), with the far-right National Front (NF) looking on from the sidelines. But with each swing of the pendulum, real change has become increasingly elusive, "alongside a growing exasperation in the face of the economic crisis", Sainte-Marie said. Current polls show that NF leader Marine

Le Pen, 48, and centrist Emmanuel Macron, a 39-year-old former Socialist minister who founded his own movement last year, will duel in May's final vote.

'Failed recipes'

As well as a prevailing mood of disillusionment, which reflects longstanding trends showing the French are worried about the direction of their country, there are also short-term reasons to explain the possible shift. The Socialists are deeply divided after the unpopular five-year term of incumbent President Francois Hollande and struggling to rally voters around their candidate, the former education minister Benoit Hamon.

Despite being picked in a primary vote in January by party activists, Hamon's economic program and tax-and-spend proposals are divisive: popular with left-wingers but seen as making him unelectable by others. Communist-backed candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon, who rejected an alliance with Hamon, is also threatening to split their vote. He enjoys about 10 percent support, according to surveys.

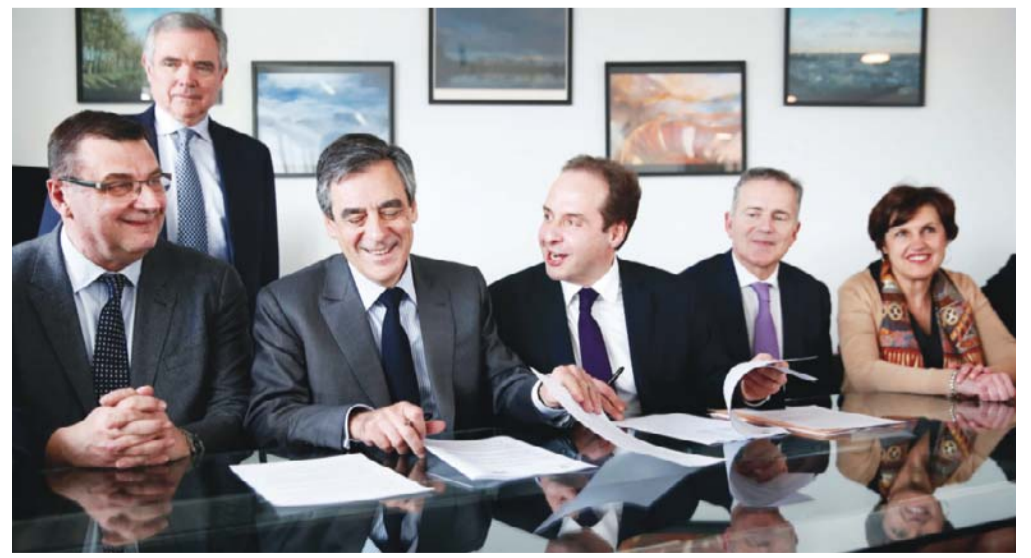
Most importantly, the Republicans' candidate Francois Fillon, the clear frontrunner until the end of January to be president is mired in a fake jobs scandal. He was charged with several offences including the misuse of public money on Tuesday after employing his wife in parliament, but has insisted on staying in the race. — AFP

FRANCE'S FILLON BANKS ON VOTER ANGER OVER A 'STOLEN' ELECTION

PARIS: French rightwing presidential candidate Francois Fillon said yesterday he had the backing of angry voters after being charged with misusing public money, as scandals rather than policy continue to dominate the campaign. "There's been a manipulation of events against me with one objective: to stop me being a candidate in the presidential election," Fillon told Radio Classique, again denying allegations his wife was paid from public funds for a fake job.

"There's a very strong movement going on. There's anger among voters on the right and in the centre who don't want to see their election stolen." The comments came as new problems piled up for the presidential contenders, with almost daily revelations in the press and fresh legal investigations creating a cloud of suspicion overhanging the two-round vote in April and May. Far-right National Front leader Marine Le Pen confirmed to AFP on Tuesday that tax authorities were pursuing her and her father, former party leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, over the value of their family properties.

The anti-immigration, anti-EU leader faces several other investigations into campaign financing and the misuse of money at the European Parliament, where she has a seat. And after Fillon was charged on Tuesday, the Paris prosecutors' office opened a preliminary enquiry into a state-financed event attended by centrist candidate Emmanuel Macron last year while he was a minister. The probe into the organisation of a promotional evening for French hi-tech companies in Las Vegas does not target



PARIS: French presidential election candidate for the right-wing Les Republicains (LR) party Francois Fillon (2nd left) and Jean-Christophe Lagarde (center), head of France's UDI political party, sign an agreement during a meeting at Fillon's campaign headquarters in Paris. — AFP

Macron personally, but could add to disillusionment among French voters with their political class. "The campaign has been stolen," lawmaker Eric Ciotti from Fillon's Republicans party told BFM television yesterday as he defended the candidate, who has slipped to third place in opinion polls. The disarray appears to have so far benefited 39-year-old Macron in particular, who is running as an independent for his

new "En Marche" (On the Move) movement. He and the anti-establishment Le Pen are shown in opinion polls to be the likely top two candidates in the first round on April 23. Polls suggest Macron would beat Le Pen in the decisive runoff on May 7 — but after Donald Trump's victory in the United States and Britain's vote to leave the European Union, analysts caution against bold predictions. — AFP

KIM'S IDENTITY CONFIRMED USING CHILD'S DNA

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia used a DNA sample from one of Kim Jong-Nam's children to confirm the identity of the assassinated half-brother of North Korea's leader Kim Jong-Un, the deputy prime minister said yesterday. The 45-year-old was poisoned with the deadly nerve agent VX in a brazen Cold War-style assassination on February 13 in Kuala Lumpur International Airport. His killing triggered a fierce diplomatic row between Malaysia and North Korea, which have expelled each other's ambassadors and refused to let their citizens leave.

Investigators "confirmed the identity of the body as Kim Jong-Nam based on the sample obtained from his child", said Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, without elaborating further. Seoul has blamed Pyongyang for Kim's death, but the North has rejected those claims and slammed Malaysia's refusal to hand over his body without a DNA sample from next of kin.

Ahmad Zahid told reporters the two countries began official talks on Monday to resolve the crisis and bring nine Malaysians, who are trapped in Pyongyang, home. Pyongyang has never confirmed the identity of the victim, who was carrying a passport bearing the name of Kim Chol when he was attacked. Malaysia officially confirmed his identity on Friday, nearly a month after the murder, but refused to say whether authorities had obtained a DNA sample from next of kin.

Fears son could be next

Kim's wife and children, who were living in exile in the Chinese territory of Macau, staged a vanishing act after the murder. There are fears his 21-year-old son, Kim Han-Sol, could be targeted next. Deputy Home Minister Nur Jazlan Mohamed yesterday said authorities did not want to reveal how they managed to obtain the DNA sample, cit-

ing safety concerns. "It is from one of the children," Nur Jazlan said. "We do not want to say which child because it could endanger the life of that child." Malaysia also used fingerprints, obtained by the Japanese government following a failed attempt by Kim to enter the country and visit Disneyland in 2001, to determine his identity, he said. "We... got the fingerprint samples from Japanese authorities. We used as many identification markers as possible to confirm the identity of Kim Jong-Nam," he added.

In what may be the first comments by the family since Kim's death, a young man identifying himself as Han-Sol appeared in a video that circulated last week. The claim was later verified by South Korea's intelligence agency. But he did not reveal his whereabouts or offer to claim his father's body, which was embalmed recently to stop it decomposing as it lies in a morgue in Kuala Lumpur.

Investigators are seeking seven North Korean suspects, four of whom left Malaysia on the day of the murder. The police chief has said he believes the other three are hiding in North Korea's embassy in Kuala Lumpur.

Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid said the government was negotiating with "an open heart and (an) open mind" to end the impasse and was "looking into all possibilities", including swapping the North Korean suspects for the nine stranded Malaysians. Pyongyang has repeatedly denounced the Malaysian investigation as an attempt to smear the secretive regime, insisting that Kim most likely died of a heart attack. Two women-one Vietnamese and one Indonesian-have been arrested and charged with Kim's murder. Airport CCTV footage shows them approaching the victim and apparently smearing his face with a piece of cloth. —AFP

BITTER TRUTH OF INDIAN SWEET SHOPS: BOYS IN BONDAGE, BURNT AND BEATEN

DINDIGUL: A festering wound on Vijay Kumar's thigh is a constant reminder of the four years the teenager spent behind a hot work frying sweets and savouries. It reminds him of the day the food shop owner beat him with a metal rod and poured hot oil on his legs to punish him for adding too much food coloring to the samosas he was making. "I had put up with everything for four years," said Kumar, who is due for a surgery in a couple of weeks to try to save his leg from amputation. Kumar was 15 when he was sent to Maharashtra state in western India from his home in Dindigul, Tamil Nadu, in 2012 after his mother was paid 15,000 rupees (\$230).

Boys in the southern state are systematically targeted and trafficked to western and northern India, trapped in terrible conditions for little pay and often abused in their workplaces, say campaigners. "I couldn't go home for both my sisters' weddings or when my grandfather died," Kumar said. "I ignored the everyday abuse, the frequent burns from the hot oil. But that day, it became unbearable." So in September 2016 Kumar escaped from the shop in the early hours of the morning. He travelled without a ticket for three days to get home to his village in Dindigul.

2011, more than 40 boys from Tamil Nadu were rescued from different states in north and west India. It was the first time the extent of abuse and bondage was known, an investigating officer said, requesting anonymity as the case is still in court. "They were rescued from single room factories with partially or fully burnt fingers. They were given minimum food, no access to their families and hardly paid. It was the most wretched type of living," he said.

'Homesick'

Surya Prakash worked with Kumar. They were both taken by an agent to Maharashtra. Others, some as young as 10, are taken to Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh. The boys were woken up at five in the morning and worked till late into the night, deep frying snacks and making sweets before packing them. "In a day we would make 75 kg of gulab jamuns and balushahs (traditional Indian sweets) and fry sacks of appalams (crisps)," Kumar told the Thomson Reuters Foundation sitting outside his home in Soundarapuram village in Dindigul.

"We used to be homesick and wanted to come back, but they didn't let us." For the four years that they were there, the boys were given no money nor allowed to go out unescorted. Phone calls back home were through the owner's telephone. A relative of the shop owner would periodically pay their families small amounts. The boys slept in the room where the food ingredients were stored. They spent all their waking hours over a hot pan or hunched over trays of sweets, cutting and packing them.

Prakash is currently missing. The shop owner has been arrested based on a complaint filed by Kumar. Two other suspects in the case are still at large, police said. Amudha Palanisamy sent her 15-year-old son to work in a snack shop in 2014. She hasn't seen him since and doesn't know where he was taken. She took an advance of 10,000 rupees (\$155) and says she has been sent 70,000 rupees (\$1,100) in the three years since. "They said I could either see him or take the money," Palanisamy said. In effect, the boys' monthly salary comes to just about 2,000 rupees (\$30) said Annadurai of Child Voice. "For that little, they are trafficked and kept in bondage for years," he said. — Reuters

'Wretched type of living'

Labor agents draw in cheap labor - mainly teenage boys from poor, illiterate and low caste or "Dalit" communities - and offer lump sum payments to the family at the end of each year. School dropouts in the districts of Theni, Madurai and Dindigul have been regularly taken to north and west India to work in food shops, campaigners say. "In our random survey of just 30 villages in Dindigul, we found 122 children had gone out to work in these units," said S Annadurai of non-profit organisation Child Voice. "In 20 percent of the cases, the parents did not know where the child was taken. They are just missing." On Monday, the Tamil Nadu government received two petitions asking to help free three children said to be in bonded labor in the sweet and savoury making workshops.

"We have formed a team to look into the cases," said K Veera Raghava Rao, administrative head of Madurai district. In



NEW DELHI: An Indian farmer from Tamil Nadu state climbs a tree in a bid to commit suicide, but was later coaxed down, during a protest in New Delhi yesterday. Tamil Nadu state farmers protested to demand a profitable price for their agricultural products, and called for the formation of management committee for solving Cauvery river water disputes. More than 200 farmers have committed suicide in Tamil Nadu in recent months following crop failure due to poor rainfall and inadequate water for irrigation. — AFP

INDIA CONGRESS PARTY HITS ROCK BOTTOM; NO CHANGE AT THE TOP

PARTY IN CRISIS AFTER WORST ELECTION RESULT IN UTTAR PRADESH

NEW DELHI: Many political parties faring as poorly as the Indian National Congress in a bellwether state election would ditch key leaders, if they did not go of their own accord. Not so Rahul Gandhi, scion of India's most famous political dynasty, who remains in charge after his attempts to connect with voters in the country's most populous state of Uttar Pradesh ended in failure. Congress support in a state that is home to one in six Indians fell to 6 percent and it won seven of 403 seats in the state assembly, marking a new low for a party that ruled the world's largest democracy for two-thirds of its 70 year history.

Filling the void is Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which won the biggest majority in the state for any party since 1977. It sets him on a path to re-election in a 2019 national ballot. Gandhi, 46, is not yet president of Congress, but with his mother, Sonia, abroad for medical treatment, he is already its de facto leader. He spearheaded the party's 2014 general election campaign that also led to humiliating defeat.

In the wake of the Uttar Pradesh results at the weekend, senior party members have not challenged Gandhi, even as they concede the need for action. "There is no reason for despondency," Abhishek Manu Singhvi, a senior Congress lawmaker, told Reuters. "There is a need for surgical, structural changes and I have no doubt they will happen." Not everyone is so

sanguine. "There is no leader today with a pan-India acceptability who can take on Modi & the BJP in 2019," tweeted Omar Abdullah, former chief minister of the northern state of Jammu and Kashmir whose party is allied to Congress. "At this rate we might as well forget 2019 & start planning/hoping for 2024," he said, referring to the dates of India's next general elections.

'Unmitigated liability'

Gandhi's campaign in Uttar Pradesh never gained traction: people who came to see him at outdoor meetings stole the benches put out by party workers for them to sit on. His hiring of Prashant Kishor, the backroom strategist who helped chart Modi's rise to national power, did not pay off. And mother Sonia took a nasty fall after fainting on a road show in Varanasi, Modi's constituency in eastern Uttar Pradesh.

Rahul, facing the press on the steps of parliament on Tuesday, deflected questions on his future but did say: "We need to make structural and organizational changes - that's a fact." That, say commentators, is a stock response and evades the fundamental issue: That Congress faces a leadership crisis. "Rahul Gandhi is now an unmitigated liability for the party," Pratap Bhanu Mehta, president of the Centre for Policy Research, wrote in the Indian Express.

"What diminishes the party even more is that there are no challengers to Rahul - the very lack of open revolt diminishes the party's character

to the point where it is now the object of outright contempt." Plenty of ink has been spilled over the years on political obituaries of the Congress, which enjoyed national dominance under Indira Gandhi and in the aftermath of her 1984 assassination - the last time Congress held an absolute majority in Uttar Pradesh. Sonia Gandhi's election victory in 2004 marked a temporary reprieve. Despite winning only 26.5 percent of the national vote, she managed to forge a ruling alliance that held for a decade.

No Contest

Now, in Modi, Congress faces an adversary who is in his element on the campaign trail and is uncompromising in his quest to create a "Congress-free India". "Modi is a driven, 24/7 politician and with Rahul it's just no contest. That is demoralizing for the party," said commentator Ashok Malik, a distinguished fellow at the Observer Research Foundation in New Delhi.

In fact, Congress won a notable victory in the state of Punjab during the latest round of local elections of which Uttar Pradesh was most important. Even so, it actually lost votes in all five states that went to the polls. Demonstrating the BJP's greater hunger for power, the Hindu nationalist party has laid claim to two small states where no party won a clear majority, quickly forming coalition alliances despite being outpolled by the left-leaning Congress. — Reuters



LAHORE: An official from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics collects information from a resident (top) during a census, as an army soldier stands guard, in Lahore yesterday. — AFP

PAKISTAN LAUNCHES ITS FIRST CENSUS IN YEARS

KARACHI: Fast-growing Pakistan, estimated to be the sixth-largest country by population, kicked off its first national census in 19 years yesterday, a delay caused by a lack of funds, political squabbling and too few available troops to oversee security. Around 118,000 "enumerators" in 63 districts began the 70-day data-gathering campaign, flanked by police and soldiers, under the order of the Supreme Court, which had set a March deadline.

The security officials, including 200,000 military personnel, will be present to protect census teams but also to ensure households can enter data without being intimidated. Electoral seats in Pakistan's parliament are assigned using population density data, and with rural populations fluctuating due to urbanization, powerful feudal landlords and political families fear losing influence. "We made all the arrangements for a smooth, safe and transparent process of population census," said Javed Iqbal at the census department in Peshawar, the capital of the volatile Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

The census will for the first time also

count Pakistan's transgender community, though members in Peshawar were surprised to be given forms without a separate column for transgender people. "We have been anxiously waiting for the process to begin but it hurt us as there is no separate column in the form," said Farzana Riaz, president of Trans Action, a trans rights group. Parts of Peshawar were cordoned off by police as census teams visited homes. A counter gathered the census data inside buildings while police and soldiers stood guard outside.

"Today we are just asking for the ID card of the head of the family and marking the houses," a counter told Reuters outside a house in the port city of Karachi, declining to be named as he said counters were strictly instructed not to speak to the media. "A day after, we will visit again and get further details of families." The counter was accompanied by a policeman and a soldier carrying a G-3 rifle. The 1998 census put Karachi's population at 9.2 million but current estimates now vary between 18 and 23 million, according to the National Database and Registration Authority. — Reuters

NEPALESE WOMEN CYCLE OUT OF POVERTY

BIRENDRANAGAR: At the break of dawn each day, dozens of women forced to flee their homes during Nepal's decade-long civil war load their bicycles with vegetables and head to market. The bikes, donated by a foreign charity, have given these women in the Surkhet Valley independence and a livelihood, lifting many out of poverty. Nandukala Basnet, who escaped her village at the height of the war, said her bike transformed her life. "Life is very nice with the bicycle. If my bike breaks, I feel like my life is broken," the 33-year-old said.

The conflict between government forces and Maoist insurgents displaced thousands, mostly in the midwest where the violence was at its worst. Basnet's village was in a Maoist stronghold but her husband was a soldier in the Nepali army, fostering suspicions about her allegiances. When an insurgent camp was bombed by a military helicopter, rumors spread that Basnet had revealed its location, sending rebels out after her. Neighbors urged her to flee. She packed up her

meagre belongings and left for Birendranagar, the main town in the Surkhet Valley.

"I struggled a lot after I moved here," she said. "I had no property. I mined sand from the river for money and even hammered stones for a day." She started selling vegetables but struggled to haul the 30 kilogram (66 pound) baskets to market. Some days she'd take less than 100 rupees (\$0.90) home. With the bicycle, her business has flourished. Basnet can now carry up to 100 kilograms of vegetables as well as sesame seeds and lentils, and can venture to markets further afield. "This has become my permanent business," she said, counting out her day's earnings - about 600 rupees - and stashing it carefully inside her cardigan pocket.

The sight of women on bicycles has drawn mutters of disapproval in some conservative quarters of Nepal's deeply superstitious and patriarchal society. Khagisara Regmi, who was

widowed and left alone to raise her four children, said villagers hurled insults as she tried to master the bike. "When I finally did, they said, 'Why is she learning to ride a bicycle, shouldn't she be ashamed?'" the 40-year-old said. Widows often face abuse and exclusion in Nepal, where they are believed to bring bad luck. But with the help of her bicycle, Regmi has earned enough to put her children through school and replace the straw roof on her house with a sturdy tin one. —AFP



SURKHET: Vegetable vendors arrive to sell vegetables at a market in Birendranagar, Surkhet District, some 520km west of Kathmandu. — AFP

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WITH A STROKE OF RED PEN, MYANMAR'S ROHINGYA FEAR LOSING RIGHT TO RETURN

75,000 FLEE TO BANGLADESH TO ESCAPE VIOLENCE

SITTEWE: Since security forces swept into their villages in northwestern Myanmar late last year, around 75,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled across the nearby border to Bangladesh. Many now fear that the authorities in Myanmar could make their displacement permanent. At least once a year, local administrators go house-to-house in the Rohingya villages of northern Rakhine State, lining up families to check their names against official lists. The names of those Muslims found missing are crossed through with a red pen, residents say.

The government says it is not using the house-

stand for a group photo as a family," said a Rohingya community leader, who did not want to be named. "They ask us if all the family is there and if anyone is missing." The authorities have also surveyed and marked for demolition allegedly unauthorized buildings in Muslim villages, residents and officials say. And Rohingyas say their movements are being restricted if they do not accept new temporary identity cards.

The democratically elected civilian government of Aung San Suu Kyi says the identity card scheme will give the stateless Muslim minority

government officials, show an administrative push to record those who had left began soon after the military campaign started.

The household survey is usually carried out in January and February. A senior immigration official in northern Rakhine, who declined to be identified, said the count was complete this year aside from those villages worst hit by the conflict. But he said officials had only marked those missing in pencil - not the feared red pen - and were awaiting orders to finalize the survey. "This year, because it might create conflict, we've delayed

be the only legal proof of their status in Myanmar - indicates the government may be trying to expel the Rohingya population from the country altogether," she told the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. "I sincerely hope that that is not the case."

Police Major Kyaw Mya Win at Maungdaw police station, in northern Rakhine, said authorities in the area have in the past filed charges against those who had been marked off the list. "People who fled to Bangladesh have been charged with illegal immigration acts when they returned to the country," he said, declining to outline the specific charges.

'We are not foreigners'

Administration along Myanmar's rugged frontier with Bangladesh is largely in the hands of the paramilitary Border Guard Police (BGP). Residents say that, soon after the conflict erupted, the BGP also began identifying structures in Rohingya villages that had been built without formal permits - including homes, mosques and Arabic schools. The GAD's Kyaw Swar Tun said more than 3,300 buildings had been listed for demolition, but said none had so far been pulled down. Min Aung, a minister and spokesman for the Rakhine state government, said officials had ordered a halt to the checks, recognizing that they could cause tensions.

However, since the buildings were illegal they would have to be demolished eventually, said Min Aung, a member of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, insisting that the same action would be taken anywhere in the country. "The government just removed illegal buildings like stores, houses, religious building, but they are merely huts, not really big buildings," he said. Although many Rohingyas trace their roots in Myanmar back generations, years of discriminatory policies have left most without valid identification. Temporary cards issued in the 1990s, which gave them voting rights, were invalidated in 2015.

Muslims in northern Rakhine say they are under pressure to accept a National Verification Card (NVC). "If we don't take it we can't travel from place to place," said the community leader. Suu Kyi's civilian government - which is not in charge of security and does not oversee the BGP, but has been pushing the ID card scheme - says that holders will be able to apply for citizenship. But Kyaw Hla Aung, a Rohingya lawyer in Sittwe, said the scheme fell short of the group's demand to officially identify themselves as Rohingya - a term Myanmar does not recognize. "NVC is not related to us - it's for foreigners," he said. Officials denied the government was coercing people to accept the document. "The roadblocks are not stopping people from moving - but they are checking NVCs," said state minister Min Aung. "We can't allow people to travel without documents." —Reuters



PAKHANGYI: People disembark from a ferry on the banks of the Chindwin river in central Myanmar near Pakhangyi town as they head to participate in the Ko Gyi Kyaw Nat festival. —AFP

hold count to try to force the Rohingyas out of the country and is holding off from finalizing the latest list. But officials confirmed that people eventually struck from the list face legal action under immigration laws if they try to return. Muhammad Ismail, 30, escaped the recent violence and is now living in a makeshift settlement in Bangladesh. His father told him by phone that officials had visited his home village of Dar Gyi Zarri January, checking who was still there. "I'm scared that if I go back, I'll be jailed," he told Reuters. "This is the law. This is how we understand the rules."

The household survey, which is not conducted elsewhere in Myanmar, is one of a series of measures that rights activists say amount to a system of apartheid against the 1.1 million Rohingya living in northern Rakhine. "We have to

more rights, but many Rohingyas say they fear it is a ruse to deny them citizenship. Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, has been criticised abroad for failing to confront her country's persecution of the Rohingyas, who many in the Buddhist majority view as unwanted illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

A red line

Myanmar's armed forces launched a crackdown in northern Rakhine after Rohingya insurgents attacked border guard posts on Oct. 9. Tens of thousands of people fled across the border during the subsequent violence, amid multiple allegations of mass killings and gang rapes by troops. Accounts gathered by Reuters from 10 residents and refugees, and confirmed by two Myanmar

the list," said Kyaw Swar Tun, General Administration Department (GAD) director based in the state capital, Sittwe. "We're waiting for them to come back."

The GAD oversees Myanmar's sprawling local bureaucracy and is controlled by the military. He declined to show the list to Reuters, citing confidentiality for official documents, or to say when it would be finalized. But, he added, "Once they're on the list, they can't come back." On Monday the United Nation's special rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, warned pressing ahead with the exercise while so many people were displaced could be seen as an attempt to depopulate Rohingya districts.

"Conducting a household survey - where those absent may be struck off the list that could

S KOREANS ANGERED; OUSTED LEADER LEAVES DOGS BEHIND

SEOUL: It was hard to imagine that ousted President Park Geun-hye could get any more unpopular in South Korea - until she moved out of the presidential palace and left her nine dogs behind. Just days after being removed from office by the Constitutional Court over a massive corruption scandal, an animal rights group accused Park of animal abandonment for not bringing the dogs with her.



South Korea's impeached ex-president Park Geun-Hye

Park's neighbors had given her a pair of Jindo dogs, a Korean breed of hunting dogs, when she left for the presidential Blue House in 2013. The dogs recently gave birth to seven puppies, which are now considered too young to be separated from their mother, Kim Dong-jo, a Blue House spokesman, said yesterday. Kim said the dogs would continue to stay at the presidential palace until they're ready to be sent to new owners. Park told staff members to take good care of the dogs before vacating the Blue House on Sunday, he said.

Kim Ae Ra, who heads the Korea Alliance

for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, said the group filed a complaint Monday with South Korea's Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission over Park's dogs. The commission then asked the National Police Agency to look into the matter. Officials from the police agency couldn't immediately confirm how the case would be treated. It appears unlikely that Park not taking the dogs with her would qualify as abandonment under South Korea's animal protection law, which defines lost or abandoned animals as those "wandering without an owner in public places" or "left deserted in paper boxes or other containers."

"It's difficult to say that the dogs were abandoned when it seems they are being taken care of and fed properly, and will likely receive medical attention when they need it," said Lee Hyeonchan, a veterinarian-turned-lawyer. Animal abandonment is punishable by a fine of up to 1 million won (\$873). People who fail to report an ownership change in pets within 30 days can also face fines of up to 500,000 won (\$436). Park's decision to leave the dogs behind touched off a heated reaction from dog lovers, who flooded social media with angry remarks.

"It seems that Park Geun-hye is a person who entirely lacks empathy, whether it's for humans or for animals," Park Jeong-eon, a 38-year-old office worker who is unrelated to the ousted president said. Park's two adult dogs also had five puppies in 2015 and the presidential office sent them to civilian owners. Parliament passed an impeachment motion against Park in December, and the court formally removed her from office on Friday. Prosecutors plan to question her next week over suspicions that she colluded with a friend to extort money and favors from companies and allowed the friend to secretly interfere with state affairs. —AP



TAIPEI: Anti-nuclear protesters march on the streets during a demonstration in front of the Presidential Palace in Taipei. —AFP

CHINA MILITARY THREAT GROWS, US STRATEGY UNCLEAR: TAIWAN

TAIPEI: China's accelerated military development and recent activity by its military aircraft and ships around Taiwan pose an increased threat to the self-ruled island, according to a Taiwanese government defense report draft reviewed by Reuters. The 2017 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) also highlights the uncertainty over the future strategic direction of the United States in the region, the impact of Japan flexing its military capabilities and "conflict crisis" potential in the disputed South China Sea.

"The recent activity of Chinese jets and ships around Taiwan shows the continued rise in (China's) military threat capabilities," highlighting the importance of Taiwan's need to defend itself, the review will say. "In addition to posing a military threat to our country, it also has a negative impact on regional stability." The document is due to be presented to parliament on Thursday by Taiwan defense minister Feng Shih-kuan. The defense ministry had no comment on the report yesterday. The four-yearly review is

the first since President Tsai Ing-wen took office last May and the first under her Democratic Progressive Party, which traditionally advocates independence for Taiwan. "The country's military development and Taiwan's freedom and prosperity are the same living body," according to the draft.

The QDR comes as China - which claims Taiwan as a wayward province to be taken back by force if necessary - has been stepping up air and sea military exercises in waters surrounding Taiwan as part of a sweeping modernization of its armed forces. Speaking in Beijing at his annual news conference on Wednesday, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang repeated that China was resolutely opposed to Taiwan independence but it would uphold peace across the Taiwan Strait.

"No matter how the situation on the island may evolve, the fraternal bond between the two sides cannot be severed and will not be able to change history or the fact that both sides belong to one and the same China," Li said. —Reuters

News

in brief

Irish woman murdered in Goa, police launch probe

MUMBAI: Indian police said yesterday they had launched a murder investigation after a young Irish woman was found dead in the popular tourist state of Goa. The 28-year-old's body was discovered in a field on Tuesday morning and an autopsy is being conducted to ascertain whether she was sexually assaulted, Deputy Superintendent of Goan police Sammy Tavares said. "Her body was found in a naked state. A case has been filed under section 302 of the Indian Penal Code (murder)," he said, adding that a suspect had been arrested. Several foreigners have died in Goa over the past decade or so, including 15-year-old British schoolgirl Scarlett Keeling, whose bruised and semi-naked body was found in shallow water on a beach in 2008. The deaths, many in suspicious circumstances or from drug or alcohol abuse, have blighted the picturesque state's reputation as a tourist haven. Ireland said the woman found Tuesday also held a British passport, while Britain's consulate in Mumbai said it was working closely with local authorities.

Texas executes man who killed father and infant

WASHINGTON: The US state of Texas on Tuesday executed a man with a history of paranoid schizophrenia, who was convicted of two killings and accused of two others.



James Bigby

James Bigby, a 61-year-old former mechanic, received a lethal injection in the early evening after spending more than a quarter of a century on death row. In a long final statement, part of which was written and part of which was said aloud, Bigby asked the families of his victims for forgiveness and thanked his

prison guards for their compassion. He was found guilty in the 1987 murders of Michael Trekkell, 26, and Trekkell's four-month-old son. Bigby was also accused of killing Calvin Crane and Frank Johnson, but was not tried in those murders. He confessed to the police that he had killed the men because he believed they were conspiring with Bigby's then employer to dismiss a worker's compensation lawsuit he had filed. Bigby was unable to explain why he suffocated and drowned the baby.

13 held for 'corruption' at Israel weapons giant

JERUSALEM: More than a dozen employees of Israel's giant state-owned weapons manufacturer have been arrested over allegations of "systematic" corruption, police said yesterday. The 13 staff of Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) included top directors, heads of department and a prominent former military official, police said in a statement. The investigation concerns suspicions of bribes paid to win IAI tenders, as well as allegations of theft, breaches of trust and money laundering. The police did not provide any further details on the suspects or say whether the alleged corruption affected trade with foreign countries. But "the investigation revealed systematic criminal practices," the police said. "Everywhere we looked, we found elements of corruption," police spokesman Meirav Lapidot told army radio. Investigators searched the homes and offices of suspects.

Thailand charges activist who mocked PM's song

BANGKOK: A Thai activist who made fun of one of junta leader Prayuth Chan-ocha's ballads on Facebook was charged on Tuesday with cyber crime for publishing material critical of the government. Veera Somkwamkid was charged with "importing false computer data" for a post saying most Thais lacked confidence in the military government, which took power in a 2014 coup in the name of ending more than a decade of political unrest. Veera's post had been based on a tongue-in-cheek survey he carried out online as to which of the promises in the junta theme song "Returning Happiness to Thailand" had been kept. Pledges in the stirring song, penned by Prime Minister Prayuth, include: "We'll do as promised," "We won't need long," "The beautiful land will return," "We will be honest" and "We would like to return happiness to you all." Most participants in the survey said "None of the Above."

4 suicide bombers kill 2 in northeast Nigeria

MAIDUGURI: Four female teenage suicide bombers killed two people and injured 16 others in a residential area in the northeast Nigerian city of Maiduguri, a disaster agency spokesman said yesterday. The girls knocked on the door of a house and then detonated their devices, a representative of the state-run emergency service in Borno State said. The focus on individual homes is a new tactic. "Community leaders should create awareness among residents not to open their doors for anybody (if) they are not aware of the visit," Borno police commissioner, Damian Chukwu, said. The blasts in the Muna Garage area, on the edge of the city worst hit by jihadist group Boko Haram's eight year insurgency, occurred around 1:15 am, National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) spokesman Abdulkadir Ibrahim said. "Four female teenage suicide bombers and two other men died," he said.

Mafia targets archaeology and crematorium business

ROME: Italian police detained dozens of politicians and businessmen around Naples yesterday in a swoop that revealed the local mafia has gotten its tentacles into archaeology and the crematorium business. Arrest warrants for 69 suspects were issued in an operation code-named "the Queen" after the surname of Guglielmo La Regina, a construction company owner and the suspected linchpin of a network that fixed 18 major public contracts. The suspects face charges of corruption and tender-rigging in favor of the so-called Casalesi cartel, a notorious branch of the Neapolitan mafia, the Camorra. The investigation was described as a "judicial earthquake" by the newspaper La Repubblica, with ten local authorities affected across an area spanning Naples and the nearby city of Caserta.

TAIWAN LESBIAN ORDERED TO PAY BACK GROOM

TAIPEI: A judgment against a gay woman who married a man because of pressure from her family has sparked criticism in Taiwan as the island moves closer to legalizing same-sex marriage. The woman was recently ordered by a court to return around Tw\$500,000 (\$16,130) to her husband after she left him for her girlfriend.

The ruling by the district court in northern Hsinchu said the money would compensate the groom for wedding fees, "betrothal money" and emotional pain that he suffered. In Taiwan it is common for the groom to give money to the bride's family as a goodwill gesture to seal the marriage deal. As the case surfaced in local media this week, online commenters voiced their support for the woman as it emerged her family had opposed her relationship with her girlfriend and urged her to marry a man.

"Same-sex marriage should be legalized so people don't have to marry someone they don't love," read one message on ETtoday website. Others called the judgment a symptom of homophobia. "This kind of outcome is caused by anti-gay people," said a post on the website of TV Channel EBC. Taiwan's same-sex marriage bill is due for a final reading this year and the island would become the first place in Asia to legalize it. But the issue has caused a split in Taiwanese society, with protests for and against the bill as conservative critics say it would destroy family values.

Taiwan is considered progressive on many issues including gay rights, however its roots in Confucianism translate into a strong sense of adherence to traditional mores. Past attempts to legalize same-sex marriage stalled under the Kuomintang party, which dominated politics for decades until it was unseated by President

Tsai Ing-wen's Democratic Progressive Party last year. While she garnered online support, there was also criticism of the woman, identified only as Hsu. "She should have insisted on not marrying the man instead of dragging him down with her," said a comment on ETtoday.

Another on Apple Daily said the groom "must feel like he's been fooled". According to the court judgment Hsu married her husband in January last year but left him a few days later. It described how she had sent a message to an unidentified third party months before, saying she had a close relationship with a woman but her mother would not allow them to be together. "She dated the plaintiff to ease her mother's concerns," the judgment said. Apple Daily reported Wednesday she had revealed she was gay on her wedding night. The pair had met on a blind date and both sets of parents had urged them to marry, the report said. —AFP

VOGUE ARABIA LAUNCHES WITH BOLD MISSION, STYLE

DUBAI: Vogue launched its newest international edition this month, targeting a niche audience in the Middle East that is fashion conscious, style-driven and wealthy. If its debut is anything to go by, the magazine promises to be bold, representative and deferential. The 22nd international edition of Vogue featured on its cover American supermodel Gigi Hadid, whose father is Palestinian, wearing an embellished, mesh veil covering half her face. With one eye peering out from beneath the veil, the magazine's cover words aimed readers directly at its mission: "Reorienting perceptions."

At the helm of Vogue's nascent project is Deena Aljuhani Abdulaziz, a fashion-forward mother of three and Saudi royal who describes herself as "ambitious." "I don't want Vogue Arabia to just be another regional magazine. I definitely want it to be a global one as well, especially in this political climate. I think it's very important," she told The Associated Press from her office in Dubai's Design District.

Through its range of features and shoots, the magazine attempts to cater to a wide and diverse audience of Arab women, whose varying takes on personal style and modesty cannot be defined by one trope or fashion statement. While not intentionally provocative, there are images of

women in backless gowns and skirts that end above the knee. There are also artful shots of women in headscarves, though not necessarily worn in the parameters of the Islamic hijab.

In Hadid's cover shot, for example, the veil reveals a hint of bronzed shoulder. "We aren't trying to make a giant political statement but we do think that we can help contribute to conversation" said Shashi Menon, founder of Nervora, which published Vogue Arabia in partnership with Conde Naste. "We want to be - delicate is the wrong word, but we want to be cognizant on how we are speaking to and with women from this region and that means being understanding," he said.

Vogue Arabia's strongest foothold is - as its name suggests - in the oil-rich countries of the Arabian Peninsula, where modern malls and a growing art scene are part of a wider push to get in on the multi-billion-dollar-a-year global fashion industry, which is currently dominated by the US, Europe and Japan. Vogue Arabia's target audience is well-traveled and has long had access to fashion magazines, both local and international, including of course American Vogue. — AP



DUBAI: Three men sweep during their 4-hour daily punishment after Dubai's ruler ordered them to clean the city zoo for feeding a cat to dogs. — AP

TRIO ORDERED TO CLEAN DUBAI ZOO OVER CAT KILLING VIDEO

DUBAI: The ruler of Dubai yesterday ordered three men accused of feeding a cat alive to two dogs and filming it to clean the city's zoo for three months. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum ordered "those detained for torturing the cat to perform community service by cleaning the Dubai zoo for four hours a day for three months", a government statement said. It is not clear if the men will also face prosecution. A recently enacted law on animal cruelty stipulates punishment of up to a year in prison or a fine of up to 200,000 dirhams (\$54,500).

Emirati newspapers said a Gulf citizen and two Asians had been arrested over the video, which was widely

shared on social media. The video showed a man offering the cat in an open cage to two Rottweilers, encouraging them to devour the terrified feline as punishment for its having eating birds. "You eat pigeons and chickens?" a man is heard saying to the cat, as it is being mauled by one of the dogs. "Eat the cat, eat it," he orders.

A picture released by the government showed three men in blue overalls sweeping a path in the Dubai zoo. "The crime committed by those negligent men contradicts basic human norms," the government statement said. "The cruelty demonstrated in this barbaric act violates our values and the principles of our religion which tell us to be humane with animals," it added. — AFP

SUCCESSFUL BOND SALE REVEALS KUWAIT'S...

Continued from Page 1

"Kuwait has put in place the right policies to ensure that growth and diversification will be maintained in the economy. Furthermore, Kuwait has successfully established large fiscal buffers as a direct result of its ability to efficiently manage oil wealth," he said.

The minister added that this transaction would introduce further diversification to the state's sources of income and establish a liquid benchmark for Kuwait in international debt markets. Saleh noted that the five-year bond was successfully priced on March 13, 2017 at a yield of 2.887 percent, the 10-year bond with a yield of 3.617 percent with a spread of 75 basis points on the five-year bonds and 100 bps on the 10-year bonds respectively, over relevant US treasury securities.

Kuwait is known for its conservative fiscal policy, typically budgeting for an oil price much lower than the expected global oil prices. The government set the 2017/18 budget based on an oil price of \$45 per barrel. This price had been set at \$35 for the previous year's budget. But Kuwait is projecting oil prices of \$55 to \$60 per barrel on average for the current fiscal year, creating a healthy cushion for government revenue.

This policy, plus a massive fiscal reserve - estimated at \$592 billion, according to the Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute - makes Kuwait a safe bet for international investors. "Kuwait's mix of breakeven oil price for both the budget and the current account shows it is more protected against a drop in oil," said Simon

Quijano-Evans, an emerging-market strategist at Legal & General Investments Management Ltd in London told Bloomberg.

The dual-tranche international bond was Kuwait's debut. NBK Capital, as well as Citi, Deutsche Bank, HSBC, JP Morgan and Standard Chartered Bank served as the bookrunners. Kuwait holds a stellar Aa2 rating from Moody's Investors Service and an AA rating from Fitch and Standard & Poor's. The bonds were significantly oversubscribed with 778 investor orders totaling over \$29 billion, with strong demand from both international and regional accounts.

The sale was also successful in achieving a diversified mix in terms of investor type and geography. The final geographic allocation for the five-year bonds was 4 percent to Asian investors, 46 percent to European and UK investors, 24 percent to investors from the Americas and 26 percent to investors from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Saleh elaborated.

The allocation for the 10-year bonds was 4 percent to Asian investors, 19 percent to European and UK investors, 51 percent to investors from the Americas and 26 percent to investors from MENA, he noted. The final investor type allocation for the five-year bonds was 22 percent to banks and private banks, 60 percent to asset managers and 18 percent to agencies, pensions and insurance. The final investor type allocation for the 10-year bonds was 25 percent to banks and private banks, 68 percent to asset-managers and 7 percent to agencies, pensions and insurance, the minister added.

MAIDS COULD OUTNUMBER CITIZENS BY 2022...

Continued from Page 1

MP Osama Al-Shaheen the problem with development programs has been the failure to implement projects because there are no efficient and competent officials, as most of them were appointed illegally. He said the Assembly backs developing the private sector but this should not come through "looting". MP Adel Al-Damkhi said that since 2009, only 15 percent of the development plan has been implemented. He said that legislators are concerned about privatization of public services because they usually end up in the hands of few people.

MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri said the same plans are included in the government program for the past 30 years, adding that Kuwait has fallen to the 75th place on the Corruption Perception Index. He claimed that economic development in the country means inflating the pockets of corrupt people by controlling public properties through a "lie called privatization". He said under privatization, public properties are being sold to highly influential people at very cheap prices.

Earlier in the session, Ashour warned that he will grill Minister of Commerce and State Minister of Youth Khaled Al-Roudhan if he does not work to lift the suspension on Kuwaiti sports.

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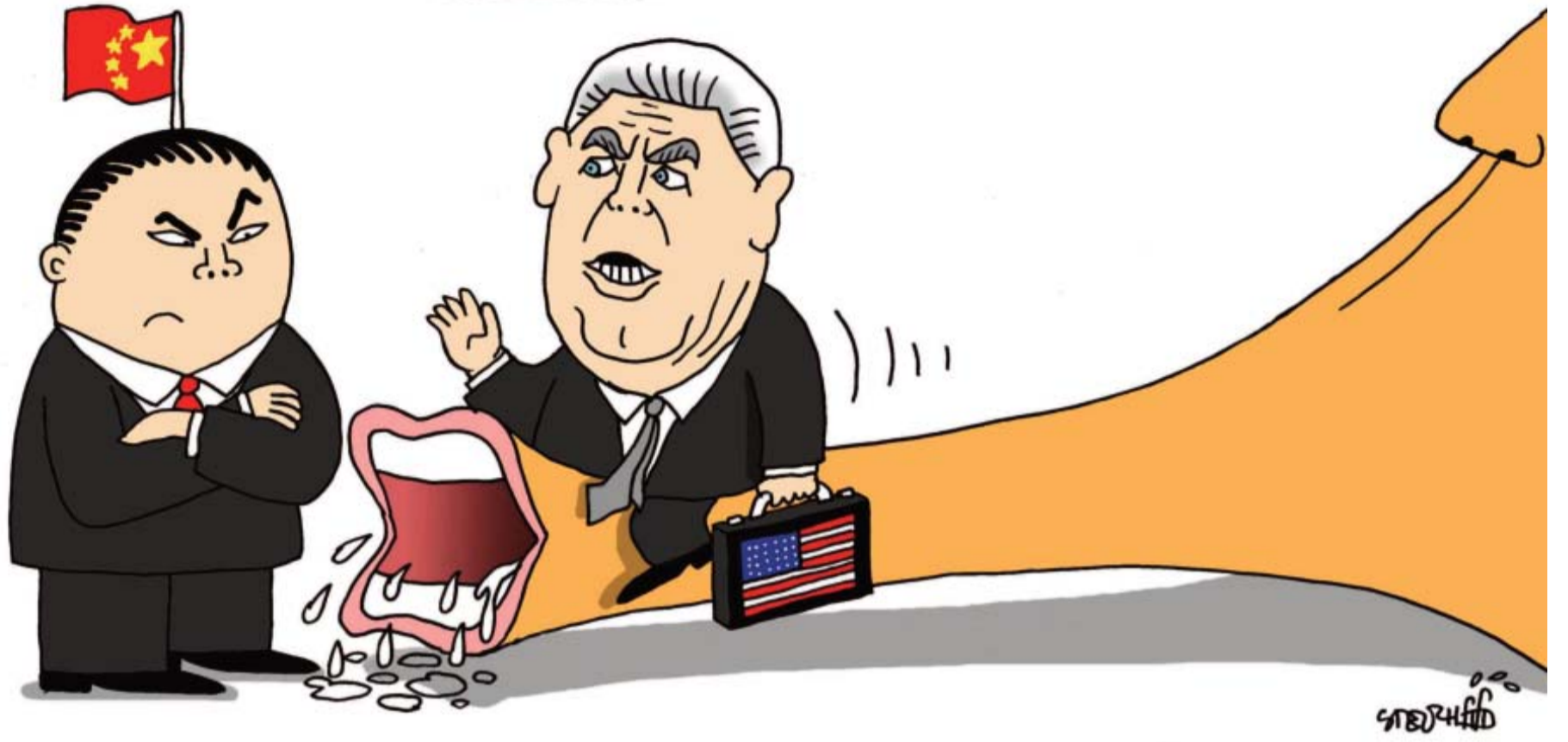
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REX TILLERSON'S FIRST ASIA TRIP



SHADOW OF PROGRESS FALLS ON ISTANBUL'S VEGETABLE GARDENS

Recip Eraslan, 64, has worked a tiny sliver of land on Istanbul's historic Sultanahmet peninsula for more than three decades. He grows spring onions, arugula and cabbage on a 1.25-acre plot along the city's ancient Byzantine-era walls that are part of one of the oldest urban gardens, or bostans in Turkish, in the world. But last year, the tranquility of this parcel of green space, hemmed in by a metropolis of 15 million people, was shattered. Pointing a finger over his right shoulder, Eraslan, with knife and spring onions in hand, recalled what happened on Jan 13, 2016.

"There used to be a building there that we used for our tools and plants. The municipality came with machines and destroyed it because they said they wanted the area to be cleaner," he said. "Now we have lost that storage space and have to walk one kilometre to and from my house every day." More than 20 growers and their families, including Eraslan, the breadwinner for a family of five, depend on the Yedikule market gardens that about the 1,600-year-old, UNESCO-protected city walls for their livelihoods. But with Turkish authorities in the midst of a nationwide drive to modernise cultural and tourist areas, the farmers, who pay a fee for using the land, are under threat.

Historic Heritage

Opposition to the development of swathes of city space reached a peak in 2013 when demonstrators took to streets to protest the proposed levelling of Gezi Park in central Istanbul. Unrest quickly spread across Turkey, a revolt against what protesters said was increasing government authoritarianism. The same year, more than 20 acres of gardens, including the 17th century Ismail Pasa gardens inside the Yedikule walls, were cleared and replaced with sports grounds, car parks and walk ways. Today, much of the surrounding areas are left derelict.

The Yedikule market gardeners, a community of around 200 people, are a living link to a heritage that goes back centuries. Today, the gardens are popular with locals because the produce is cheaper and fresher than vegetables sold in supermarkets. Some farmers live part-time on site without electricity or indoor running water, though most have homes nearby. The 1.5 km stretch of land is owned by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, two local municipalities and several state agencies. The authorities say because the gardens are not the farmers' property they are free to construct recreational areas such as cafes and restaurants around the city walls to better serve local residents and tourists alike. The municipality also claims the walls, wall-walks and ramparts are being frequented by drug users and homeless people who light fires against the base of the walls to keep warm.

Defending the Jan 2016 demolitions, municipal council member Abubekir Tasyurek said the farmers' activities caused "visual pollution that can be seen by anyone passing by." The authorities also say the gardeners could damage the protected city walls. Although the government's Site Management Directorate says it has a new plan for the Yedikule gardens, requests from the Thomson Reuters Foundation for specific details went unanswered. "The biggest problem is that urban agricultural land doesn't exist as a land type within the Turkish system," said Ali Tapkik of a group trying to preserve the gardens. "Urban agriculture is mostly done on private or public property as 'occupiers.' Because of this, the gardeners can't become members of the farmer's union and can't avail themselves of government support," he said. Political unrest in Turkey, including a botched military coup in July and a series of attacks by Islamic State and Kurdish militants, mean the government's focus lies elsewhere. "This is something which has to be lobbied for in Ankara, yet with all the political problems in the country, this won't get priority."

Spring is in the Air

Last year, archaeological societies rallied at the dumping of asphalt and gravel on the protected site, leading to fears that preparation for further construction was in the works. Reports emerged last month that the local municipality had covered a section of the protected walls in preparation of the building of a wedding hall. For the farmers, spring is fast approaching and growers are busy tilling soil and planting seed, even though the shadow of uncertainty hangs overhead. "They (the municipality) want to make a new plan for here; we don't know what for, but maybe for houses or tourism," said Eraslan. On a recent afternoon, a dozen city workers were laying a new, wider footpaths bordering the gardens to offer visitors easier access to the walls. Further up the street, at least three sheds have disappeared. For Kemal Keram, who has worked a three-quarters of an acre plot abutting the city walls for two years, growing cucumber, parsley and lettuce, says his customers are falling away.

"Two years ago, if there were 10 customers coming to buy vegetables, now there are five," he said outside a shack that he complains can't protect his tools from the elements. He says the authorities knocked down between 15 and 20 buildings last year. "Ten days ago they came and cut down all the trees almost to the roots," he says. "I don't know why they did that; maybe because they want a give better view for tourists to take photos of the walls. Who knows?" —Reuters

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ASSAD NOW SECURE BUT SYRIA CARVED UP

Six years since the start of the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad, he is winning on the battlefield but Syria's civil war is far from over, with his once stable country broken into fiefdoms ruled by rebels and warlords. While few non-partisan observers think the conflict will end soon, fewer still believe Assad can retake the whole country. But since all outside players now seem to have adjusted to his staying, no one expects a peace deal either.

Many foresee, at best, a ceasefire observed much of the time over much of a territory that will be effectively partitioned between competing forces. During five years of stuttering negotiations between the government and the opposition, brokered by the United Nations, the United States and Russia, and more recently by Russia and Turkey, the sticking point has been whether Assad would go. Now, the starting point is that he will stay.

"We have to be realistic - he's not leaving," says Robert Ford, a former American ambassador to Damascus who resigned in frustration at President Barack Obama's indecision on Syria and remains in contact with many of the conflict's protagonists. "After Aleppo, there is no chance" of dislodging Assad, Ford added. "That's the result of the military victory they won."

It started six years ago with protests across Syria, mainly among the country's majority Sunni Muslims, against Assad and his family's 40-year rule built around the minority Alawite community, an offshoot of Shiite Islam. In March 2011, "Arab Spring" protests sweeping the region had already dislodged autocrats in Tunisia and Egypt, and would later claim the long-term rulers of Libya and Yemen, two other countries still embroiled in civil wars six years on.

Assad responded to Syria's protests with unconstrained violence, turning the uprising into a war to the death. Western leaders including Obama predicted Assad would quickly fall. But he hung on, using the resources of the state and backing from Iran and Lebanon's Hezbollah Shiite militia to fight rebels funded by Arab states to a stalemate. A year and a half ago, Russia joined the war on his side, tipping the balance in his favor.

Today an estimated half a million people have been killed, half the population has been uprooted in the world's biggest refugee crisis, and the war has set new standards of savagery in its impact on civilians. Most of the world's major powers and regional states have backed proxy forces in a complicated multi-sided conflict, while the Islamic State jihadist group, at war with everyone else, declared a

caliphate straddling the border with Iraq. Anti-Assad rebels, split between nationalists and Islamists, are splintered and abandoned by their half-hearted patrons. International actors - Russia, Iran, the United States and Turkey - crowd an ever more confusing battlefield. And Assad is still there, proclaiming he will reconquer every inch of a devastated country shattered into ruins.

if he had thought about leaving Syria, said: "Never. After six years, the most difficult time has passed, which was in 2012-13. Those times we never thought about (leaving), how could I think about it now?" For the former ambassador Ford, who once saw Assad's demise as inevitable, the flip side of him now seeming impregnable is that his opponents can never accept his continued rule. Among the millions of Syrian refugees and internally displaced, many cannot return to homes in areas they see as subject to the tyranny of rule by Assad's secret police, which the opposition blames for hundreds of thousands of deaths.

Converging Interests

Nevertheless, an emerging international consensus in practice favors pro-Assad forces, illustrated by events around the northern town of Manbij this month, when Washington sent its first openly acknowledged regular ground troops. The small US force was sent to separate Kurdish fighters Washington has supported from rival Arab rebels backed by Turkey near the town. By blocking any advance of the rebels, the US move was seen as a tacit endorsement of the presence of Assad's Russian-backed forces in the area.

"The Americans are cooperating with the Russians in a way that is going to help complete the regime's victory in Syria," says Eugene Rogan, professor of modern Middle Eastern history at the University of Oxford, of the US moves in Manbij. Syria watchers say a patchy ceasefire in place now - brokered by Russia and Turkey - could be consolidated. But they believe Assad will eventually try to annihilate the rebel forces pushed into rural Idlib, one village at a time.

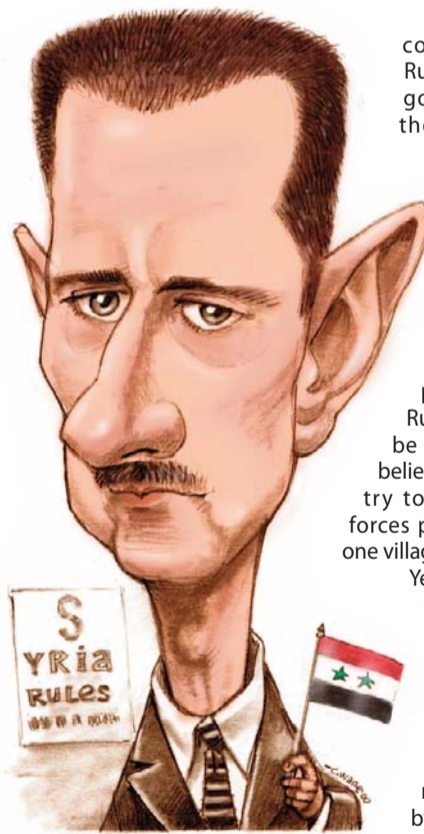
Yet Assad and his patrons will always face the constraint of limited manpower, which stretches his forces ever thinner the more territory he regains and makes his troops more exposed to attacks by opposition groups and

Resembling Lebanon and Iraq

Since Russia stormed into Syria 18 months ago, Assad has surged from the verge of a collapse among his depleted loyalist forces to a formidable position of military strength. His recapture in December of the rebel enclave in Aleppo, their last urban stronghold, was a major turning point in the war and left the insurgents bottled up in rural Idlib province and battling each other. Syria now faces a situation that could resemble neighboring Lebanon at several stages of its 1975-90 civil war, when it was carved into fiefdoms by competing militias, with long lulls in fighting punctuated by violent cataclysms.

It could also share some traits with Iraq after the first Gulf War, which left its former ruler Saddam Hussein in power for more than a decade as a global pariah, with his legitimacy in question and his economy strangled by sanctions. Andrew Tabler, a Syria specialist at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy think-tank, does not see anyone, much less Assad's allies Russia or Iran, ordering the president out, although he can still imagine a violent end for Assad. "I don't see Russia or Iran asking him to step down, but we do have to prepare for an eventually in this volatile environment that Assad may be targeted for assassination because of how much of a barrier he is to a settlement - him personally."

Assad himself, asked in an interview



NOTHING TO SEE BUT COMFORT FOR XI

China's annual parliament followed a tight script with no surprises and little drama, evidence of President Xi Jinping's ever firmer grip ahead of a party congress later this year that could bring more of his allies into the top leadership team. Potential successors were kept on the sidelines, foreign journalists often ignored and speculation hushed through the 10 days of the rubber-stamp National People's Congress, which ended on Wednesday, as it began, without incident.

Premier Li Keqiang set the tone in an opening speech on March 5, with social and economic stability the top priority as the leadership targeted modestly slower growth and the building of a "firewall" against financial risks arising from record lending and a speculative property boom. Controversy, criticism of the leadership and chit-chat were off the agenda. There was no open session of the 'friendship with foreign countries' delegation to parliament's advisory body, a forum that in past years has seen complaints about slowing defense spending and comments on political intrigue at the top. No explanation was provided.

"Xi does not want any unexpected drama ahead of the congress and has gone out of his way to ensure a low-key parliament," said a senior

Beijing-based Western diplomat. The five-yearly congress, which will bring fresh blood into the top ranks of the party machinery, including the seven-member Politburo Standing Committee (PSC), is an opportunity for Xi to demonstrate just how thoroughly he has consolidated power since taking the reins in late 2012.

In early 2012, his last parliament before taking over as party boss was overshadowed by the brewing corruption scandal that ended engulfing the charismatic and ambitious Communist Party chief of Chongqing, Bo Xilai, who had been tipped by many for a top job. This time there were no distractions and no open dissent, with alternative power centers brought to heel over the intervening years.

Bo was jailed for life in 2013, and his powerful ally in the PSC, domestic security chief Zhou Yongkang, was put under investigation for corruption the following year. The media were ordered to show their loyalty to the party line last year, and already strict internet controls were ratcheted still tighter, while a crackdown on civil rights lawyers silenced some of the few challenging voices. The mighty military has also been kept in check, with Xi assuming the position of Commander in Chief last year while pushing through a modernizing program that reorganized its command structure

and will see 300,000 troops demobilized. Xi pressed the point with a high-profile visit to the People's Liberation Army delegation in parliament, calling for greater technical innovation as part of the modernization program.

Sidestep

Topics that might have caused a stir at the parliament, such as China's policies in the South China Sea, where it has been building military structures on atolls also claimed by some of its neighbors, were sidestepped in at least one session where there had been discussion before. At the open media session for delegates from the island of Hainan, which is in charge of administering China's islands in the region, officials only tangentially touched on the disputed waterway when mentioning pleasure cruises to the Parcel Islands.

While officials in that forum have in the past been open to questions from foreign journalists, the only foreigner allowed a question this time was from Russia. And prickly questions on leadership changes in the autumn were ruled out in advance. "Don't bother asking," one Chinese official told Reuters. As if to avoid giving fuel to speculation, Xi was conspicuously absent from meetings of the provincial delegations from Guangdong, Chongqing and Guizhou, from

which some of the hottest candidates for elevation to the PSC are based.

When he did speak to delegates, he made much of his four-year campaign against corruption, a drive that has proved popular in the country while cementing his authority over party discipline. "Fasten the seatbelt of incorruptibility," he told lawmakers from the southwestern province of Sichuan, where the disgraced Zhou, who was eventually jailed for life in 2015, had his power base. A key barometer of how much political power Xi has amassed in his first five-year term will be whether he can break with party convention and successfully retain his ally and top graft buster Wang Qishan beyond retirement age.

Plans for a sweeping overhaul of the party's anti-corruption architecture, including establishing a new National Supervisory Commission overseeing all public servants could provide Xi the justification to do just that. Wang himself was at the parliament, delivering an unwavering message of loyalty. "Under the party's leadership, there is only division of labor between the party and government, not separation of powers," Wang told Beijing delegates. "Within the Party, the government, the army, the people, academics, and east, west, south, north, center - the party leads everything," he added. —Reuters

KALOU EXTENDS HERTHA CONTRACT

BERLIN: Ex-Chelsea striker Salomon Kalou yesterday extended his Hertha Berlin contract, which had been due to expire in June, with reports the new deal runs until 2020. "I feel very comfortable in Berlin and I still have plenty that I want to achieve with Hertha Berlin. I would like to help the team continue to progress as it has in the last few years," said the 31-year-old Kalou. The Ivory Coast forward joined Hertha for 1.8m euros (\$1.9m) from Lille in 2014, who he had joined in 2012 following six years with Chelsea. At Hertha this season he has scored six goals and provided four assists in 16 games so far. Hertha has not stipulated how long the new contract is for, but German daily Bild claims it will run for another three years. Hertha's director of sport Michael Preetz said Kalou, who has scored 30 goals in 86 appearances for Berlin, turned down other clubs to stay. Head coach Pal Dardai is pleased to keep the club's potent partnership intact with Kalou playing alongside Hertha's top-scorer Vedad Ibisevic, who has 10 league goals this season. "Salomon is a real champion. He has won everything, but despite that he is still hungry for more." —AFP

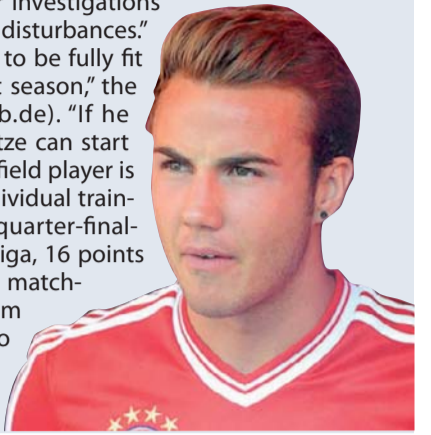


CALL FOR ATHLETE RIGHTS CHARTER IN FALLOUT OF RUSSIAN DOPING

LAUSANNE: A World Anti-Doping Agency panel is proposing a charter to formally protect the rights of athletes. WADA athlete committee chairwoman Beckie Scott says "athletes are frustrated and are asking that their 'rights' with respect to clean, fair sport be recognized and protected." WADA says its athlete panel worked on the proposal after two investigations revealed widespread doping and cover-ups in Russian track and field and other sports, including at the 2014 Sochi Olympics. Athletes in some sports have challenged governing bodies to be tougher reacting to findings from the WADA-appointed investigations. At a WADA conference in Lausanne, athlete representatives said priorities included "the right to compete on a level playing field, the right to access education, privacy protection, legal representation." — AP

GOETZE TO MISS SEASON WITH METABOLIC DISORDER

DORTMUND: Borussia Dortmund midfielder Mario Goetze will miss the rest of the season while he receives treatment for a metabolic disorder that is causing muscle problems, the Bundesliga club said yesterday. Goetze, who has made 16 appearances in all competitions this term, was pulled out of training last month after investigations by the club revealed he had "metabolic disturbances." "The long term target for the player is to be fully fit and ready to play for the start of next season," the club said on their website (www.bvb.de). "If he responds positively to treatment, Goetze can start back training in early summer. The midfielder player is currently undergoing rehab and an individual training programme." Champions League quarter-finalists Dortmund are third in the Bundesliga, 16 points behind leaders Bayern Munich with 10 matches remaining, and host second-bottom Ingolstadt on Friday. Dortmund also face Bayern in the German Cup semi-finals. —Reuters



YEMENI TENNIS HOPEFUL CROSSES WAR ZONE TO COMPETE

DOHA: Stepping onto a floodlit tennis court in Qatar last week, 13-year-old Alhassan Ishaq tried to steady his nerves. The aspiring tennis champion from Yemen had trained for months and used his family's savings crossing a war zone to reach the Asia junior championships in Qatar. Justifying the arduous trip, he not only made it through the qualifying stage but pressed on to reach the last eight, lifting his ranking to 126th in Asia among under-14s. Pictures of him competing in his blue t-shirt in Doha brightened the usually sombre pages of Yemeni newspapers - a rare note of cheer in a country ravaged by two years of war and threatened by famine. The war between a Saudi-led alliance and the Shi'ite Houthi forces in control of the capital Sanaa has killed at least 10,000 people, including 1,500 children, according to the United Nations. Countless others have been forced to go hungry or flee their homes; some are targeted for radicalisation by the Yemeni arm of al Qaeda. Youngsters aspiring to a career in sport have to overcome massive obstacles, including damage to training facilities from air strikes and shelling. "The war can feel impossible to ignore but I have to concentrate. I just want to win matches," said a breathless Ishaq during a break from training. "Honestly, I'm just trying to focus on the tennis." Unable to fly to Qatar from Sanaa airport which was bombed in 2015, Ishaq and his coach, Osama al-Maqaleh, embarked on a 21-hour bus journey across Yemen's mine-strewn interior last month to an airport in the eastern city of Seyoun. Passing burnt-out buildings and villages recently controlled by al Qaeda militants, their bus was held at checkpoints by Houthi fighters who interrogated passengers and searched among luggage for weapons. "They asked people where they were from and inspected their hands to see if they had been using weapons," said Maqaleh. "One passenger was taken off the bus. He didn't get back on," he said. "You should stay and fight!" a bearded Houthi fighter with a gun on his shoulder said to Ishaq before waving the bus on. Leaving behind the mountains that lead to Sanaa, the bus crossed the war's front-line into Marib province, where Gulf Arab troops loyal to Yemen's exiled government have assembled military outposts in the desert. **SHRAPNEL ON COURT** The war has taken its toll on sport in Yemen. Soccer stadiums in Abyan province and the central city of Ibb have been damaged in the fighting. In 2015, Yemen's national soccer team caught the world's attention by crossing the Gulf of Aden on a cramped fishing boat to travel to a World Cup qualifying match. When Saudi jets last year bombed a presidential palace complex close to Ishaq's club in Sanaa, shrapnel rained down on the courts. "We found one piece, metal and charred, it was arm-length. It fell on the court," said Maqaleh. Tennis in Yemen is tough at the best of times: power cuts and sandstorms often disrupt matches, and clubs with pot-holed courts lack full-time coaches and adequate funding from ministries. Still, Ishaq and a handful of juniors, with support from the International Tennis Federation, have entered regional tournaments and hope to gain international rankings. Their ambitions are threatened by a conflict in which close to a third of combatants are children, according to UNICEF, and hundreds of thousands of children face life-threatening malnutrition. But rebuilding the country and defying its current disasters will require kids like Ishaq not to lose hope. "Sometimes the bombing is so loud it rings in your ears and we have to evacuate the club," said Maqaleh. "But the next day the kids still want to play." —Reuters



TENNIS

KUWAIT EIGHTH OPEN TENNIS TOURNAMENT CONCLUDES, MOHAMMAD AL-GHAREEB HONORED

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Eighth Open Tennis Tournament came to a conclusion Tuesday evening under the patronage of President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The tournament saw 500 players of both genders in various age groups, as 302 matches were played. The final match and closing ceremony also attended by chairman of Behbehani Group Ali Murad Behbehani as well as representatives of other sponsors including Kuwait Financial Center which was represented by Abdellatif Al-Nisf, Kuwait Airways represented by Abdullah Al-Sharhan and Kuwait International Bank represented by Nawaf Najiya. The final doubles match saw Mohammad Seddiq and Bejorn Rinquest defeating Abdelrahman Al-Awadhi and Abdallah Al-Mukaimi 6-4, 6-1. The closing ceremony began with Ali

Behbehani honoring Kuwait's tennis player Mohammad Al-Ghareeb and presented him with a Porsche car, in appreciation of his efforts to raise Kuwait's flag in international arenas. The final results of the tournament were as follows:

Men's singles: Abdelrahman Al-Awadhi, Salah Al-Mousa.

Men's doubles: Mohammad Seddiq & Bejorn Rinquest, Abdelrahman Al-Awadhi & Abdallah Al-Mukaimi.

Women's singles: Sarah Behbehani, Dana Al-Fulaj.

U-11 singles: Abdelwahab Al-Abdallah, Daviansh Tripathy.

U-13 singles: Satiansh Tripathy, Hussein Al-Shatti.

In the juniors U-17: Ahmad Khamees, Essa Qabazard.

Women's U-18: Fareeda Al-Ayat, Reena Al-Samrani.

Pioneers singles above 45: Jarokola Chowdry, Mohammad Tonaih.

Pioneers Singles above 55: Zoran Dimitrivic, Majdi Khamees.

Pioneers doubles above 45: Marlon Olakar & Jarkola Chowdry, Mohammad Tonaih & Zoran Dimitrivic. Player Mohammad Al-Ghareeb thanked Kuwait Tennis Federation headed by Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Sabah, board members and the organizing committee for the outstanding organization. He also expressed appreciation for the honoring he received.

PAS SHOOTING TOURNEY TO BEGIN TOMORROW

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Tournament of the Public Authority for Sports, organized by Kuwait Shooting Sport Club will begin tomorrow (Friday) at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex in Skeet, trap, Double trap, 10 meter Air Rifle and Pistol and 50m Rifle. All concerned department at the club completed their preparations for the tournament that comes within the continued cooperation between PAS and KSSC, in support of Kuwait shooters. Secretary General of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Obaid Al-Osaimi appreciated PAS interest in shooting and shooters, led by its Director General Sheikh Ahmad Al-Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and his deputies. He said KSSC Board of Directors is keen on carrying out all that is in the interest of shooting and shooters, and the club continues on holding courses and tournaments all during the season, besides holding training camps and receiving shooters from all shooting federations around the world, in order to keep Kuwait shooters in



Obaid Al-Osaimi

touch with world shooters. Al-Osaimi asked shooters to work hard during this tournament in order to get the results that qualify them to join the national teams.

JAPAN, NETHERLANDS BLAST WAY INTO WBC FINAL FOUR

TOKYO: Japan and the Netherlands crushed their opponents in second round play at the World Baseball Classic yesterday, earning a trip to Los Angeles for the semi-finals. Japan exploded for five runs in the sixth inning to break open a scoreless contest with Israel at the Tokyo Dome. They then coasted to an 8-3 victory to finish at the top of Pool E and complete an unbeaten run (6-0) through the first two rounds. Earlier, Vladimir Balentien homered twice as the Netherlands dismissed Cuba 14-1 in a rout, which was ended after seven innings because of the tournament's termination rule. Japan, champions in 2006 and 2009, and the Netherlands will now wait to see which two teams emerge as semi-finalists from Pool F, which comprises defending champions the Dominican Republic, the United States, Puerto Rico and Venezuela. The Netherlands, who were knocked out in the semis in the last WBC tournament in 2013, benefited from another fine pitching

performance from left-hander Diegomar Markwell. He surrendered just one run in six innings of work but again the Dutch bats did most of the damage, pounding out 13 hits. Balentien and Jurickson Profar led the hit parade with three apiece, while Kallian Sams and Yurendell Decaster also homered. The Netherlands have blasted their way into the final four, scoring 11 runs in three games in the opening round and 32 in the second. "All I asked was they not take anything for granted and that they just play hard, the way we did against Israel," Netherlands manager Hensley Meulens said. "We've played great all tournament. "We feel great about our chances." It was a disappointing tournament for Cuba. Once considered a baseball power, Cuba was runner-up to Japan in the first World Baseball Classic in 2006 but exited after going 0-3 in the second round this time. — Reuters

QUEEN'S AURA MARKS TRACK LEGEND MEARES

LONDON: Australian cycling great Anna Meares told AFP being handed the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games baton for the torch relay by Queen Elizabeth II is a personal high. The 33-year-old who won two Olympic titles and 11 world golds said receiving the baton from Queen Elizabeth at Buckingham Palace on Monday would be something to tell her grandchildren in the future. Meares-who was appearing in her role as an ambassador for the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games which gets underway in April 2018 — shared the duties on Monday with her great British rival and fellow retiree Victoria Pendleton. "It was a pretty magical experience," she told AFP after she had appeared at the Gold Coast Games presentation at Australia House. "The aura, the presence she has and the attention she draws, she just commands with such ease and such grace. "You see her in pictures and moving images on television but to be actually in her presence to shake her hand and receive the baton as the first torch bearer! "I've done some amazing things in my sporting career and I'm not sure much will ever surpass being the (Australian team) flag-bearer (at the 2012 Olympics opening ceremony). "However, on both a personal experience and personal level and what thanks to sport and the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games has allowed me to be in that place (with the Queen in Buckingham Palace) well the grandkids will always know about that!" Meares admitted she had tinges of regret she would not be bowing out at the Commonwealth Games where the velodrome bears her name. Yesterday's meeting with the British monarch. "She came to Australia with the Duke of Edinburgh before the London Games," Meares said. "I took my mum to a meeting at Parliament House (in Canberra) and I didn't realise there would be so many people, there were around 700. "So I said to my mum, because she loves the Queen and little imagined she would ever see her let alone meet her, we would position our-

selfes to the right of the stage as that is where the Queen would exit from. "However, right at the moment she was coming off they ushered forwards two lines of athletes in front of us." Meares had all but given up that they would get close to the Queen, but she hadn't counted on the determination and willness of her mother. "I thought we had missed the opportunity. But this is where I get my tactical nous from as

my mum said 'don't worry she has to leave (the room) somehow' and so mum went and parked up at the exit and held her ground as more and more people came. "She (mum) shook her hand as well and introduced me to her. "I loved that excitement and pride on her (mother) face. "For that generation Her Majesty has such an impact and to see that on my mums face and what it meant to my mum and for me to witness it is priceless." —AFP



Retired cyclist Anna Meares (R) from Australia receives the baton from Queen Elizabeth.

INDIA, AUSTRALIA AIMING TO MOVE ON FROM DRS CONTROVERSY

RANCHI: The week since India's dramatic, series-leveling win in Bangalore has been dominated by the rancorous debate over Australia skipper Steve Smith's "brain fade" moment that magnified a flaw with the Decision Review System, and his counterpart Virat Kohli's reaction to it.

When the teams meet in Ranchi, where the toss today could again determine the result on a contentiously prepared pitch, players on both teams will be focused on one primary objective: taking a 2-1 lead in the four-match series. Australia's against-the-odds 333-run win in the series-opening match at Pune ended India's long unbeaten

stretch in tests on home soil and, for the first time in a long time, put pressure on Kohli's leadership. The Australian cricket team traditionally hasn't performed well in subcontinental conditions, and many had tipped another series sweep for India. The loss stung the top-ranked Indian team, and it reacted with a heightened level of aggression in the second test, which it came back to win by 79 runs on a tense fourth day despite giving up a first-innings lead.

"Whatever happened in Bengaluru stays there," Kohli said. "We are in Ranchi now, and looking forward to this game. There is a lot of cricket to be played still." "If people choose to write or speak

about me, it's their choice," Kohli added. "It doesn't matter if people praise or criticize me." The International Cricket Council took no action against Smith, who admitted to looking up to the dressing room for help in determining whether he should challenge an umpire's decision to give him out in the second innings, or against Kohli for his angry reaction. Under the DRS, players can consult with a teammate on the field about whether to review an umpire's call, but the decision needs to be made on the field. The umpires quickly approached Smith and told him he'd lost the right to review that decision. Kohli complained bitterly on the field, and used a post-

match news conference to say the Australians had been using the tactic throughout the test.

CONDITION OF THE PITCHES

The tension escalated when the head of Cricket Australia defended the integrity of the team, saying Smith's episode was a once-off mistake, and the Board of Control for Cricket in India threatened to make a formal complaint to the ICC.

The situation simmered slightly when the rival cricket boards negotiated a truce that ensured both captains would be available to play in Ranchi.

Kohli has said he stands by the comments he made after the Bengaluru Test.

Smith, who met with the match officials yesterday before the Australian team practice session, said he also planned to meet with Kohli and match referee Richie Richardson ahead of the toss.

"Today the talk with officials was about making cricket the winner in this Test. I expect the same tomorrow as well," Smith said. "But Virat has stood by his comments, so maybe we will get a chance to clear that up. I might ask him a few questions tomorrow."

The other constant contentious topic on the tour has been over the condition of the pitches, and the wicket at the JSCA International Stadium ensured that continued. AP

MANOHAR QUILTS AS ICC CHAIRMAN

NEW DELHI: India's Shashank Manohar resigned yesterday as chairman of the International Cricket Council after a fallout with his own board over efforts to reform the game's world governing body. Manohar took over last year as the first independent ICC chairman for a two-year term and had been trying to bring in changes to the ICC's governance designed to reduce the power of cricket's most powerful nations—India, Australia and England.

But the organisation now faces a fresh bout of turmoil after the divisions between the powerful Indian board and most of the rest of the game erupted into the open.

"The ICC has confirmed it has received an email from Chairman Shashank Manohar tendering his resignation," the organisation said in a brief statement after news of the resignation had been leaked. "The ICC Board will assess the situation and next steps before making a further announcement." Manohar, the 59-year-old former head of the Indian board, cited personal reasons in his letter to ICC chief executive David Richardson, according to the cricinfo website. "I have tried to do my best and have tried to be fair and impartial in deciding matters in the functioning of the Board and in matters related to Member Boards along with the able support of all Directors," he wrote. "However, for personal reasons it is not possible for me to hold the august office of ICC Chairman and hence I am tendering my resignation as Chairman with immediate effect."

TUSSLE FOR POWER

India last month voted against a proposed shake-up of the ICC, fearing a curb of its earnings and clout as a result of the changes to the organisation's financial and governance structure.

Manohar had argued that the reforms would ensure "a more equitable distribution of revenues" and greater equality within the game by attaching equal weight to each member nation's vote in board meetings. Since India's emergence as the most powerful country in world cricket, the ICC has often been accused of failing to exert its independence on key issues of governance.

Many of the game's smaller Test-playing nations have been accused of bending to India's demands in the ICC, desperate to attract tours by India which can ensure their financial security by selling TV rights. Proposals by the ICC to create a two-tier Test system were scrapped last year after the Indian board came out in opposition to the plan. Manohar, who is a lawyer by profession, took over as president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) in October 2015 for a second stint after the death of veteran administrator Jagmohan Dalmiya. But he soon became frustrated after coming under pressure to introduce reforms to the BCCI's governance recommended by a panel convened by the Supreme Court and stood down from the post in May 2016. Cricket's massive popularity in India has helped the BCCI become by far the wealthiest of all of the sport's national boards, netting massive money from sponsorship and TV deals.

The BCCI expressed its "surprise at the sudden decision" by Manohar to quit. "Mr Manohar's contribution to Indian cricket is invaluable. He is a man of few words but excellent deeds," the board said in a statement Wednesday. However, the BCCI has been embroiled in a series of scandals in recent years, including accusations of corruption in the Indian Premier League (IPL) involving a team linked to its former head Narayanaswami Srinivasan. —AFP



COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's captain Rangana Herath (R) plays a shot as Bangladesh captain Mushfiqur Rahim (C) looks on during the first day of the second and final Test cricket match between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh at The P. Sara Oval Cricket Stadium in Colombo yesterday. — AFP

CRICKET

GRITTY CHANDIMAL LIFTS SRI LANKA AGAINST BANGLADESH

COLOMBO: Dinesh Chandimal rode his luck to score an unbeaten half-century for Sri Lanka against Bangladesh in Colombo yesterday after the tourists made a dream start to their 100th Test match. The home side reached 238-7 before bad light stopped the opening day's play, recovering from 70-4 on a turning pitch at the P. Sara Oval, owing mainly to Chandimal's patient 86 not out.

Chandimal shared a 66-run stand with Dhananjaya de Silva and then added 44 and 43 runs with Niroshan Dickwella and captain Rangana Herath to halt what had been a quick procession of wickets. Chandimal, who faced 210 balls and hit four fours in his knock, was given out lbw on 38 off the bowling of left-arm spinner Shakib Al Hasan but the decision was overturned following a review. He then top-edged another left-arm spinner Tajjul Islam to fine leg on 46 but was given a benefit of the doubt by the third umpire as TV replays on whether Mehedi Hasan had caught him cleanly were inconclusive.

Coming into the side for Lahiru Kumara as Sri Lanka's only change from their 259-run win in the first Test in Galle, de Silva gave Chandimal good support before he was bowled by Tajjul for 34. Wicketkeeper Niroshan Dickwella chipped in with 34 after de Silva's departure before Herath joined Chandimal in his effort to give Sri Lanka innings a decent look. Herath, unbeaten on 18 at the close of play, also had his share of luck as he had an lbw decision overturned off Shakib. Bangladesh were hoping to restrict Sri Lanka within 300 runs. "We need to take three more wickets, and having already bowled seven good balls to take their wickets, we can keep them within 300," said batsman Sabbir Rahman. "We need to do it within the first hour of play tomorrow." Bangladesh, sent into bowl first by Herath, had taken the honours in the opening session as off-spinner Mehedi struck twice and fast bowlers Mustafizur Rahman and Subashis Roy took one wicket apiece.

MILESTONE TEST

Mustafizur put the visitors in good heart in their milestone Test when he forced an edge from opener Dimuth Karunaratne, having cranked up the pressure by bowling three successive maidens.

Mehedi took a brilliant catch at gully as Karunaratne departed after making just seven runs. Mehedi then struck in his third over, enticing Kusal Mendis out of his crease before Mushfiqur Rahim completed a stumping. Mendis was the man-of-the-match in the first Test in Galle after scoring 194 but he departed this time having scored just five.

Sri Lanka's troubles deepened when Upul Tharanga edged Mehedi to Soumya Sarkar at slip for 15 after earlier being given a reprieve by a television replay when he was given out lbw off Mustafizur for six. Chandimal and Asela Gunaratne tried to revive the innings but Subashis struck on the stroke of lunchtime when he trapped Gunaratne lbw for 13. Bangladesh, in their quest to draw level in the second match of the two-Test series, made four changes to the squad.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Liton Das was ruled out on the eve of the match with a rib fracture, allowing Mosaddek Hossain to earn his debut. Mominul Haque, Mahmudullah and Taskin Ahmed made way for Imrul Kayes, Sabbir and Tajjul. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

COLOMBO, March: Scores at stumps on the opening day of the second Test between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh at the P. Sara Oval in Colombo yesterday:

Sri Lanka 1st innings		Extras (n1, lb12, w6, nb 2)	21
D. Karunaratne c Mehedi b Mustafizur	7	Total (seven wickets, 83.1 overs)	238
U. Tharanga c Soumya b Mehedi	11	Fall of wickets: 1-13 (Karunaratne), 2-24 (Mendis), 3-35 (Tharanga), 4-70 (Gunaratne), 5-136 (de Silva), 6-180 (Dickwella), 7-195 (Perera)	
K. Mendis st Mushfiqur b Mehedi	5	To bat: S. Lakmal, L. Sandakan	
D. Chandimal not out	86	Bowling: Mustafizur 15-5-32-2 (w5), Roy 15-2-47-1 (nb2, w1), Mehedi 15-2-58-2, Tajjul 14-2-34-1, Shakib 20.1-3-43-1, Mosaddek 4-0-11-0.	
A. Gunaratne lbw b Roy	13		
D. de Silva b Tajjul	34		
N. Dickwella b Shakib	34		
D. Perera c Soumya b Mustafizur	9		
R. Herath not out	18		



MUMBAI: This file photo taken on October 19, 2015 shows Shashank Manohar, the then-Chief Executive of the BCCI president and more recently the International Cricket Council (ICC) chairman, being escorted out of the Indian cricket board's headquarters at the Wankhede stadium in Mumbai. — AFP

RUGBY

ENGLAND LOOKING AT ALL BLACKS CLASH IN NOVEMBER

LONDON: England could play New Zealand a year earlier than scheduled if they can get an agreement to face the world champions at Twickenham on November 4, the Daily Mail reported yesterday. A quirk of the international fixture schedule means that New Zealand and England—the top two teams in the world rankings—are not currently due to meet again until 2018.

But the prospect of New Zealand playing England before then has been given added spice by the knowledge that a victory for already-crowned Six Nations champions England against Ireland in Dublin on Saturday would see them surpass the All Blacks' record of 18 successive Test wins by a major rugby union side.

However, England have not faced New Zealand during their winning run, with their last match against the All Blacks a 24-21 loss at Twickenham in 2014.

New Zealand are due to play the Barbarians at Twickenham on November 4 in a match marking the invitational club's 125th anniversary.

But according to the Mail, Ian Ritchie—the chief executive of England's governing Rugby Football Union—is lobbying to get the All Blacks to face England on that date instead. The Mail added that the major sticking point was over how the money generated from a likely 82,000 sell-out crowd would be divided, with the New Zealand Rugby Union well aware of the All Blacks' worth-reportedly seeking a 50 per-

cent share of the gate receipts, a figure equating to £3 million (\$3.6 million, 3.4 million euros) from the RFU, the world's wealthiest rugby union.

An RFU spokesman told Britain's Press Association yesterday: "We are scheduled to play New Zealand in 2018 and if an opportunity came up to play them before then we would pursue it."

New Zealand coach Steve Hansen congratulated England on equalling the All Blacks' record following their 61-21 thrashing of Scotland at Twickenham last weekend, saying the team were now producing rugby worthy of their talent under Eddie Jones. But a suspicious Jones, praised by Hansen for giving the England team a "want and desire that probably hasn't been there before," responded by saying: "It's a bit like Red Riding Hood and the wolf when the wolf comes dressed up as the grandmother."

"You always have to be careful when All Black coaches compliment you, you always have to be careful," the Australian added. England are already due to face Argentina, Australia and Samoa at Twickenham in November. A match on November 4 falls outside World Rugby's designated end-of-year Test window. By adding this fixture to the schedule, just four months after the British and Irish Lions tour New Zealand, both English and New Zealand officials could open themselves up to accusations they are more interested in making money than player welfare. —AFP

PAKISTAN RECALLS SHAHZAD AND KAMRAN IN LIMITED-OVERS SQUADS

LAHORE: Pakistan yesterday recalled opener Ahmed Shehzad and Kamran Akmal in separate squads for the four-match Twenty20 and three-match one-day series in the West Indies starting later this month.

Both batsmen earned their recalls on the back of solid performances in the recently held Pakistan Super League (PSL) where they played for opposing sides in the final.

The limited overs squads will be led by Sarfraz Ahmed, who will also keep wicket, with the first Twenty20 in Barbados on March 26. The remaining three matches will be played in Port of Spain on March 30, April 1 and 2. The one-day matches are scheduled for April 7, 9 and 11 — all in Guyana. Shehzad was dropped from the Twenty20 and one-day squad after former head coach Waqar Younis described him as "undisciplined" following Pakistan's World Twenty20 failure in India last year. But he has since shown good domestic form, scoring 653 and 286 in two one-day tournaments.

The 35-year-old Akmal last played for Pakistan in the 2014 World Twenty20 in Bangladesh and has also shown remarkable form to regain his place, finishing as top scorer in PSL with 353 runs.

Chief selector Inzamam-ul-Haq said in addition to recalls for some seniors, younger newcomers were also being given a chance. "We have given more chances to the young players who are doing well at the domestic level," said Inzamam. "The squads were also weighed on fitness and that's why Umar Akmal failed to get a place on lack of fitness," he said, referring to Kamran's younger brother.

The limited over series will be followed by three Tests for which a squad will be announced later.

Fast bowler Mohammad Amir was rested for the Twenty20 series but was included in the ODI squad. However there was no room in either squad for Azhar Ali, who stepped down as ODI captain after losing a series 4-1 in Australia in January. —AFP



DHAKA: This file photograph taken on March 30, 2014, shows Pakistan cricketer Kamran Akmal (R) playing a shot as Bangladesh captain Mushfiqur Rahim looks on during the ICC World Twenty20 tournament in Dhaka. — AFP

OLYMPICS

WINTER GAMES CAN 'UNITE' SOUTH KOREA, SAYS BACH

PYEONGCHANG: Olympics chief Thomas Bach yesterday said next year's Pyeongchang Winter Olympics can "unite" South Korea after its political turmoil, adding that he hoped the North will take part despite soaring regional tensions. Bach, visiting the mountain resort which will host the Games next February, said he had been assured of cross-party support for the event after the impeachment of president Park Geun-Hye in a corruption scandal. North Korea's bellicose nuclear posturing and Chinese anger at the deployment of a US missile defence system in South Korea have added to an unsettled atmosphere in East Asia. But Bach said he had no con-

cerns about the 2018 Games after meeting the acting president and parliamentary speaker in Seoul on Tuesday. "We could hear and feel the great support which is going across all political borders," the International Olympic Committee (IOC) president told reporters.

"Because the Koreans feel... that these Games are a good opportunity for Korea to unite again and be united also in support of their athletes," he added. "Because now the country is going through a difficult period of many political divisions." While Park was ousted over an influence-peddling scandal, nuclear-armed North Korea also launched four

ballistic missiles this month in its latest provocative test. Despite enduring tensions between the two Koreas, who remain technically at war, Bach expressed hopes that the North-which boycotted the 1988 Seoul Olympics-will take part. The South's political leaders had agreed that the Olympics will be "open to everybody", he said, when asked about North Korea.

'KOREA WILL DELIVER'

"This is the mission of the Olympic Games, to welcome the world," said Bach. "The political tensions in the region will play no role in this. "This is the philosophy of the Games. And also in this

respect I've no doubt that Korea will deliver and will offer its great hospitality for everybody." Separately, China has vowed to "resolutely take necessary measures" and Chinese protesters have targeted South Korean retailers after the deployment of the THAAD missile-defence system in South Korea. South Korea's Yonhap news agency has reported that China has banned travel agencies from selling trips to South Korea in retaliation for THAAD. But Lee Hee-Beom, the Games' chief organiser, stressed Pyeongchang had a "very close working relationship" with Beijing-which will host the next Winter Olympics in 2022 — and said he expected a lot of Chinese fans to

come. "We expect that a lot of Chinese travellers and Chinese spectators will come to Pyeongchang and enjoy the Games," said Lee. Bach and Lee were speaking at the IOC's coordination commission wrapped up its penultimate pre-Games assessment of preparations for in Pyeongchang. Commission chief Gunilla Lindberg said she was "optimistic" about Pyeongchang, where building work is on track and 17 test events have been held since December.

But she said there are a few concerns over transport and accommodation in the remote region and particularly, about creating excitement and engagement among fans.—AFP

NHL

OVECHKIN BREAKS SCORING DROUGHT, CAPITALS BEAT WILD

WASHINGTON: Alexander Ovechkin ended a 10-game scoreless drought with a second-period goal and the Washington Capitals halted their four-game losing streak Tuesday night with a 4-2 win over the Minnesota Wild in a battle of conference leaders. Nate Schmidt, Evgeny Kuznetsov and Jay Beagle also scored for the Capitals, while Braden Holtby stopped 30 shots to end his three-game losing streak and pick up his 35th win. Devon Dubnyk made 36 saves for the Wild, who got goals from Matt Dumba and Eric Staal.

PANTHERS 7, MAPLE LEAFS 2

Jonathan Marchessault scored two goals and Thomas Vanek added a career-high four assists as Florida broke a five-game losing streak, defeating Toronto at the BB&T Center. The Panthers also got goals from Aleksander Barkov, Colton Sceviour (short-handed), Reilly Smith, Jussi Jokinen (power play) and Keith Yandle. Leo Komarov and Nikita Soshnikov scored for the Maple Leafs.

LIGHTNING 2, SENATORS 1 (OT)

Victor Hedman's goal with 53.9 seconds left in overtime gave surging Tampa Bay a victory over Ottawa at Canadian Tire Centre. Brayden Point scored in regulation for the Lightning. Tommy Wingels scored for the Senators (39-22-7). Mike Condon made 35 saves for the Senators while Andrei Vasilevsky stopped 31 shots in the Tampa net.

BLACKHAWKS 4, CANADIENS 2

Patrick Kane scored a goal and an assist to help Chicago top Montreal Canadiens at the Bell Centre. Jonathan Toews, Johnny Oduya and Artemi Panarin also scored for the Blackhawks, who took over first place in the Central Division. Paul Byron and Shea Weber replied for the Canadiens.

ISLANDERS 3, HURRICANES 2 (OT)

John Tavares scored 34 seconds into

overtime and New York produced a solid bounce-back result by defeating Carolina at PNC Arena. Joshua Ho-Sang and Jason Chimera scored in a brief span of the second period for the Islanders, who lost to the same opponent by an 8-4 score a night earlier in New York. Joakim Nordstrom and Elias Lindholm scored for the Hurricanes, who have points in four consecutive games.

OILERS 7, STARS 1

Seven players made the scoresheet with goals for Edmonton as it finally got some traction going during their eight-game homestand with a victory over Dallas. Connor McDavid, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Benoit Pouliot, Oscar Klefbom, Darnell Nurse, David Desharnais and Patrick Maroon scored for the Oilers, who snapped a three-game losing streak to improve to 2-2-1 on the lengthy homestand. Brett Ritchie replied for the Stars, who lost three games in a row.

SHARKS 4, SABRES 1

Joe Pavelski continued his late-season goal surge to lead San Jose over Buffalo. Pavelski scored twice to take the team lead with 28 goals. The San Jose captain has seven goals in five games. And goalie Martin Jones made 22 saves as the Sharks enjoyed quite the disparity of shots on goal — 41-23 — which included a season-high 20 for one period in the first. Logan Couture and Michael Haley also scored for the Sharks while Jack Eichel scored his 20th for the Sabres.

COYOTES 3, KINGS 2 (SO)

Max Domi scored two goals and Anthony DeAngelo scored the deciding shootout goal as Arizona defeated Los Angeles. The Coyotes won their third straight game with Louis Domingue stopping 44 Kings' shots and nine shootout attempts. Tyler Toffoli scored both regulation goals for the Kings, who lost their second straight game.—Reuters

NHL results/standings

San Jose 4, Buffalo 1; Edmonton 7, Dallas 1; Chicago 4, Montreal 2; Tampa Bay 2, Ottawa 1 (OT); Florida 7, Toronto 2; Washington 4, Minnesota 2; NY Islanders 3, Carolina 2 (OT).

Western Conference Central Division						
W	L	OTL	GF	GA	PTS	
Chicago	44	20	5	208	173	93
Minnesota	43	19	6	225	167	92
Nashville	34	24	11	205	196	79
St. Louis	36	27	5	189	190	77
Winnipeg	30	33	7	208	224	67
Dallas	27	32	10	190	228	64
Colorado	19	46	3	131	222	41
Pacific Division						
San Jose	42	20	7	194	159	91
Calgary	39	26	4	191	185	82
Anaheim	36	23	10	181	174	82
Edmonton	36	24	9	198	182	81
Los Angeles	33	29	7	171	174	73
Vancouver	28	32	9	159	201	65
Arizona	26	35	8	168	219	60
Eastern Conference Atlantic Division						
Montreal	39	23	8	191	176	86



WASHINGTON: Evgeny Kuznetsov #92 of the Washington Capitals scores a goal against the Minnesota Wild during the second period at Verizon Center on Tuesday in Washington, DC. —AFP



OAKLAND: Philadelphia 76ers' Jahlii Okafor, left, Dario Saric (9) and TJ McConnell, right, guard Golden State Warriors' Stephen Curry (30) during the second half of an NBA basketball game Tuesday, in Oakland, Calif. Warriors won, 106-104. —AP

BASKETBALL

CURRY SCORES 29 PTS ON HIS 29TH BIRTHDAY, WARRIORS WIN

OAKLAND: Stephen Curry scored 29 points on his 29th birthday and the Golden State Warriors used a frenetic fourth-quarter rally to end a three-game skid with a 106-104 win over the Philadelphia 76ers on Tuesday night. Dario Saric intentionally missed his second free throw with 2.6 seconds remaining to try to give the Sixers one last shot, but Curry secured the ball. Curry struggled to knock down open 3-pointers again but came through from deep with 5:38 left and again with a key baseline 3 at 3:42. Matt Barnes hit one a minute later from the opposite corner for a 104-99 lead. Curry's jumper with 9:55 to play pulled the Warriors within 90-86 after Golden State trailed 90-78 to begin the final quarter. Draymond Green's 3 at 8:04 made it a one-point game, and Shaun Livingston gave Golden State the lead the next time down. Klay Thompson scored 28 and Green had 20 points, eight assists, eight rebounds and six blocks for the Warriors, who trailed by as many as 16 in the third.

CAVALIERS 128, PISTONS 96

LeBron James got his 52nd career triple-double, Kyrie Irving scored 26 points and Cleveland used a blazing start to overpower Detroit. James picked up his 10th triple-double of the season and third in the last four games at the 3:45 mark of the third quarter. In only 28 minutes, the four-time MVP finished with 16 points, 11 rebounds and 12 assists. Cleveland had lost four of five, but James helped them cruise in this one. He even overpowered a teammate at one point, flattening Irving while grabbing a rebound in the third quarter. James helped Irving to his feet then dribbled the ball up the floor. Cleveland's hot shooting buried Detroit early. The Cavaliers made their first 10 3-pointers and started by hitting 22 of 25 shots for a 60-33 lead early in the second quarter.

THUNDER 122, NETS 104

Russell Westbrook had 25 points, 19 assists and 12 rebounds in his 33rd triple-double of the season, and Oklahoma City beat Brooklyn. Westbrook shot just 6 of 18 from the field after scoring 40 or more points in five of his previous eight games, but as usual he was the dominant player on the floor even when his shot didn't fall. He was loudly cheered throughout the night by what appeared a full and lively crowd despite a winter storm that pounded New York on Tuesday, and the fans roared when he grabbed his 10th rebound with just under five minutes to play for the 70th triple-double of his career. Victor Oladipo added 21 points for the Thunder, who won their third straight game. Enes Kanter had 17 points and Brooklyn native Taj Gibson finished with 17 points and eight rebounds. Brook Lopez scored 25 points and Jeremy Lin had 24 for the Nets, who failed in their attempt to win consecutive games for the first time this season.

KNICKS 87, PACERS 81

Carmelo Anthony scored 15 of his 22 points in the fourth quarter, Derrick Rose added 16 points and New York overcame a 13-point third-quarter deficit to beat Indiana. Knicks forward Kristaps Porzingis exited in the third quarter with a left leg injury. Rookie Willy Hernangomez entered in his place and had 13 points and 16

NBA results/standings

Golden State 106, Philadelphia 104; New Orleans 100, Portland 77; Oklahoma City 122, Brooklyn 104; NY Knicks 87, Indiana 81; Cleveland 128, Detroit 96.

Eastern Conference Atlantic Division					Western Conference Northwest Division				
W	L	PCT	GB	Utah	42	25	.627	-	
Boston	42	25	.627	Oklahoma City	38	29	.567	4	
Toronto	39	28	.582	Denver	32	35	.478	10	
NY Knicks	27	41	.397	Portland	29	37	.439	12.5	
Philadelphia	24	43	.358	Minnesota	28	38	.424	13.5	
Brooklyn	12	54	.182	29.5	Pacific Division				
Central Division					Golden State	53	14	.791	-
Cleveland	44	22	.667	-	LA Clippers	40	27	.597	13
Indiana	34	33	.507	10.5	Sacramento	26	41	.388	27
Detroit	33	34	.493	11.5	Phoenix	22	45	.328	31
Milwaukee	32	34	.485	12	LA Lakers	20	47	.299	33
Chicago	32	35	.478	12.5	Southwest Division				
Southeast Division					Washington	41	25	.621	-
Atlanta	37	30	.552	4.5	San Antonio	52	14	.788	-
Miami	32	35	.478	9.5	Houston	46	21	.687	6.5
Charlotte	29	38	.433	12.5	Memphis	37	30	.552	15.5
Orlando	24	44	.353	18	Dallas	28	38	.424	24
					New Orleans	27	40	.403	25.5

rebounds. New York had lost its last three games. Anthony also had 13 rebounds. Paul George scored 22 points for the Pacers, who failed to build on their sixth-place lead in the Eastern Conference. Myles Turner had 17 points and 12 rebounds. The Knicks trailed 59-46 with 9:07 left in the third after Turner's basket but closed out the quarter on an 18-3 run, capped by Anthony's 3-pointer that gave New York a 64-62 lead with 52 seconds left.

PELICANS 100, TRAIL BLAZERS 77

DeMarcus Cousins scored 22 points, Anthony

Davis had 15 points and 15 rebounds and New Orleans beat Portland. Cousins had nine rebounds and three assists. He made 9 of 17 2-point shots but missed all five of his 3-point attempts. Jordan Crawford had 13 points and scored in double figures for the fourth time in four games since being signed to a 10-day contract March 5. Solomon Hill scored 12 points, E'Twaun Moore had 11 and Jrue Holiday 10. Damian Lillard scored 29 points to lead Portland, which lost for the second time in its last seven games. Shabazz Napier came off the bench to score 10 points.—AP

TENNIS

KERBER OUSTED AT INDIAN WELLS

INDIAN WELLS: Angelique Kerber won't celebrate her return to world number one with an Indian Wells title after a shock fourth-round exit Tuesday at the hands of Elena Vesnina. Russia's 14th-seeded Vesnina toppled the second-seeded German 6-3, 6-3 to book a quarter-final clash with seven-time Grand Slam champion Venus Williams. Williams battled back from a break down in the final set to beat Chinese qualifier Peng Shuai 3-6, 6-1, 6-3.

"(I) wasn't really sure how it was going to turn out today," Williams said. "There were some up-and-downs and errors. It was so frustrating. But I feel like I got my focus more in that second set and towards the end of the third, because I'm just a competitor. So if things get closer, then I think my better tennis is going to come."

Vesnina, the 14th seed, notched her first career victory over a top-three player. Kerber was the top-ranked player in the draw, and will return to number one in the world on Monday despite the defeat thanks to Serena Williams' injury withdrawal from the event.

Vesnina went up a quick break and never trailed. She broke Kerber five times, and man-

aged to stifle a would-be rally that saw the German close the gap from 4-1 to 4-3 in the second set. "I was a little nervous at the end of the match," Vesnina said. "So I'm really happy that I closed that match because this win means a lot to me." Kerber, winner of the Australian and US Opens last year, had struggled past 62nd-ranked Pauline Parmentier in the previous round and said she never found her rhythm against Vesnina. "It was not my day," she said. "I was doing a lot of mistakes. I was not moving, actually, good. But it's happened. I mean, she played from the beginning until the end good tennis, and she was aggressive. So she took the game in her hands." Eighth-seeded Russian Svetlana Kuznetsova sped past Caroline Garcia 6-1, 6-4 to lead the way into the quarters. Kuznetsova is in the last eight in the California desert for the first time since reaching back-to-back finals in 2007 and 2008. The 31-year-old Russian, owner of two Grand Slam singles titles, enjoyed a resurgence in 2016, winning two titles and upsetting world number one Serena Williams in Miami as she returned to the top 10 in the world for the first time since 2010.—AFP

AFRICAN SOCCER SUPREMO HAYATOU FACES CHALLENGER IN BID FOR EIGHTH TERM

ADDIS ABABA: Issa Hayatou, the last of the old generation leaders in world football, faces a rare and determined challenge when he bids for an eighth term as head of the Confederation of African Football in today's election.

Ahmad Ahmad, head of the Madagascar Football Association, has picked up key votes with his calls for "change" against the 70-year-old Hayatou. The Cameroonian official remains favourite but many African federations refused to say who they would back when asked by AFP. "Issa has never faced a challenge like this and he has had to call in some favours," one CAF executive member said ahead of the vote at a congress in Addis Ababa.

Hayatou has headed CAF since 1988 and is a senior vice president of FIFA. He has been credited with increasing the number of African teams at the World Cup and bringing in extra finance for the continent's competitions.

But he has also faced controversy, accused by a British newspaper of receiving \$1.5 million to vote for Qatar when it was awarded the 2022 World Cup seven years ago.

In 2011, Hayatou was reprimanded by the International Olympic Committee over money he received from the scandal-tainted sports marketing company ISL in 1995. He has always insisted the money went to CAF and has always strongly denied any

wrongdoing. "Noone has been able to hurt him despite all the rumours of corruption," a former top member of the FIFA world body management said.

UNCERTAIN VOTES

Ahmad, 57, has also been implicated in the 2022 World Cup bribe-taking. The Sunday Times said he received between \$30,000 and \$100,000 for his vote. The Madagascar soccer chief has called the allegations unfounded.

"If people want change there is no other choice. Only I can dare (to challenge Hayatou)," Ahmad told AFP during a recent interview at the Madagascar Football Federation offices in Antananarivo. "My

programme is the reform of the administration of CAF to avoid the involvement of politics in the organisation," he added. Ahmad is already a member of the CAF executive and he has been promised the support of the 14 member Council of Southern African Football Associations (COSAFA).

Zimbabwe Football Association chief, Philip Chiyangwa, who is also COSAFA leader, said: "We have all endorsed Ahmad. We need new ideas."

In the group, South Africa has not publicly committed to vote for Ahmad.

But an official from the Football Association of Malawi said, speaking on condition of anonymity, told AFP: "The

thinking is that Hayatou has overstayed and has run out of ideas. Africa needs fresh minds to develop football."

In a sign of the furious lobbying going on, the influential vote of Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation and a football powerhouse, appeared in doubt. Nigerian Football Federation president Amaju Pinnick had wanted to vote for Ahmad. But the government has called for a vote for Hayatou.

The 12-member Council of East and Central Africa football associations (CECAFA) which includes Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, Burundi, South Sudan, Djibouti, and Somalia, voted a resolution in February to back Hayatou.—AFP

LEICESTER BREAKTHROUGH KEEPS FAIRYTALE ALIVE

LEICESTER: In progressing to the Champions League quarter-finals for the first time, Leicester City preserved a golden thread stretching back all the way to last season's miraculous Premier League title success. The thread has worn close to breaking in recent weeks, with Leicester's perilous slide towards the relegation zone costing popular manager Claudio Ranieri his job. But after overcoming a 2-1 deficit to beat Sevilla in the Champions League last 16, the sense of fearlessness that became their hallmark a year ago has returned. "They looked so fluid and had such amazing passion and determination," the club's former manager David Pleat told BBC Radio 5 Live after Leicester's 2-0 win over Sevilla on Tuesday. "I don't think they would want either Real Madrid or Barcelona in the quarter-final. But who would have thought they would win the title last year? So whoever they face, who knows?"

As well as Barcelona and Real Madrid, Juventus, Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund also lie in wait in Friday's last-eight draw. Atletico Madrid and Manchester City are in pole position to join them ahead of the final two last 16 second legs later on Wednesday. Asked who he hoped to avoid in the quarter-finals, Juve's emblematic captain Gianluigi Buffon replied: "Leicester."

The prospect of a genuine European superpower arriving at the King Power Stadium will further help to restore some of the magic dust that had been rubbed off amid Leicester's domestic toils.

Eliminated from both cup competitions and fighting to keep themselves above the Premier League bottom three, the Champions League represents their only hope of prolonging last season's fairytale.

Wednesday's Daily Mail back-page head-

line said Leicester could "CARRY ON DREAMING", while The Guardian said victory over Sevilla had seen Leicester "write a new fairytale". The Times said Leicester were "back in fantasy land". The great irony of Leicester's resurgence is that it has taken the dismissal of Ranieri, architect of the title win, for the players to start playing like they had last season.

'PLAY TO OUR STRENGTHS'

They had already found the Champions League to be well-suited to their preferred contain-and-counter strategy, however, having recorded four wins and kept four clean sheets during the group phase.

Ranieri tried to introduce greater sophistication to Leicester's tactics, notably deploying Riyad Mahrez in a central role in the 2-1 first-leg loss to Sevilla, which was to prove his last game. But the instant impact enjoyed by his successor Craig Shakespeare suggests Leicester's players are both happier and more effective with the simple 4-4-2 formula used to such devastating effect last season. "I think we have to play to our strengths," said Shakespeare, Ranieri's former assistant.

"You have to be concerned about the opposition, and know their strengths, but as a football club, we have to know our strengths. You saw that in abundance in the performance (against Sevilla), in terms of desire, but we can play a bit as well. (Beating Sevilla) epitomises what we're about." Tactical factors only go so far in explaining the Leicester turnaround under Shakespeare, which started with successive 3-1 wins over Liverpool and Hull City. The sight of Jamie Vardy and Shinji Okazaki once again breathlessly harrying opposition centre-backs suggested the change has been as much psychological as anything else.—AFP

EXCITEMENT MOUNTS AS TOGO LAUNCH WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP

ANEHO: It is a scene played out in football all over the world every day: A team huddles together in the tense minutes before kick-off of a crucial match.

But Ayao Adjoa, captain of FC Athleta, and her team-mates are making a small piece of history by playing in Togo's first official women's football championship.

"It's a great pleasure for me to play the championship and my only dream is to become a great football star like Emmanuel Adebayor," says Adjoa, who is just 17, referring to the veteran Togo striker, an icon in African football.

The players-nicknamed the Spikes by their small but dedicated legion of enthusiastic Togolese fans-were singing and dancing in a corner of the old municipal stadium of Aneho, about 50km east of Togo's capital of Lome. Sixteen clubs are participating in the months-long championship held in stadiums across the West African country of seven million people.

As encouragement to participate, each club received a grant of 500,000 CFA francs (760 euros) from the national federation.

The goal is to revive Togo's defunct women's national team.

"If men can't bring back the cup to the country, then we will try it with women," said Christine Mana Dzodope, chairwoman of the women's football commission, referring to Togo's disappointing results in the last Africa Cup of Nations.

The Togolese Football Federation (FTF) had long promised a women's championship but, overwhelmed by corruption scandals, it had until now failed to launch it. Internal wrangling triggered Togo's top-flight football to be suspended in late 2014.

FIFA gave Togo a red card, sacking embattled federation president Gabriel Ameyi and setting up a "normalisation committee" structure to manage daily affairs and organise new elections.

Both men and women suffered as for two years, no matches took place in Togo.

Organising this championship was a goal-and FIFA stipulation-for the new leaders of the FTF, who were elected in February 2016 following the protracted crisis that rocked Togolese football.

With the new and improved federation up and running, games are finally getting under way. Six months after the men's championship started, now it's the women's turn to lace up their boots and take to the pitch. The first objective is to get the women playing, explains Dzodope. "The second is then to form a national team." In many countries on the continent, women's football isn't taken seriously and can be subject to prejudice.

Last year, a senior Nigeria Football Federation official blamed the women's poor performance on their alleged homosexuality, saying "lesbianism kills teams."—AFP



SHANGHAI: Shanghai SIPG's Brazilian forward Hulk (C) and teammate Elkeson celebrate a goal during the AFC Asian Champions League group football match between China's Shanghai SIPG and Japan's Urawa Red Diamonds in Shanghai yesterday. — AFP

SOCCER

ELKESON LEADS CHINA'S BRAZILIAN CARNIVAL IN ASIA

SHANGHAI: Shanghai SIPG's prolific marksman Elkeson scored with an outrageous 45-yard effort as China's Brazilian imports justified their expensive price tags in the AFC Champions League yesterday. Hulk, a 55 million euro signing from Zenit St Petersburg, was another Brazilian on the score-sheet as Andre Villas-Boas's SIPG kept their 100 percent record in Group F with a 3-2 win against Japan's Urawa Red Diamonds. SIPG's rivals, Jiangsu Suning also dispatched Japanese opposition as former Chelsea midfielder Ramires was enjoying a carnival of his own at Gamba Osaka, scoring the only goal in a man-of-the-match performance. Elkeson's stunning strike past the stranded goalkeeper Shusaku Nishikawa put Andre Villas-Boas's SIPG 2-0 ahead on the stroke of half-time after Shi Ke's headed opener.

With Brazil international and record 60 million euro signing Oscar pulling the strings in midfield it soon became 3-0 on 52 minutes when Hulk used all his strength to brush off three challenges before slotting through the hapless Nishikawa's legs. Urawa got one back against the run of play when Rafael Silva was hauled down in the box and got up to convert the penalty himself. And Wataru Endo's scrambled goal six minutes from time gave SIPG a few nervy moments before the full-time whistle. Meanwhile in Osaka, Ramires was running the show as Jiangsu, bankrolled by the giant Suning group that also controls Inter Milan, stayed on top of Group H with a 1-0 win as the big-spending club got in search of their first Asian title. The Brazilian midfielder, who cost Jiangsu 28 million euros from Chelsea in January 2016, struck a gorgeous finish with his left foot from 20 yards six minutes before half-time.

Gamba threw everything forward in the second half as they went in search of an equaliser, but it was Jiangsu who went closest to another goal with some lightning counter-attacking led by Ramires and fellow Brazilian Alex Teixeira, who cost 50 million euros from Shakhtar Donetsk. The result put Jiangsu five points clear at the top of Group H with a perfect three wins from three games.

SYDNEY STUN SEOUL

Former Asian champions Western Sydney Wanderers had lost both of their opening Group F games but they stunned FC Seoul 3-2 in the Korean capital in the upset of the night.

Goals from inside the box by Lachlan Scott, Terry Antonis from the penalty spot and a long-range Jaushua Sotirio effort put the 2014 AFC Champions into a shock 3-0 lead with just over an hour played.

Yun Il-Lok gave the fans at the Seoul World Cup Stadium hope with a tight-angled finish on 66 minutes and when he got his second six minutes later an unlikely comeback was on. But Wanderers managed to hold firm in the face of a late siege to take the three points.

Another Australian side, Adelaide United, got their first point of the campaign after coming from behind twice in a pulsating 3-3 draw at home to Korea's Jeju United in the other Group H match. After a goalless first half the South Australian side took the lead when Papa Diawara stroked home a 51st-minute penalty. Jeju hit back 10 minutes later through their giant striker Frederic Mendy and led when Brazilian Marcelo Toscano thumped home an unstoppable right-foot piledriver on 71 minutes.

Adelaide pulled it back to 2-2 through Sergio Cirio's header to set up a frantic finale.

Kwon Soon-Hyung fired Jeju 3-2 ahead with six minutes remaining only for never-say-die Adelaide to equalise within 60 seconds of the restart through Mark Ochieng.—AFP

MOURINHO SAYS UNDER-FIRE POGBA DESERVES 'RESPECT'

MANCHESTER: Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho has hit back at the mounting criticism being heaped upon Paul Pogba, saying the France midfielder is the victim of jealousy from former professional players now working in the media. Pogba has been under an understandably intense spotlight since his world record £89.3 million (\$108.9 million, 102.4 million euros) pre-season return to United from Italian side Juventus. In recent weeks his form has been widely criticised, especially after Monday's FA Cup quarter-final loss at Chelsea where Pogba seemed to shoulder much of the blame for what was just United's second defeat since early November. But Mourinho has launched a passionate defence of Pogba, still only 24, and insists his strong personality means that he "does not give a s***" about his critics. "It is not Paul's fault that he gets 10 times the money some players did in the past," Mourinho told a news conference on Wednesday ahead of the second leg of United's Europa League tie against Russian side Rostov at Old Trafford on Thursday.

"It is not his fault that some pundits are in real trouble with their lives and need every coin to survive and Paul is a multi-millionaire. It is not his fault! I think he deserves respect. I think his family deserve respect.

"He is from a working family, a family with three boys and I am sure they need a lot of food on their table each day because they are all giants so I am sure that the mum and dad had to work hard for many, many years for them.

"A kid that came to Manchester as a teenager, who fought for his career here and was not afraid to move and go to another country (Italy) and look for better conditions for him, a kid that reached the top of the world with this work, nobody gave him anything." The Portuguese manager added: "So I am really, really worried with the previous generations that things are going in such a direction that envy is everywhere. "And I am very

happy with Paul and the club is very happy with Paul. And because of his personality he doesn't give a s' to what people say." The disappointment of losing at Stamford Bridge in a last-eight tie which featured the controversial sending off of United midfielder Andre Herrera — was compounded by former Chelsea manager Mourinho's current side facing travel problems on their return to Manchester.

A delay to the team plane arriving in London meant Mourinho and his squad were forced into a long coach trip north which saw the team arrive back at their home base at 4:00am local time (0400 GMT), eight hours before their next scheduled training session. But Mourinho believes such adversity can bring United-and supporters-closer together. "The only thing I can tell you is that my players did what everybody could see on the Monday night and Tuesday 12 o'clock (1200 GMT), they were here to train again as they great professionals they are and the great commitment they have and the fantastic group of boys I work with," said Mourinho.

"We had one 'gift' and we thought one 'gift' was enough and we thought two was too much and then the third 'gift'. "The first 'gift' was to play Monday and then the next 'gift' is 10 men and then third was to have a promenade on the M6 (motorway), but we are professional so the next morning we were here to train and the same today and tomorrow (Thursday) "The fans will give us this extra energy so we believe that tomorrow we can cope with the situation and fight to be in the quarter-final."

Zlatan Ibrahimovic is available for the second leg against Rostov, with United having drawn 1-1 in Russia. However, fellow strikers Anthony Martial and Wayne Rooney are both injured as United try to take another step towards winning the Europa League and qualify for next season's Champions League.—AFP

2017 UNDER-20 WORLD CUP DRAW

SEOUL: Draw for the 2017 FIFA Under-20 World Cup, to be held in South Korea on May 20-June 11, announced yesterday:

- Group A**
South Korea, Argentina, England, Guinea
- Group B**
Germany, Mexico, Venezuela, Vanuatu
- Group C**
Portugal, Costa Rica, Zambia, Iran

- Group D**
Uruguay, Japan, Italy, South Africa
- Group E**
France, New Zealand, Honduras, Vietnam
- Group F**
USA, Senegal, Saudi Arabia, Ecuador. — AFP



SEOUL: Argentinian football star Diego Maradona holds up the name of Germany during the official draw for the FIFA under-20 football World Cup in Suwon, south of Seoul, yesterday. The FIFA U-20 World Cup will be held in South Korea from May 20 to June 11. — AFP



MANCHESTER: Manchester United's French midfielder Paul Pogba (C) and Manchester United's Spanish midfielder Juan Mata (R) take part in a training session at their Carrington base in Manchester, north west England, yesterday, on the eve of their UEFA Europa League Round of 16 second-leg football match against Rostov. — AFP

Sports

India's Manohar
quits as ICC
chairman



Elkeson leads
China's Brazilian
carnival in Asia



THURSDAY, MARCH 16, 2016

ANGELIQUE KERBER OUSTED AT INDIAN WELLS

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MONACO: Manchester City's Serbian defender Aleksandar Kolarov (C) challenges Monaco's Portuguese midfielder Bernardo Silva (L) and Monaco's French forward Valere Germain (R) during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 football match between Monaco and Manchester City at the Stade Louis II in Monaco yesterday. — AFP

MONACO DUMP CITY OUT OF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

MONACO: Tiemoue Bakayoko's superb header fired Monaco into the Champions League quarter-finals as yesterday's 3-1 victory condemned Pep Guardiola's Manchester City to a painful exit on away goals.

Trailing 5-3 from the first leg in England, teenage starlet Kylian Mbappe put Monaco ahead on the night after just eight minutes at the Stade Louis II and Brazilian midfielder Fabinho converted the home side's second just before the half hour.

Leroy Sane's 71st-minute goal handed City a 6-5 advantage on aggregate, but Bakayoko turned home Thomas Lemar's free-kick 13 minutes from time as Monaco claimed a famous win.

Monaco go through to Friday's draw for the last eight in Nyon carrying French hopes following Paris Saint-Germain's shock elimination,

while Guardiola suffered his earliest Champions League exit as a manager.

"It's an immense joy to score in the Champions League. I didn't expect this," said Bakayoko. "Over two games we deserved to qualify. Now we want to keep going." The French league leaders suffered a blow before kick-off as Radamel Falcao, who scored twice in the first leg, failed to recover from a hip injury in time and was replaced by the versatile Valere Germain.

Jemerson returned in place of the suspended Kamil Glik in defence, while Guardiola, who took charge of his 100th game in Europe, made two changes with Gael Clichy and Aleksandar Kolarov given the nod ahead of Nicolas Otamendi and Yaya Toure.

Coach Leonardo Jardim had challenged Monaco to draw inspiration from the side

which dumped out Real Madrid en route to the 2004 final, recovering from a 4-2 defeat in the first leg of that year's quarter-finals before knocking the Spanish giants out on away goals. And the hosts were inspired by 18-year-old Mbappe, who has emerged as one of Europe's most promising talents amid Monaco's thrilling pursuit of the French title this season.

FAST START DAZZLES CITY

Willy Caballero stood tall to repel Mbappe's crisp early strike as he knifed through the City defence, but the Argentine goalkeeper was helpless as the teenager poked home Bernardo Silva's driven low cross just a minute later. City recovered from twice falling behind in the first leg, but the opening goal emboldened Monaco as Germain unleashed a searing

strike from distance that zipped not too far over. Guardiola had emphasised the best form of defence would be attack for City, yet the visitors struggled to settle and Monaco grabbed their second goal in not dissimilar fashion on 29 minutes.

Lemar fed the ball into the overlapping run of Benjamin Mendy, a reported target of City's this summer, and the left-back picked out Fabinho to side-foot beyond Caballero.

Mbappe's electrifying pace posed a constant threat for City, but the Premier League side gradually began to pose Monaco problems as well although Raheem Sterling's hesitancy allowed the hosts to clear as the England winger looked to tee up Sergio Aguero. The Argentine striker then skied over from close range after Sane skipped past Andrea Raggi down the left-hand flank,

before Danijel Subasic thrust himself superbly in the way after Aguero was picked out by David Silva inside the area.

Sane broke in behind the Monaco backline once more but steered his effort the wrong side of the near post with Subasic charging off his line, but City finally broke through with 19 minutes left.

Sterling broke in from the right and his low shot was palmed away by Subasic, but Sane reacted quickest to thump the rebound into the roof of the net and change the complexion of the tie.

However that merely drew an immediate response from Monaco as Lemar whipped in a devilish free-kick that Bakayoko expertly planted into the far corner to consign Guardiola to a first-ever last 16 European exit.—AFP

OBLAK STARS IN STALEMATE AS ATLETICO PROGRESS

MADRID: Atletico Madrid booked their place in the Champions League quarter-finals for a fourth consecutive season but had goalkeeper Jan Oblak to thank for avoiding defeat in a 0-0 draw with Bayer Leverkusen yesterday.

Oblak produced a remarkable triple save midway through the second half as Atletico held on to their 4-2 first-leg advantage to take their place in Friday's draw for the last eight.

And the home fans didn't even get to cheer the return of hero Fernando Torres two weeks on from being knocked unconscious in a sickening head clash as Atletico boss Diego Simeone left the former Spanish international on the bench for the full 90 minutes.

New Leverkusen boss Tayfun Korkut was taking charge of his first Champions League game after Roger Schmidt was sacked when Leverkusen's first-leg defeat was followed by a 6-2 thrashing at Borussia Dortmund.

Korkut summoned a much-improved performance from the Germans as they forced Atletico onto the back foot for long spells.

However, the damage had already been done as the hosts registered their 17th clean sheet in their last 21 Champions League home games.

Leverkusen had the chance to bring the tie back to life after just four minutes but Kevin Volland pulled his shot across Oblak and beyond the far post.

Atletico have only ever been eliminated from the Champions League under Simeone by Real Madrid.

Javier Hernandez got Real's winner in their quarter-final clash two years ago, but the Mexican didn't come back to haunt Simeone's men as he blazed over with another decent opening.

Atletico took until seven minutes before the break to threaten but then forced Bernd Leno into two fine saves in 60 seconds.

Firstly, Angel Correa was denied before Koke's low driven shot was turned behind by the German international.

Only a poor cross from Volland denied Hernandez what should have been a tap-in at the start of the second half after great work

from Julian Brandt. At the other end, Atletico went close twice in quick succession once more as Correa danced inside two Leverkusen challenges before stabbing just wide.

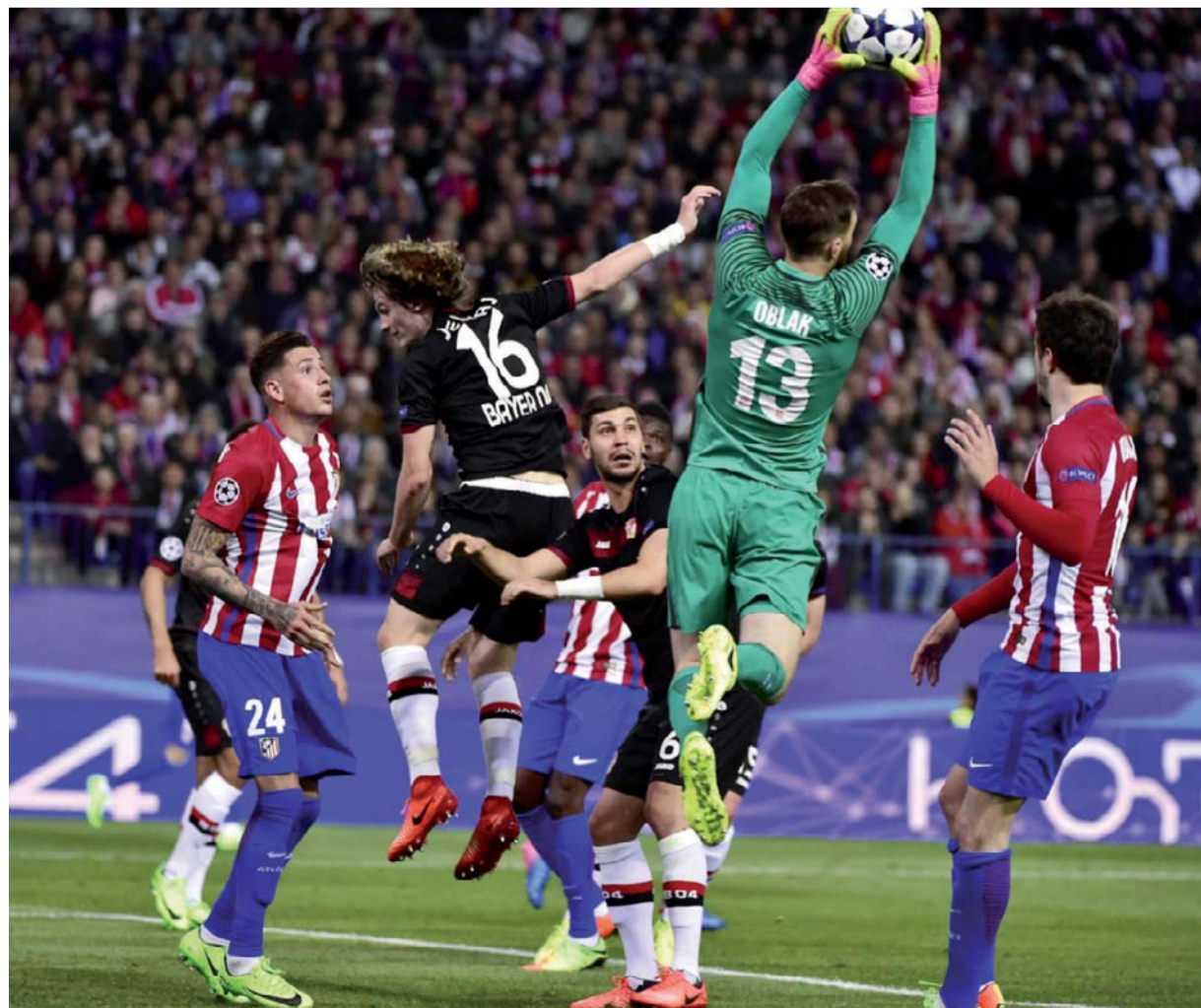
Antoine Griezmann was then inches away from his 22nd goal of the season with a measured chip over Leno that floated just wide.

The highlight of the match came 21 minutes from time when Oblak pulled off an incredible triple save to end Leverkusen's hopes of a comeback.

Brandt pounced on a slack pass from Jose Maria Gimenez and after he was denied one-on-one with Oblak, the Slovenian twice pulled himself off the ground to save Volland's follow-up efforts.

Oblak's work for the night wasn't done as he still had to make saves from long-range efforts by Leon Bailey, Wendell and Kevin Kampl to prevent Atletico slumping to just a second Champions League home defeat under Simeone.

But the hosts held on to extend Spanish clubs' winning run over German sides in European competition to 11 ties.—AFP



MADRID: Atletico Madrid's Slovenian goalkeeper Jan Oblak stops a ball during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 second leg football match Club Atletico de Madrid vs Bayer Leverkusen at the Vicente Calderon stadium in Madrid yesterday. — AFP

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March 12th, 2017 Till April 6th, 2017

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KUWAIT SCENERY & NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION

2017

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INDIA'S RICHEST MAN SHAKES UP MOBILE MARKET



PITTSBURGH: A shopper passes a display in the window of a J Crew store in the Shadyside shopping district of Pittsburgh. The Commerce Department released US retail sales data for February yesterday. — AP

US RETAIL SALES WEAKEST IN SIX MONTHS

INFLATION FIRING, CONSUMER PRICES EDGE UP 0.1%

WASHINGTON: US retail sales recorded their smallest increase in six months in February as households cut back on motor vehicle purchases and discretionary spending, the latest indication that the economy lost further momentum in the first quarter. Other data yesterday showed a steady increase in inflation, with the consumer price index posting its biggest year-on-year increase in nearly five years in February. Firming inflation could allow the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates on Wednesday despite signs of slowing domestic demand.

"Nothing here to suggest the Fed shouldn't raise interest rates at the policy meeting that concludes later today," said Paul Ashworth, chief US economist at Capital Economics in Toronto.

The Commerce Department said retail sales edged up 0.1 percent last month, the weakest reading since August. But January's retail sales were revised up to show a 0.6 percent rise instead of the previously reported 0.4 percent advance. Sales were likely held back by delays in issuing tax refunds this year as part of efforts by the government to combat fraud. Compared to February last year retail sales were up 5.7 percent. Excluding automobiles, gasoline, building materials and food services, retail sales rose 0.1 percent after an upwardly revised 0.8 percent jump in January. These so-called core retail sales, which correspond most closely with the consumer spending component of gross domestic product,

were previously reported to have increased 0.4 percent in January.

"The later-than-usual processing of income tax refunds may have hampered consumer spending. However, the IRS has now caught up to last year's pace, and so spending could get a bump up in March," said Gus Faucher, deputy chief economist at PNC Financial in Pittsburgh.

In a separate report, the Labor Department said its Consumer Price Index ticked up 0.1 percent last month as a drop in gasoline prices offset increases in the cost of food and rental accommodation. That was the weakest reading in the CPI since July and followed a 0.6 percent jump in January. In the 12 months through February, the CPI accelerated 2.7 percent, the biggest year-on-year gain since March 2012.

The CPI rose 2.5 percent in the year to January. Inflation is firming in part as the 2015 drop, which was driven by lower oil prices, fades from the calculation. The so-called core CPI, which strips out food and energy costs, increased 0.2 percent last month as new motor vehicle prices fell and apparel prices moderated after spiking in January. The core CPI increased 0.3 percent in January. In the 12 months through February, the core CPI increased 2.2 percent after advancing 2.3 percent in January. It was the 15th straight month the year-on-year core CPI remained in the 2.1 percent to 2.3 percent range. The Fed has a 2 percent inflation target and tracks an inflation measure

which is currently at 1.7 percent. The US central bank was expected to raise its overnight benchmark interest rate by 25 basis points to a range of 0.75 percent to 1.00 percent. It increased borrowing costs last December and has forecast three rate hikes in 2017.

US financial markets were little moved by the data as traders awaited the outcome of the Fed's meeting. "Should inflation continue to firm and consumer spending remain solid, we expect the Fed will hike again in June, and at least three times this year," said Michael Hanson, chief economist at

TD Securities in New York. February's retail sales added to January's weak reports on trade, construction and business spending that have pointed to sluggish economic growth in the first quarter.

The Atlanta Fed is forecasting GDP rising at a 1.2 percent annualized rate in the first quarter. With the labor market near full employment, slowing growth probably understates the health of the economy. In addition, GDP growth tends to be weaker in the first quarter because of calculation issues that the government has acknowledged and is working to resolve.

Tightening labor market conditions, which are steadily lifting wages, continue to underpin consumer spending. In February, motor vehicle sales fell 0.2 percent after declining 1.3 percent the prior month. Receipts at service stations slipped 0.6 percent, reflecting lower gasoline prices.

Sales at electronics and appliances recorded their biggest decline since December 2011. Sales at clothing stores were the weakest in nearly a year. Retailers including J.C. Penney Co Inc, Abercrombie & Fitch and Macy's Inc are scaling back on brick-and-mortar operations amid increased competition from online retailers, led by Amazon.com.

Sales at online retailers jumped 1.2 percent last month. Receipts at building material stores increased 1.8 percent. Americans also cut back on spending at restaurants and bars, and spent less on hobbies and sporting goods. — Reuters



NEW YORK: Traders and financial professionals work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE), March 15, 2017 in New York City. Traders and financial experts were bullish yesterday that the Federal Reserve would raise interest rates. — AFP

IMPACT OF OPEC CUTS WILL TAKE TIME TO BE FELT: IEA

PARIS: OPEC countries are complying with a landmark deal to reduce a worldwide glut in oil, but it will take some time yet before the oil market feels the full impact of the reduction in output and prices stabilize, the International Energy Agency said yesterday. The implementation of the OPEC production agreement appears in February to have maintained the solid start seen in January, the IEA said in its latest monthly report.

"OPEC kept up robust adherence to its ... supply cut. For the first two months of the deal the compliance rate averaged 98 percent," it said, adding that "global oil supplies rose in February as (both) OPEC and non-OPEC producers pumped more." At the end of November, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries agreed to cut output by 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd) from January 1, initially for a period of six months. Then in December, non-OPEC producers led by Russia agreed to cut their own output to 558,000 bpd.

The aim was to reduce a glut in global oil supply that has depressed prices, which currently stand at around \$48-\$51 per barrel. Nevertheless, global oil supplies increased by 260,000 bpd to 96.52 million bpd in February, the IEA calculated.

OPEC increased output by 170,000 bpd to 32 million bpd and non-OPEC oil production increased by 90,000 bpd to 57.8 million bpd, largely due to higher US output. This meant that OPEC's compliance rate with the agreed output cut stood at 91 percent, down from 105 percent in January.

And after a compliance rate of 40 percent in January for the 11 non-OPEC countries, there was still little information available on production levels in February, the IEA said. Nevertheless, the non-OPEC output was seen "slightly higher following rising output from Kazakhstan and

Sudan/South Sudan and with Russian production essentially unchanged," it added.

Shouldering the burden

The IEA said that Saudi Arabia was shouldering the bulk of the cuts in overall OPEC production and while it actually increased output by 180,000 bpd to 9.98 million bpd in February, it kept below the agreed limit of 10.06 million bpd. "The market needs time for the full impact of the big supply cuts under the output reduction agreements to be felt," the report said. "If current production levels were maintained to June when the output deal expires, there is an implied market deficit of 500,000 bpd for the first half of 2017, assuming, of course, nothing changes elsewhere in supply and demand," the agency stated.

"It is unclear at this stage whether OPEC will extend its six-month supply pact to the end of the year," the IEA said. "For those looking for a re-balancing of the oil market the message is that they should be patient, and hold their nerve. In the meantime, the volatility that suddenly broke out last week will probably recur, as the IEA has regularly warned."

Investors are nervous because of a surprisingly big jump in US stockpiles reported last week and increased shale production. Overall, OECD stocks jumped for the first time in six months in January, increasing by 48 million barrels to 3.03 billion barrels "and preliminary data for February suggests they have fallen back again only modestly," the IEA said. Turning to demand, the IEA estimated that "having expanded by 1.6 million bpd in 2016, global oil product demand growth is forecast to decelerate to 1.4 million bpd in 2017." — AFP

CHINESE PREMIER WARNS US AGAINST 'TRADE WAR'

BEIJING: Chinese Premier Li Keqiang yesterday warned the United States against starting a trade war while expressing optimism that the world's two largest economies could keep relations steady despite Trump-era frictions. "We don't want to see any trade war breaking out between the two countries. That wouldn't make our trade fairer," Li told reporters at a press conference closing China's annual parliamentary session.

"No matter what bumps the China-US relationship may run into, we hope this relationship will continue to move forward in a positive direction." China and the United States are currently discussing arrangements for a summit between President Donald Trump and his counterpart Xi Jinping that could help ease tensions stoked by Trump's fiery election-campaign rhetoric.

Trump threatened to upend decades of multilateralism and raised fears of a trade war with China while on the campaign trail. After his election victory, he angered Beijing with a protocol-busting telephone conversation with the president of self-ruled Taiwan, which China claims as its own.

Trump and Xi subsequently smoothed over the dispute last month in a phone call in which the US leader reiterated Washington's adherence to the "one China" policy that nominally endorses Beijing's claim to Taiwan. In the wake of the Xi-Trump conversation, Li said he saw "bright prospects" for bilateral relations. "I believe whatever differences we have, we can still sit down and talk to each other and work together to find solutions," he said. Li's parliament-ending press conference is the only time each year that foreign journalists are allowed to put questions to a member of China's elite

leadership inner circle, though they are pre-approved. Li is second only to Xi in the Communist Party hierarchy.

Fasten your seat belts

Li cited a report which he said indicated that if a trade war occurred, "foreign-invested companies, in particular US firms, would bear the brunt of it." Li vowed that China would continue to act as a steady pillar of the global economy despite trimming its domestic economic growth forecast for this year. Delivering his government's annual report to the rubber-stamp National People's Congress 10 days earlier, Li cited a "more complicated and graver situation" facing the global and domestic economy this year.

He said the government growth target for 2017 was "around 6.5 percent, or higher if possible," a further deceleration after full-year growth last year came in at 6.7 percent, weakest since 1990.

He said Wednesday that achieving the 2016 target "will not be easy", and warned that China faced a plethora of financial risks at home. China is trying to pivot from hyper-fast growth based on investment, heavily-polluting industries, and exports towards a steadier consumer-driven model. But the transition is complicated by the slowing growth, a slumping currency, bloated industrial firms, capital flight abroad, and fears of a looming housing bubble and bad-loan crisis. Li said China would "continue to be a strong driving force in the face of a sluggish global economy recovery." But he added that Chinese policymakers need to "take very seriously the risks we are facing on the domestic front, especially in the financial sector." — AFP

INDIA'S RICHEST MAN SHAKES UP MOBILE MARKET

SMALLER PLAYERS FIND IT HARD TO SURVIVE AS AMBANI SPARKS PRICE WAR

MUMBAI: Buyouts, mergers and quick exits-as India's richest man shakes up the country's ultra-competitive mobile market, telecommunications companies are scrambling to either consolidate or cut their losses and run. Norwegian multinational Telenor recently became the latest to quit India and analysts expect other brands will disappear as intense price wars sparked by tycoon Mukesh Ambani mean thinning profit margins.

"Most of the smaller players will find it difficult to grow by themselves and will be looking for exit options," Bhasker Canagaradjou, head of research at Ipsos Business Consulting in Mumbai, told AFP.

India's multi-billion dollar telecoms sector had a dozen companies battling for customers as recently as 2010. Now, there is around half that number and industry watchers say soon there will be only four.

The race to consolidate has hastened since Ambani sent shock waves through the sector in September when he launched Reliance Jio's 4G network with a free service for the rest of 2016 that was later extended to April. The audacious offer was followed by vastly cheaper data plans and free voice calls for life, forcing rattled competitors to slash their own tariffs to maintain market share while also seeking extra investment.

India's telecoms sector, which global research firm International Data Corporation estimates will have market revenue of \$37 billion this year, has long been a risky and costly endeavour for companies. Network operators have to overcome regulatory difficulties to purchase expensive wireless spectrum to provide services that are often plagued by dodgy reception, frequent call drops and fluctuating internet speeds.



MUMBAI: Indian students watching a movie on their smartphone while commuting on a suburban train in Mumbai. —AFP

'Aggressive Jio'

But Jio's arrival has added a new dimension as major players, including Vodafone and Idea, explore tie-ups to match the deep pockets of the Reliance Industries-backed telecoms company, while others are being forced to call it a day.

Telenor announced in late February that market leader Bharti Airtel would acquire its Indian operations, saying the amount of investment needed to compete in the crowded sector would not offer a worthwhile level of return.

The withdrawal came after Videocon Telecom told subscribers in January that it planned to cease operations and pull out of the market. Airtel and Mobile TeleSystems (MTS) have sold up since the beginning of 2016. Jio signed up 100 million users in its first six months and wants to lead the market with a 50 per cent share by 2021, eyeing Airtel's status as India's largest telecoms provider.

Airtel's deal with Telenor will see it boost its own subscriber numbers by around 40 million and greatly enhance its spectrum coverage as it battles to

fend off Jio's ambitious target.

"(The Telenor-Airtel agreement) is the latest sign that the entry of aggressive new operator Reliance Jio is spurring incumbents to consolidate to better meet the intense competition and weaker telcos to exit altogether," Fitch Ratings said.

Airtel's position is also under threat from British mobile phone behemoth Vodafone and Mumbai-based Idea Cellular. Vodafone announced in January that it was in talks to merge its Indian unit with Idea in their own response to Jio. Global brokerage firm CLSA esti-

mates that the pair would command a revenue market share of 43 percent by the start of the 2019-20 financial year, ahead of Airtel on 33 percent, if they combined. Jio would have 13 percent.

Profit slump

Reliance Communications (Rel Comm) — owned by Ambani's younger brother Anil Ambani—has been responsible for much of the consolidation at the lower end of the market. Rel Comm announced that Airtel was merging with it around a fortnight after Jio's launch. It had already purchased Russian conglomerate Sistema's Indian telecoms business, branded MTS, earlier in 2016 and is now reportedly in talks with Tata Group's loss-making tele services unit to join forces.

Indian telecoms analyst Baburajan Kizhakedath told AFP he expected the Tata Docomo brand to disappear altogether while recent Indian newspaper reports have said that the loss-making state operators BSNL and MTNL are in talks to merge. "The ongoing consolidation is likely to leave four larger operators—Bharti, Jio, the combination of Vodafone India and Idea Cellular, and the combined Reliance Communications and Airtel Limited," said Fitch.

Jio's free services eroded the profitability of its rivals in the recent quarter with Airtel reporting a 55 percent slump in on-year quarterly net profits and Reliance Communications announcing an almost 15 percent slide. They are hopeful that an end to Jio's free subscriptions on April 1 will provide some respite, but analysts warn that current pricing levels are unsustainable and companies may have to endure significant losses in the short term. "The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India) has already warned the government about the possible risk of payment defaults by the telecom companies if these freebies and price war continues for a long time," said Canagaradjou. —AFP

TURKEY REASSURES INVESTORS, SAYS DUTCH BUSINESS NOT AT RISK

ANKARA: Dutch investment in Turkey is not at risk from the diplomatic row between the two countries as Ankara's ire is focused on the Dutch government, not its people or businesses, Turkey's minister for EU affairs told Reuters. Turkey suspended high-level diplomatic relations with the Netherlands on Monday, banning the Dutch ambassador from the country and preventing diplomatic flights from landing in retaliation for the Dutch barring Ankara's ministers from speaking to rallies of overseas Turks.

Despite the furor, minister Omer Celik said Ankara was making a call to businesses worldwide that Turkey was a safe country for investment. "Dutch businessmen who invest, have businesses and create employment in Turkey are included in this (call). They are definitely not part of the crisis," Celik said in an interview late yesterday. Asked if Dutch companies active in Turkey would be affected by the row, Celik said: "The private sector, business world, tourists and the people of the Netherlands are not a part of the crisis." His comments could provide some reassurance to investors after Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmus said yesterday that economic sanctions against the Netherlands could be in the works.

Dutch direct investment in Turkey amounts to \$22 billion, making the Netherlands the biggest source of foreign investment with a share of 16 percent. Turkish exports to the Netherlands totalled \$3.6 billion in 2016, making it the tenth largest market for Turkish goods, according to offi-

cial data. The row exploded after Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan branded the Netherlands "Nazi remnants" at the weekend for barring Turkish ministers from speaking in Rotterdam. Some analysts have said they don't expect the affair to have immediate economic consequences. However, foreign investor sentiment towards Turkey has been badly bruised by widening security concerns and fears of growing authoritarianism.

Overseas turks

Erdogan is drumming up support in the run-up to an April 16 referendum on expanding his powers, and has been looking to the large number of Turks living in Europe to help secure victory. But Turkish campaigning abroad has raised tensions with several European countries, including Germany. The row has called into question a landmark agreement last year in which Turkey promised to stop migrants and refugees using it as a route to enter the European Union, in return for EU aid and the promise of visa-free travel to the bloc.

Celik said he believed the time had come for Turkey to reassess the deal, as it had become clear the EU would not take a fair stance on the visa issue. Turkey had fulfilled its side of the agreement but the EU had not kept its word, he said. Progress on the issue has been held up by legal wrangling. Brussels says Ankara needs to narrow its anti-terror laws to meet EU standards; Turkey says it needs the laws in their current form to combat multiple security threats. —Reuters

LUFTHANSA BURIES HATCHET WITH PILOTS AFTER LONG BATTLE

FRANKFURT AM MAIN: German airline group Lufthansa and pilots' union Cockpit said yesterday they had struck a new deal to end a years-long battle over pay, pensions and jobs. Under the agreement, some 5,400 pilots flying for Lufthansa, Lufthansa Cargo, and low-cost subsidiary Germanwings will enjoy a salary increase of 11.4 percent over a period from May 2012 to June 2022.

The airlines will also pay flight crew a one-off bonus of 1.8 months' salary. In return, pilots have accepted a gradual increase in their retirement age and change in their pension system to one in which their retirement payout is directly determined by the amount they have contributed monthly throughout their careers. Executives and union representatives had agreed in February on a mediator's suggestion of an 8.7-percent increase in salary by 2019 and a 5,000-6,000 bonus for each pilot. But the two sides continued their talks on other questions, including the vexed pension issue.

Cockpit said in a statement yesterday that the latest deal would guarantee "structurally sustainable improved flight crew costs"—in exchange for Lufthansa's agreement to keep at least 325 aircraft flying until mid-2022 using pilots covered by the bargain. The comprehensive deal was "a great opportunity to bring a peaceful end to the



MUNICH: This file photo shows two pilots sitting in the cockpit of an airplane of German airline Lufthansa at the Franz-Josef-Strauss airport in Munich, southern Germany. —AFP

years-long battle," union board member Joerg Handweg said.

Repeated pilot walkouts in 2014 and 2015 cost Lufthansa 351 million euros, the firm says, with a further 100-million-euro tab for a week-long walkout last November that seriously disrupted traffic. "The path to this result exacted a heavy toll from everyone involved—but, in the interests of Lufthansa, our employees, customers, and shareholders, it was worth it," said Lufthansa personnel chief Bettina Volkens in a statement. —AFP

GOODBYE DEFLATION, HELLO INFLATION: INVESTORS POSITION FOR TURNAROUND

LONDON: The demons of deflation are being consigned to the past by a pick-up in price pressures globally, prompting investors to seek protection in inflation-protected bonds.

New Zealand sold its first inflation-linked bond in over two years earlier this month and, in a sign of nascent demand, Italy last week seized the opportunity to sell 3 billion euros of so-called linkers via a

syndicate of banks. "Since the beginning of the year, demand for linkers has increased a lot—we have really turned a corner," said one banker who worked on the deal, asking not to be named.

The climate for inflation-linked debt has "changed completely," he said. Just a year ago, it was deflation-falling prices that restrain consumer spending and economic growth—that plagued investors and central

banks, keeping in place the ultra-easy monetary policy that has pushed government borrowing costs in much of the developed world below zero percent. Market pricing still points to subdued long-term inflation but evidence that price pressures are rising, coupled with talk of a sizeable US fiscal boost, means investors have backed away from the most bearish inflation bets placed after last year's vote in

Britain to leave the European Union. The benchmark Barclays World Government Inflation-Linked Index, is up almost 2 percent from a nine-month low hit in December, albeit well below peaks hit last year. The difference between the yield on an inflation-protected bond and a nominal bond of the same maturity—the breakeven rate—meanwhile has widened in Europe and the United States over the past six

months, reflecting rising inflation expectations. Breakeven rates in the United States are around 2 percent for 10-year debt, having hit their highest levels since September 2014 in January. That compares with around 1.5 percent last July, when investors bet the Fed would miss its 2 percent inflation target over a 10-year period.

German 10-year breakevens, the eurozone benchmark, stand at 1.41 per-

EXCHANGE RATES

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ASIAN COUNTRIES

Japanese Yen	2.671
Indian Rupees	4.676
Pakistani Rupees	2.924
Srilankan Rupees	2.018
Nepali Rupees	2.928
Singapore Dollar	217.490
Hongkong Dollar	39.446
Bangladesh Taka	3.820
Philippine Peso	6.092
Thai Baht	8.697

GCC COUNTRIES

Saudi Riyal	81.775
Qatari Riyal	84.224
Omani Riyal	796.388
Bahraini Dinar	814.270
UAE Dirham	83.490

ARAB COUNTRIES

Egyptian Pound - Cash	20.950
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	16.875
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.231
Tunisian Dinar	134.560
Jordanian Dinar	431.710
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	2.043
Syrian Lira	2.185
Morocco Dirham	30.830

EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES

US Dollar Transfer	306.450
Euro	327.290
Sterling Pound	376.320

Canadian dollar	228.440
Turkish Lira	82.160
Swiss Franc	305.380
Australian Dollar	233.510
US Dollar Buying	305.250

GOLD

20 Gram	246.320
10 Gram	126.080
5 Gram	63.880

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Rate for Transfr	Selling Rate
US Dollar	306.000
Canadian Dolla	228.325
Sterling Pound	375.055
Euro	327.605
Swiss Frank	309.850
Bahrain Dinar	811.180
UAE Dirhams	83.705
Qatari Riyals	84.925
Saudi Riyals	82.525
Jordanian Dinar	432.760
Egyptian Pound	17.483
Sri Lankan Rupees	2.021
Indian Rupees	4.625
Pakistani Rupees	2.918
Bangladesh Taka	3.846
Philippines Peso	6.078
Cyprus pound	168.040
Japanese Yen	3.665
Syrian Pound	2.430

Nepalese Rupees	3.885
Malaysian Ringgit	69.675
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	44.665
Thai Bhat	9.660
Turkish Lira	82.215

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CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
Europe		
British Pound	0.365960	0.375960
Czech Korune	0.004012	0.016012
Danish Krone	0.039857	0.044657
Euro	0.319584	0.328584
Norwegian Krone	0.031529	0.036729
Romanian Leu	0.071416	0.071416
Slovakia	0.009195	0.019195
Slovenia Krona	0.030112	0.035112
Swiss Franc	0.307903	0.307903
Turkish Lira	0.076835	0.087135
Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.223514	0.235514
New Zealand Dollar	0.206007	0.215507
Asia		
America		
Canada Dollar	0.222036	0.231036
Georgina Lari	0.138411	0.138411
US Dollars	0.302350	0.306750
US Dollars Mint	0.302850	0.306750
Arab		
Bangladesh Taka	0.003505	0.004089
Chinese Yuan	0.042908	0.046408

Hong Kong Dollar	0.037355	0.040105
Indian Rupee	0.002686	0.004783
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000018	0.000024
Japanese Yen	0.002584	0.002764
Kenyan Shilling	0.002971	0.002971
Korean Won	0.000257	0.000272
Malaysian Ringgit	0.065096	0.071096
Nepalese Rupee	0.002967	0.003137
Pakistan Rupee	0.002675	0.002965
Philippine Peso	0.005999	0.006299
Sierra Leone	0.000038	0.000044
Singapore Dollar	0.211299	0.221299
South African Rand	0.017267	0.025767
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001661	0.002241
Taiwan	0.009814	0.009994
Thai Baht	0.008352	0.008802

Arab		
Bahraini Dinar	0.806293	0.814793
Egyptian Pound	0.011699	0.020952
Iranian Riyal	0.000085	0.000086
Iraqi Dinar	0.000196	0.000256
Jordanian Dinar	0.426566	0.435566
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000153	0.000253
Moroccan Dirhams	0.020184	0.044184
Nigerian Naira	0.000401	0.001036
Omani Riyal	0.789293	0.794973
Qatari Riyal	0.083363	0.084813
Saudi Riyal	0.080633	0.081933
Syrian Pound	0.001300	0.001520
Tunisian Dinar	0.130437	0.138437
Turkish Lira	0.076835	0.087135
UAE Dirhams	0.082011	0.083711
Yemeni Riyal	0.000996	0.001076



KUWAIT: The Investment Studies Center at the Union of Investment Companies, in collaboration with the PricewaterhouseCoopers PWC, holds a seminar on taxation in Kuwait yesterday.

TAXATION WILL HELP PRESERVE KUWAIT'S ECONOMIC STABILITY

SEMINAR DISCUSSES VAT, TAXATION RULES

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The Investment Studies Center at the Union of Investment Companies, in collaboration with the PricewaterhouseCoopers PWC, held a seminar on taxation in Kuwait yesterday at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The seminar was attended by around 250 participants from different institutions including the Ministry of Finance, Central Bank of Kuwait, Capital Markets Authority, Kuwait Direct Promotion Authority, banks, embassies

and various companies. In view of the tax system which will be introduced soon in Kuwait, the seminar highlighted the latest updates on the issue. In addition, the seminar also reviewed the regional and international trends in taxation, discussed the rules of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and tax liability which has significant impact on all institutions today.

Fuad Douglas, Managing Partner at PWC spoke about tax law on foreign companies in Kuwait and the taxes that

will be applied soon. He explained that tax retention and its requirements highlighting law No 2/2008 on income tax and executive rule No 27 concerning subcontractors.

Sharif Abdulfatah, Tax Partner at PWC spoke about the banking and investment rules including tax on income from money lending in Kuwait. He also spoke about Islamic finance including Murabaha and Ijara Sukuk, in addition to international tax treaties. He detailed about the Common Reporting Standards (CRS) that will be applied in

Kuwait by the beginning of 2018. "Kuwait is currently working on diversifying its income sources in addition to the oil income. Introducing taxation will preserve the stability of the economy. We expect introduction of Value Added Tax (VAT) in Kuwait by 2018 or 2019," stated Abdulfatah.

Nadeen Baseel, a taxation expert from Lebanon gave a presentation on Value Added Tax (VAT) explaining the features of VAT framework saying that the GCC countries have signed and agreed to the framework. She also

spoke about the VAT legislation and regulation including the Federal Tax Authority, recommending the creation of a project team to manage its implementation.

Baseel discussed the fiscal reforms in the GCC and the key VAT principles pointing out that VAT is a tax on consumption. "VAT is levied at each stage in the chain of production or distribution. Also it is a self-assessment system and businesses submit VAT returns on a quarterly basis and make payment to the VAT Authority," she said.



A mortgage rate graph is displayed on a computer in North Andover, Massachusetts. Are mortgage rates headed up? —AP

WILL MORTGAGE RATES RISE? WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT FED RATE HIKE

WASHINGTON: Are mortgage rates headed up? How about car loans? Credit cards? How about those nearly invisible rates on bank CDs - any chance of getting a few dollars more? If, as everyone expects, the Federal Reserve raises its benchmark interest rate, signals the likelihood of additional rate hikes later this year, consumers and businesses will feel it - maybe not immediately, but over time, especially if the Fed raises rates multiple times in 2017.

The Fed's thinking is that the economy is a lot stronger now than it was during the first few years after the Great Recession ended in 2009, when ultra-low rates were needed to sustain growth. With the job market in particular looking robust, the economy is seen as sturdy enough to withstand modestly higher loan rates in the coming months and perhaps years.

"We are in a rising interest rate environment," noted Nariman Behravesh, chief economist at HIS Markit. Here are some questions and answers on what this could mean for consumers, businesses, investors and the economy:

Q. I'm thinking about buying a house. Are mortgage rates going to march steadily higher?

A. Hard to say. Mortgage rates don't usually rise in tandem with the Fed's increases. Sometimes, they even move in the opposite direction. Long-term mortgages tend to track the rate on the 10-year Treasury, which, in turn, is influenced by a variety of factors. These include investors' expectations for future inflation and global demand for US Treasuries.

When inflation is expected to stay low, investors are drawn to Treasuries even if the interest they pay is low, because higher returns aren't needed to offset high inflation. When global markets are in turmoil, nervous investors from around the world often pour money into Treasuries because they're regarded as ultra-safe.

Last year, for example, when global investors worried about economic weakness in China and the UK's exit from the European Union, they piled into Treasuries, lowering their yields and reducing mortgage rates. Since the presidential election, though, the 10-year yield has risen in anticipation that tax cuts, deregulation and increased spending on infrastructure will accelerate the economy and fan inflation. The average rate on a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage has surged to 4.2 percent from last year's 3.65 percent average.

That rate increase suggests that markets have already priced in Wednesday's rate hike and that mortgages might not respond immediately to the Fed's announcement. Unless, that is, the Fed signals that it plans to raise rates even faster than anyone expects.

Q. So does that mean home-loan rates won't rise much anytime soon?

A. Not necessarily. Inflation is nearing the Fed's 2 percent target. The global economy is improving, which means fewer international investors are buying Treasuries as a safe haven.

And at least two more Fed rate hikes are expected later this year. All those trends will likely lift the rate on the 10-year note over time and, by extension, mortgage rates.

It's just hard to say when. Behravesh forecasts that the average 30-year mortgage rate will reach 4.5 percent to 4.75 percent by year's end, up sharply from last year. But for perspective, keep in mind: Before the 2008 financial crisis, mortgage rates never fell below 5 percent.

"Rates are still incredibly low," Behravesh said. Even if the Fed raises its benchmark short-term rate three times this year, its key rate would remain below 1.5 percent. "That's still in the basement," Behravesh said.

Q. What about other kinds of loans?

A. For users of credit cards, home equity lines of credit and other variable-interest debt, rates will rise by roughly the same amount as the Fed hike within 60 days, said Greg McBride, Bankrate.com's chief financial analyst. That's because those rates are based in part on the banks' prime rate, which moves in tandem with the Fed.

"It's a great time to be shopping around if you have good credit and (can) lock in zero-percent introductory and balance-transfer offers," McBride said.

Those who can't qualify for low-rate credit card offers may be stuck paying higher interest on their balances because the rates on their cards will rise as the prime rate does. The Fed's rate hikes won't necessarily raise auto loan rates. Car loans tend to be more sensitive to competition, which can slow the rate of increases, McBride noted.

Q. At long last, will I now earn a better-than-measly return on my CDs and money market accounts?

A. Probably, though it will take time. Savings, certificates of deposit and money market accounts don't typically track the Fed's changes. Instead, banks tend to capitalize on a higher-rate environment to try to thicken their profits. They do so by imposing higher rates on borrowers, without necessarily offering any juicier rates to savers. The exception: Banks with high-yield savings accounts. These accounts are known for aggressively competing to attract depositors, McBride said. The only catch is that they typically require significant deposits.

"You'll see rates for both savings and auto loans trending higher, but it's not going to be a one-for-one correlation with the Fed," McBride said. "If the Fed hikes rates a quarter point, don't expect your savings to improve by a quarter point or that all car loans will immediately be a quarter-point higher."

Q. What's in store for stock investors?

A. So far, Wall Street hasn't been spooked by the prospect of Fed rate hikes. "The market has really come to view the rate hikes as actually a positive, not a negative," said Jeff Kravetz, regional investment strategist at US Bank. —AP

EU WARNS BANKS MAY FACE HIGHER BAD LOAN RISK

EU FMS TO MEET IN APRIL, GERMANY CAUTIOUS

BRUSSELS: European Union banks may face increasing risks from bad loans totalling 1 trillion euros (\$1.1 trillion) when the European Central Bank cuts back its economic stimulus program, internal EU documents seen by Reuters said. Banks have been saddled with more so-called non-performing loans (NPLs) following the 2008 global financial crisis, as companies and households have struggled to pay their debts. This in turn has crimped their ability to make new loans.

While the problem is more acute in countries such as Greece and Italy, which have experienced a prolonged economic crisis, it has "a European dimension" with spill-overs possible, a report by representatives of EU countries and regulators said. And the risks posed by NPLs to the whole EU banking system may increase, "should monetary conditions become less accommodative," a document accompanying the report said. The ECB is scheduled to cut the pace of its bond purchases, which it has used to try to stimulate economic growth, by a quarter to 60 billion euros a month from April.

Although it will continue them until at least the end of the year, it is also preparing the ground for a gradual phasing out of its aggressive stimulus measures, sources said. EU countries with the highest rates of bad loans have returned to growth since the ECB launched its stimulus program in 2014, but it remains unclear what will happen when this ends. While banks are likely to benefit from higher interest rates,

which improve the margin they make on their loans, this may be offset by the effects of another economic slowdown.

The report will be discussed at a meeting of EU finance ministers in Malta on April 7-8 on how to tackle the NPL issue and a more detailed version is expected in spring.

Italy's bad loans

Germany, the EU's largest economy, has so far opposed EU-funded solutions to the problem, arguing that it is only an issue in some countries and it is up to them to resolve it. In absolute terms, more than a quarter of all EU bad loans are held by Italian banks, with Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena, which is negotiating the terms of a multi-billion-euro bailout with EU regulators, holding the largest proportion of bad loans compared to its capital. German banks hold only 2.6 percent of the loans classified as soured, while in Greece and Cyprus nearly half of all loans are difficult to recover, according to the latest European Banking Authority (EBA) data.

Greek banks are being urged to reduce their high load of bad loans, a source said yesterday. In Portugal NPLs are almost 20 percent of the total, and in Slovenia and Italy the ratio is above 16 percent, against a slightly declining EU average of 5.4 percent. To tackle the problem, the EBA proposed in January setting up a publicly-funded bad bank that would acquire soured loans at prices higher than the market is now

ready to pay. This could help create a secondary market for the loans, which banks now are reluctant to sell because prices are too low and there are too few buyers.

While UniCredit, Italy's biggest bank, has sold 17.7 billion euros of bad loans at average 13 percent of their gross nominal value this year, it has also raised 13 billion euros in the markets to compensate the capital shortfall. Italian lenders price bad loans at 41 percent of their nominal value on average, but the quality of the credit varies and few could afford a capital rise on the scale of UniCredit's.

While Germany did not endorse the EBA plan, the EU documents point at the development of a secondary market for NPLs as a priority.

But this issue remains controversial and is likely to require a compromise at political, rather than technical, level at the Malta meeting, an EU official familiar with the discussions told Reuters. The documents also suggest a wider "restructuring of banking sectors" as states address the NPLs problem. This could lead to mergers among EU banks after they offload their bad loans, a banking industry official said. "Time limits" to conclude insolvency procedures are also suggested as a way of boosting the value of bad loans, as recovering them would become easier and less costly. This proposal would complement European Commission plans to shorten bankruptcy procedures and the recovery of bad loans. —Reuters

LUXLEAKS WHISTLEBLOWERS GET REDUCED SENTENCES ON APPEAL

LUXEMBOURG: A Luxembourg court yesterday gave reduced sentences on appeal to two "Luxleaks" whistleblowers convicted of leaking thousands of documents that revealed tax breaks for multinational firms. Former PricewaterhouseCoopers employee Antoine Deltour, 31, received a six month suspended sentence with a 1,500-euro fine, instead of the 12-month jail term given at the original trial last June. His colleague Raphael Halet, 40, received a 1,000-euro fine instead of a nine-month prison sentence. Both were ordered to pay a symbolic sum of one euro each to PricewaterhouseCoopers. Investigative reporter Edouard Perrin, who used the thousands of pages of documents to produce two reports for French public television in 2012 and 2013, had his acquittal at the earlier trial confirmed.

The LuxLeaks scandal erupted in 2014 and sparked a major global push against generous deals handed to multinationals, which grew even stronger with new revelations such as the Panama Papers and Football Leaks. The blockbuster leak revealed the huge tax breaks that tiny EU nation Luxembourg offered international firms including Apple, IKEA and Pepsi, at a time when Jean-Claude Juncker, now head of the European Commission,



LUXEMBOURG: French investigative reporter Edouard Perrin, arrives at the Luxembourg Court of Appeal to hear the appeal decision on the LuxLeaks whistleblowers case yesterday in Luxembourg. —AFP

was prime minister. The revelations ended up prompting the EU to take urgent steps to stop global firms avoiding tax in Europe, including anti-trust inquiries into firms like Apple, McDonald's and Amazon.

'A good thing'

The scandal also pressured Luxembourg into accepting a new law that requires EU member states to share tax deal information with its bloc partners. Several NGOs had demonstrated at the

opening of the appeal proceedings and Green MEPs have also called for a change in EU regulations to protect whistleblowers in the workplace.

Luxembourg prosecutors had themselves recommended the reduced sentences following an appeal by the convicted men. EU Competition commissioner Margrethe Vestager appeared to back the whistleblowers in comments earlier this week.

"I think it was a good thing (the leaks)," she told a news conference

in Brussels. "I think it is important when people tell if they find that something is not the way it should be. Then authorities, law enforcers, can do their job and do that in a better way," she added. "I think that a lot of people actually have benefitted from them telling what they knew." Deltour and Halet had originally faced a maximum penalty of 10 years on charges which included stealing documents, revealing business secrets and violation of professional secrets. —AFP

WALL ST HIGHER AS OIL RECOVERS; FED IN FOCUS

NEW YORK: US stocks opened slightly higher yesterday as oil prices rebounded and investors counted down to the conclusion of the Federal Reserve's two-day meeting...

The US economy has been strengthening, with the labor market nearing full employment and inflation perking up. Markets are also betting on a potential economic boost from President Donald Trump's proposed fiscal policies...

of hawkish comments from Fed members. The Dow Jones industrial average was up 31.03 points, or 0.15 percent, at 20,868.4 and the S&P 500 was up 5.04 points, or 0.21 percent, at 2,370.49.

Euro stocks flat

European stock markets flatlined yesterday with investors playing it safe ahead of a likely Federal Reserve rate hike and the outcome of a closely watched Dutch election.

Committee (FOMC) is all but certain to announce an interest rate hike later yesterday. "Today's main event-apart from the Dutch elections of course-is the FOMC decision," said Rabobank analyst Philip Marey.

Dutch vote is seen as a litmus test of the strength of far-right and populist parties ahead of crucial elections in France and Germany later this year.

"There is not a lot for the (eurozone) region today ... so any political news out of the Netherlands might be its main driver," said Spreadex analyst Connor Campbell.

Oil bounces

Oil prices rebounded after the International Energy Agency said in its latest monthly report that OPEC crude production nations were complying with a landmark deal to curb a global supply glut.

Oil prices rebounded after the International Energy Agency said in its latest monthly report that OPEC crude production nations were complying with a landmark deal to curb a global supply glut.

In February, millions of Dutch voters go to the polls yesterday in an election overshadowed by a blazing diplomatic row with Turkey, with all eyes on the fate of far-right MP Geert Wilders.

Following last year's shock Brexit referendum and Donald Trump's surprise victory in the US presidential polls, the

On currency markets the pound edged up after hitting an eight-week low in New York as Britain prepares to trigger its exit from the European Union. The euro also firmed, but is struggling as investors nervously await the Dutch election outcome.

Daily Kuwait Stock Exchange Report Global

Wednesday 15 March 2017

Table with 5 columns: Index, Change, Closing, Last Closing, High, Low. Rows include Price Index, Weighted Index, and KSX 15.

Table with 2 columns: Volume, Value (KWD), Number of Trades. Values: 437,751,478; 38,750,113; 8,557.

Table with 8 columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include MARIN, IPG, NAFESCO, etc.

Table with 8 columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include SOKOUK, KRE, URC, etc.

Table with 8 columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include KFOUC, BPCC, ALKOUT, etc.

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Table with 8 columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include KSH, NSH, PAPCO, etc.

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Table with 8 columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include ASC, OSOS, HAYATCOMM, etc.

Table with 8 columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include KINS, GINS, AINS, etc.

Table with 8 columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include SANAD, AFAQ, ALSHAMEL, etc.

Table with 8 columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include KINS, GINS, AINS, etc.

Table with 8 columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include SANAD, AFAQ, ALSHAMEL, etc.



NEW YORK: The facade of the New York Stock Exchange. US stocks rose yesterday after the government reported that prices paid by consumers increased in February, a sign of potentially stronger economic growth.

National Bank of Kuwait Financial Markets Daily Report. Includes Global Stock Indices and MENA Stock Indices tables.

Global Currencies Exchange Rate table showing rates for Kuwaiti Dinar, Saudi Riyal, US Dollar, Euro, etc.

MENA Currencies Exchange Rate table showing rates for US Dollar, Kuwaiti Dinar, Saudi Riyal, etc.

Global Interest Rates table showing rates for 1-Week, 1-Month, 3-Month, 6-Month, 1-Year for various currencies.

Global Bond Yields table showing yields for United States, Europe, and United Kingdom.

Commodities table showing prices and changes for Kuwait Oil, Brent, West Texas, Gold, Silver.

SHAPE OUTPUT PUSHES OIL PRICES BELOW \$50PB

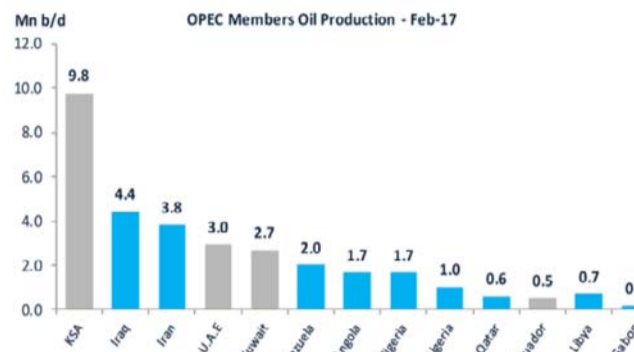
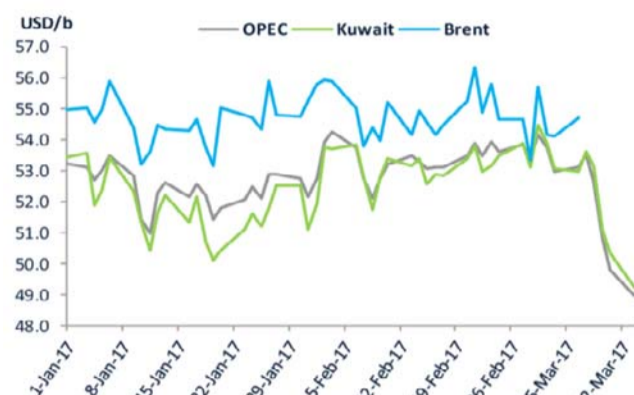
KAMCO Oil Market Monthly Report

After scaling multi-month highs during February-17, oil prices declined to a 4-month low and below the critical support level of \$50/b after US shale output increased responding to higher prices. This highlights the flexibility and the minimal gestation period required for the shale producers to increase output as well as the increasing vulnerability of the oil market to short term increase in production. Moreover, according to the EIA, US shale producers are expected to add another 109 tb/d during April-17. On the same lines, according to the latest rig count data from Baker Hughes, US oil rig count increased to the highest level since September-15 after the count increased for the eighth consecutive week by eight to 617 rigs. The average rig count in the US during February-17 was 212 higher from the last year's level after the US added 61 rigs as compared to the previous month. The increase globally stood at 109 during February-17 as compared to January-17.

On the positive side, according to an IEA report, the drastic cuts in spending in oil infrastructure during the past three years which started after the rout in oil prices could result in a supply shortage in the near term. According to the agency, the increase in US shale production seen recently and the expected addition in the near term would be insufficient to meet the demand for oil by 2020 as the pipeline of new projects is weak. On the other hand, oil demand is expected to rise steadily and increase to 104 mb/d by 2020 that would require higher supply from OPEC and investment in new projects to add new capacity to meet the rising demand. Average OPEC crude price during February-17 stood at \$53.4/b, a marginal increase of 1.9 percent as compared to the previous month as crude continued to trade in a tight range during the month. Brent crude and Kuwait crude also traded higher as compared to the previous month with average prices up by 2.7 percent and 0.9 percent, respectively, for the two grades of crude oil. However, the trend reversed during the first half of March-17 with OPEC crude falling by 8.2 percent to reach \$49.0/b on 13-March-17. We expect prices to remain range bound in the near term with initial decline on the back of shale developments being offset by higher compliance to the production cuts further supported by the upcoming summer demand in the gulf region.

World oil demand

World oil demand growth estimates for 2016 was raised marginally by 50 tb/d in the latest monthly oil report by OPEC. The growth in 2016 is now expected to have reached 1.38 mb/d to an average daily demand of 95.05 mb/d. The increase was primarily driven by higher-than-expected demand from OECD Europe, Asia Pacific, Other Asia and in China during the last quarter of 2016 that was partially offset by

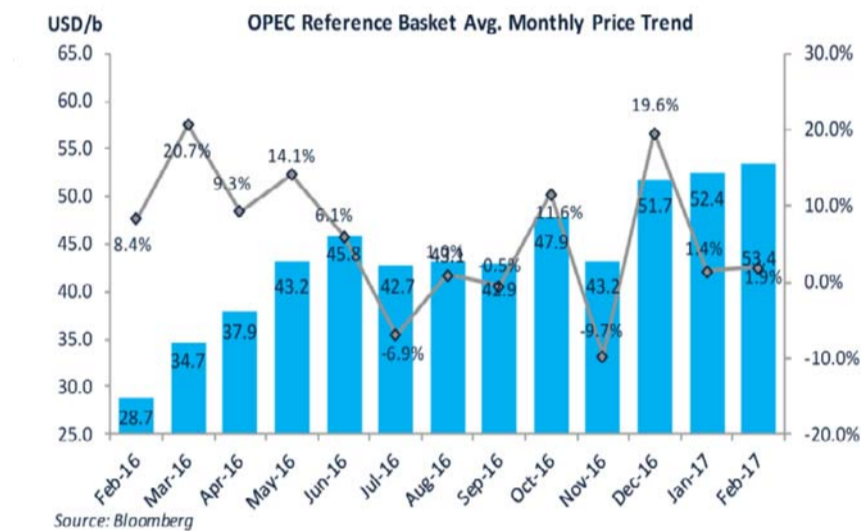


downward revision of 50 tb/d for the Middle East region. Improving economic conditions in OECD Europe is providing a big boost to oil demand in the region despite measures to curb oil usage including high taxation. The road transportation sector is a big driver for this demand growth as seen in increasing vehicle sales in Europe. This was also seen in the US that witnessed increasing mileage with softer auto sales. This coupled with substantially colder weather conditions in December-16 led to an increase in fuel requirements. In the OECD Asia Pacific region, South Korea continues to be a big driver of oil demand on the back of transportation and petrochemical sectors. In the non-OECD countries, China and FSU remain the key driver on the back of improving economic momentum, whereas India, which has been one of the strongest oil demand drivers, witnessed some softness on the back of the policies implemented late last year. In the Middle East region, oil demand was mixed with Kuwait, Iraq and Qatar seeing growth in demand while Iran's requirements softened.

Demand growth expectation for 2017 was also raised upward by 70 tb/d as compared to the previous month on the back of revisions in demand numbers from OECD Europe and Asia Pacific. Oil demand in 2017 is now expected to reach an average of 96.31 mb/d with a growth of 1.26 mb/d as compared to 2016 demand on the back of higher year-on-year oil demand from India, China and OECD Americas partially offset by expected decline in OECD Asia Pacific. Oil demand outlook for the US looks promising although preliminary weekly data for

the first two months of the year pointing to a slight decline in demand for gasoline and diesel oil partly offset by higher demand for jet/kerosene and fuel oil highlighting increasing industrial production activities. In the Middle East region 2017 demand is set to marginally higher vs. 2016, but subsidy reduction efforts can effect demand with Saudi Arabia expected to hike gasoline prices again this year.

set by downward revisions in the US, Norway, Australia, Brunei and Azerbaijan. The contraction during the year comes primarily from US onshore crude oil output, shortage led by Canadian wildfires, decline in output in Colombia and weaker-than-expected output in China due to the decline in the number of mature onshore oil fields coupled with low investment in new fields. In addition, total global upstream spending



World oil supply

There was no change in overall non-OPEC oil supply estimates for 2016 that is expected to have averaged at 57.34 mb/d with a contraction of 0.66 mb/d. In terms of individual country revisions, the growth in supply during the final quarter of 2016 from Canada and Other OECD Europe was completely off-

during the year was down by 23 percent as compared to 2017 with 47 percent decline in spending in the shale industry.

Meanwhile, 2017 supply forecast was raised by 0.16 mb/d and supply growth is now pegged to grow at 0.4 mb/d to reach an average of 57.74 mb/d. The revisions primarily reflects higher supply from Canadian

oil sands and US shale amid improving drilling efficiency and well productivity by North American producers. Moreover, a consistent growth in rig count in the US recently led to an upward revision of 0.1 mb/d to supply growth from the country that is now expected to reach 0.34 mb/d. On the other hand, higher expected supply from non-OPEC countries during 2017 is expected to be partially offset by decline in China, Mexico, Azerbaijan, Indonesia, Colombia, Oman and Norway.

OPEC oil production & spare capacity

According to Bloomberg, OPEC oil production continued to decline during February-17, although marginally, and averaged at 32.165 mb/d with a decline of 0.2 percent of 65 tb/d to reach the lowest level since November-15. However, OPEC's secondary sources data suggests an even higher decline of 140 tb/d to reach a production rate of 32.0 mb/d. During the month, there were minimal changes to production levels in individual OPEC members. According to Bloomberg data, Saudi Arabia slashed production by 90 tb/d followed by Iraq at 50 tb/d and Venezuela and Gabon combined decline of 35 tb/d.

On the other hand, Nigeria, Iran, Angola and Libya raised their production marginally by a total 100 tb/d. Saudi Arabia continued to produce at around 10 mb/d level with the highest contribution to the production cut agreement. The Kingdom's spare capacity now stands at an 11-month high level of 1.72 mb/d. The compliance to production cut agreement in the OPEC is said to be in the range of 90 percent-100 percent with Saudi Arabia sharing the bulk of the cuts and more than its assigned share. The wide variation in the compliance numbers comes primarily due to the inclusion of countries that are exempt from the agreement. The compliance ex-Saudi Arabia stood at close to 50 percent, according to some estimates.

Meanwhile, Abu Dhabi, which is yet to fully comply with its share of production cuts, said that it would fully comply with the commitment to cut 109 tb/d in March-17 and April-17 to 2.874 mb/d. The compliance would be supported by production curbs in addition to oilfield maintenance as ADNOC has planned maintenance at oilfields in March-17 and May-17.

Oil production in Libya, which is exempt from the agreement, is expected to rise following resolution of some of the issues that the country was facing recently. The country produced at 700 tb/d during February-17 with plans to raise production to 1.1 mb/d by the end of 2017.

We expect OPEC oil production to continue to decline in the coming months as we believe that Saudi Arabia's near 100 percent compliance would be further supported by higher compliance by other bigger producers in the group.



SAO PAULO: A commuter waits at the closed Parque Dom Pedro bus terminal during a national strike against a government's Brazilian Social Welfare reform project which seeks to extend the time of contributions and raise the minimum age required to obtain the full benefits of retirement, in Sao Paulo yesterday. — AFP

BRAZILIANS PROTEST AGAINST AUSTERITY IN MAIN CITIES

BRASILIA: Anti-austerity protesters in Brazil disrupted the morning commute yesterday in the biggest city Sao Paulo, shut schools in Rio and invaded the economy ministry in the capital. More than 500 activists from leftist groups led by the Movement for the Landless burst into the ministry building in Brasilia before the start of the workday, an AFP correspondent on the scene said.

Police reported that protesters had broken windows. In Sao Paulo, the financial powerhouse of Latin America's biggest economy, city buses were canceled and the metro system only provided partial service, G1 news site reported. Staff at public

schools in Rio de Janeiro went on strike and in Belo Horizonte the metro was shut down, according to G1.

Protesters' main target was pension reform planned by the center-right government of President Michel Temer. Temer who says that far-reaching austerity reforms are needed to bring responsibility to Brazil's budget and to lift the country from two years of recession-wants to set retirement age at 65. Currently, many people are able to retire at 54.

The government says the country will be bankrupt if nothing is done. Already, Congress has approved Temer's request for a 20-year budget spending freeze. — AFP

BRITISH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE HITS 41-YEAR LOW

UK TREASURY CHIEF BACKS DOWN ON TAX PLANS AFTER OUTRAGE

LONDON: Britain's unemployment rate has struck the lowest level for more than 41 years, official data showed yesterday as the country prepares to trigger its exit from the EU. However a drop in the jobless rate comes alongside news of slowing wages growth. Unemployment for the quarter ending January 31 fell to 4.7 percent from a rate of 4.8 percent in the final three months of 2016, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement. "The unemployment rate dropped to 4.7 percent in the three months to January 2017... It has not been lower since June to August 1975," the ONS said.

Analysts' consensus forecast had been for an unchanged rate of 4.8 percent, which would have kept unemployment at an 11-year low point. "The labor market is currently seeing decent improvement, reflecting the economy's resilience through the second half of 2016," Howard Archer, chief UK economist at IHS Markit, said in reaction to yesterday's data. "However, markedly slowing earnings growth reinforces the squeeze on consumers coming from rising inflation - and this is likely to increasingly weigh down increasingly on economic activity." It comes as British Prime Minister Theresa May intends on starting the EU withdrawal process by the end of March.

Parliament this week approved a bill empowering the government to trigger Article 50 of the EU's Lisbon Treaty, starting a two-year countdown to Brexit. "The labor market has been helped by the economy's extended resilience since June's Brexit vote, but mounting signs that consumers are starting to limit their spending fuels belief that 2017 will become increasingly difficult for the economy and for the jobs market," said Archer. "The immi-



LONDON: In this March 8, 2017 file photo, Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond poses for the media with his traditional red dispatch box before delivering his annual budget speech to Parliament in London. — AP

nent triggering of Article 50 will bring likely difficult negotiations with the EU... Consequently, we see unemployment starting to edge up before too long and we suspect that the unemployment could reach 5.1 percent by the end of 2017," he added. The Bank of England will be mindful of the mixed unemployment data ahead of its latest monetary policy announcements due today. Analysts widely expect the BoE to keep its main interest rate at a record-low 0.25 percent and make no changes to its cash-stimulus program aimed at supporting the UK economy during the Brexit process. "The wage

growth element is key for the Bank of England as weaker wage growth, which increased by only 2.2 percent year-on-year in January, could reduce pressures on the BoE to raise interest rates," said Kathleen Brooks, research director at City Index.

Tax outrage

Britain scrapped a plan for higher taxes on self-employed workers yesterday after the proposal touched off outrage from the nation's growing legion of self-employed workers. Treasury chief Philip Hammond announced an increase in National Insurance contributions for the self-employed in his budget last week, arguing the measure was needed to level the playing field for those employed by companies and those who work for themselves. The public was outraged, as the Conservatives had promised no such increases during the 2015 election campaign. Just moments after the U-turn was announced, Prime Minister Theresa May faced a loud and boisterous House of Commons. Amid howls, she insisted that while she still wanted equity in taxation, it wasn't going to happen now.

"We will bring forward further proposals but we will not bring forward increases in (national insurance) later in this Parliament," she said. A review into the matter will go forward, and carried out alongside a review on employment rights to be carried out by Matthew Taylor, a former adviser to Tony Blair. "As a number of my parliamentary colleagues have been pointing out in recent days, the trend towards greater self-employment does create a structural issue in the tax base on which we will have to act," she said. "We want to ensure we maintain fairness in the tax system." — Agencies

LIBERIAN HYDRO PLANT POWERS BUSINESSES LEFT IN DARK BY WAR

MONROVIA: Liberia is making a giant leap into an electrified future with the rehabilitation of a hydropower plant damaged during a civil war, allowing small businesses to lower costs and boost productivity. The national grid of Liberia has until recently run on 38 MW of electricity, according to official figures, which is ordinarily enough to power just 38,000 homes in a nation of four million people.

Taken offline by damage inflicted by Charles Taylor's forces during Liberia's first civil conflict in 1990, the Mount Coffee Hydropower plant has undergone extensive repairs over the last five years with US, European and Saudi funding.

After the first turbine was switched back on in

December, small businesses in Liberia's capital Monrovia are seeing a jolt to their operations as they join the grid for the first time.

Eva Kollie, a bakery owner in a northern suburb, had already bought electric mixers in order to meet customer demand, but the cost of using a generator to power them was "unbearable" she told AFP, sometimes amounting to \$20 a day in fuel. But since she was connected to the grid, she pays \$50 a month to power the machines.

"The cost of production has been cut down by about 70 percent," said Kollie. "We are able to satisfy demands from our customers on time."

Power Africa, a US government initiative to bring electricity to the continent, describes ener-

gy as "the single largest component of operational expenses in Liberia for large concessions, industries, and businesses." Off-grid solutions such as solar panels that have gained ground in east Africa and are appearing in nearby nations like Ghana have failed to make headway here so far, though the World Bank has just approved its first mini hydropower plant in Liberia's Lofa County. "Electricity in Liberia is like a new born baby. The infrastructure was not improved and the training of people was not carried out," said Ian Yhap, board chairman of Liberia Electricity Corporation (LEC), the state utility running the Mount Coffee Project.

The nation's electricity problems are not limit-

ed to a lack of production, either, he added. "People are stealing the power generated," Yhap said angrily, estimating that 40 percent of all power generated in Liberia is siphoned off illegally. "When we were handed over the system we were told that there were 44,000 customers connected but in reality there were only 15,000," he said. More than 15,000 new customers have been connected since Mount Coffee was switched back on, and LEC hopes to have 100,000 connections by the end of the year.

"The drive of the new management is to connect more people and disconnect those who are illegally using the power" said Yhap. His focus was now on reducing costs for customers and

making the supply less intermittent, addressing two top concerns of new clients, he added.

More turbines

LEC says the first turbine can generate a maximum capacity of 22 MW, and the second 22 MW turbine is due on line in the next few weeks after testing, with two more to follow by year's end.

Meanwhile the firm's campaign to connect more customers continues apace. With fewer than two percent of Liberians on the national grid, by some estimates, the arrival of engineers to connect a home or business is greeted in many neighborhoods as nothing less than a spectacle. — AFP

NBK CAPITAL FULLY REALIZES INVESTMENT IN ELAJ MEDICAL SERVICES

KUWAIT: NBK Capital, a leading investment firm in the MENA region, announced yesterday that it has successfully completed the sale of a stake held by the Kuwait Investment Opportunities Fund in Elaj Medical Services KSCC ("EMS"), which owns Taiba Hospital in Kuwait, to a consortium of renowned doctors.

NBK Capital arranged the strategic investment in EMS in 2011, through its management of the Kuwait Investment Opportunities Fund (the "Fund"). The firm's subsidiary in the DIFC, NBK Capital Partners Limited, has previously advised on successful investments in the

healthcare sector, namely in D. n. y. a. G. z., a leading ophthalmology hospital chain in Turkey, and Bavet Ilac A.S., a leading manufacturer and distributor of animal health products in Turkey. Taiba Hospital was founded in 2002 as a day case surgery center by Dr Sanad Al-Fadala.

During its partnership with NBK Capital and the Fund, the management team developed and executed a strategic growth plan that significantly expanded the hospital's capacity and delivered high standards of clinical care to



Faisal Al-Hamad

over 275,000 patients annually. Commenting on the sale, Faisal Al-Hamad, CEO of NBK Capital, said: "This deal represents the continuing endeavor of NBK Capital to develop the social infrastructure of Kuwait in partnership with local entrepreneurs."

With enhanced service offerings and new facilities, we believe the business has a strong and sustainable platform to continue its expansion in Kuwait. We continue to explore credit and equity opportunities in core sectors

such as healthcare, education and food & beverage, where we can leverage our expertise to maximize value for both our partners and investors." Dr Sanad Al-Fadala, Founder and Chairman of Elaj Medical Services, welcomed the transaction: "We are excited to embark on the next phase of growth with our new partners who come with a wealth of experience in the medical field and bring strategic value to Taiba Hospital. Our partnership with NBK Capital has enabled us to grow our operations and facilities, and the new partnership will enable us to utilize our new state-of-the-art facilities to their full potential."



NISSAN PATROL NISMO TAKES WHEELS 'BEST SUV' CROWN

DUBAI: The Nissan Patrol NISMO has been awarded 'SUV of the Year' at the Wheels Car of the Year ceremony. During the publication's annual Car of the Year (COTY) awards, the Patrol NISMO challenged its major competitors before an esteemed judging panel. The Nissan was labelled the strongest vehicle in three major categories: desert capability, on-road performance, and comfort. "Patrol leaves them in the dust," explained the judges in the award citation. "The 5.6-litre V8, mated to a slick seven-speed automatic, has been poked and prodded to deliver more performance, and with all four wheels digging in for added traction, along with its off-road ability still intact, this is actually three cars rolled into one. It's still a brilliant family car with loads of room for seven adults to sit in total comfort. It's a superb off-roader with all sorts of driver aids to tame difficult terrains and it's a sports SUV, too. It can do it all and sure is deserving of this accolade."

The Nissan Patrol NISMO is no stranger to such high praise. Since the model was introduced to the Gulf market in 2015, its

on- and off-road capabilities have drawn plaudits from journalists and owners alike.

Samir Cherfan, Managing Director of Nissan Middle East was delighted the Patrol NISMO was recognized as a cut above the competition. "When you take a vehicle as dear to the hearts of Gulf motorists as the Patrol, and decide to produce a NISMO-tuned performance version, you must get it right," he said.

"We knew we had a very special SUV on our hands as soon as it arrived in our showrooms. So, it's particularly gratifying to see the wider automotive community, and many of the Gulf's top motoring writers agree with this view." Patrol NISMO is part of a line-up of three vehicles from the tuning, performance and motorsport division of Nissan. The remaining two are the 370Z NISMO and the GT-R NISMO.

The accolade was dished out during a recent event, at Dubai Palm's spectacular Waldorf Astoria. The Wheels COTY Awards, now in its eighth year, has established itself as one of the most prestigious automotive awards ceremonies in the Middle East.

BURGAN BANK TO ANNOUNCE YAWMI AND YOUTH ACCOUNTS WINNERS

KUWAIT: Borgan Bank will be conducting the quarterly draws of Yawmi and Youth accounts on Sunday, March 19, 2017, where the lucky winner of the Yawmi Account will receive KD 125,000 as a cash prize, and the first lucky winner of Youth Account will receive a cash prize of KD 1,000, while second and third winners will each receive free "unlimited access" to Grand Cinemas for one year.

where customer service representatives will be delighted to assist with any questions on any of the bank's products and services. Established in 1977, Borgan 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. Borgan Bank has majority owned subsidiaries in the MENA region supported by one of the largest regional branch networks.

The Bank has continuously improved its performance over the years through an expanded 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. Borgan 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.



To be eligible for the Yawmi Account quarterly draw, customers should maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 for 2 months prior to draw date. Additionally, every KD10 in the account, will entitle customers to one chance of winning.

In addition, to be eligible for the Youth accounts quarterly draw, customers must transfer their student allowance to their Youth account whereby they will be automatically enrolled into the draw, the account provides the customer a chance to win with every KD 20 in the account.

For more information about Borgan Banks accounts, customers are advised to visit their nearest Borgan Bank branch, or call the bank's Call Center at 1804080



NEW OFFER FOR ABK CARDHOLDERS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH EMIRATES

KUWAIT: Building on its longstanding partnership with Emirates Airline, Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) is offering all ABK credit, prepaid and debit cardholders a discount of up to 10 percent upon booking a business or economy class ticket online with Emirates.

In order to benefit from the offer, which applies to all destinations, customers must make their ticket bookings online through <http://emirates.com/>, and enter the promo

code: KWABK17. Bookings can be made until 19 June, 2017 for travel dates up to 30 November, 2017.

Emirates operates 7 daily flights from Kuwait to over 150 global destinations via its hub in Dubai. The airline also operates the iconic A380 to Kuwait on one of its seven services. Onboard, passengers can look forward to world-class in-flight menus and the award-winning ice system with over 2,500 channels of entertainment.

ETIHAD AIRWAYS INTRODUCES A380 FLIGHTS ON PARIS ROUTE

LARGEST JET FEATURES THREE-ROOM SUITE THE RESIDENCE

ABU DHABI: Etihad Airways is introducing its award-winning A380 on the Abu Dhabi - Paris route this summer as part of seasonal adjustments to the airline's fleet deployment plan.

Featuring the carrier's revolutionary The Residence - the world's first three-room suite on a commercial airliner - the aircraft will operate on one of its twice-daily services to the French capital between July 1 and October 28.

Paris becomes the airline's latest A380 long haul destination following London, Sydney, New York and Melbourne. With the aircraft upgrade from a 328-seat Boeing 777, Etihad Airways is able to offer an all-A380 daily service from Paris to both Melbourne and Sydney via the airline's Abu Dhabi hub.

The additional capacity will provide business and leisure travellers from the UAE the benefit of experiencing the double decker aircraft - with a living room, bedroom and shower in The Residence, and more premium seats in the First Apartments and Business Studios - to meet demand to another popular long haul destination during the peak summer months.

It will also support the strong connecting traffic to and from many cities across Asia and Australia including Brisbane, Perth, Bangkok, Chengdu, Ho Chi Minh City, Hong Kong, Jakarta, Manila, Shanghai, Seychelles, Chennai, Delhi and Mumbai, together with destinations across the GCC such as Bahrain, Doha, Jeddah and Muscat.

Flight EY31 has a scheduled departure time from Abu Dhabi International Airport of 0215 hrs, arriving at Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport at 0750 hrs, with the return flight EY32 leaving the French capital at 1040 hrs, arriving in Abu Dhabi at 1930 hrs. (all times listed are local).

Peter Baumgartner, Etihad Airways Chief Executive Officer, said: "Flying our flagship product to France with additional seat capacity helps fulfil growing demand and meet our guests' expectations for an even greater travel experience with unmatched luxury, comfort and service. "Paris is one of our busiest and best performing European routes, so the deployment of this upgraded service will benefit travellers to and from Abu Dhabi, and our popular connecting cities across Asia and Australia."

Etihad Airways' A380 features a total capacity of 496 seats - up to two guests in The Residence, nine First Apartments, 70 Business Studios and 415 Economy Smart Seats.

The airline has taken the finest details from the best service hospitality establishments around the world to redefine the A380 travel experience - from the comfort of a seat and finest cuisine to new inflight amenities and extensive entertainment options. Inflight chefs



Etihad Airways A380 set to fly to Paris

create a made-to-order dining experience from a larder of fresh ingredients for guests travelling in The Residence and First Class. The Residence is an ultra-private, three-room suite featuring a living room with a 32" LCD monitor, bedroom with a double bed, separate en-suite shower room and dedicated personal Butler trained at the world-renowned Savoy Butler Academy in London to look after the needs of its discerning

guests. The cabin also comes with a private chef ready to custom-create menus to order.

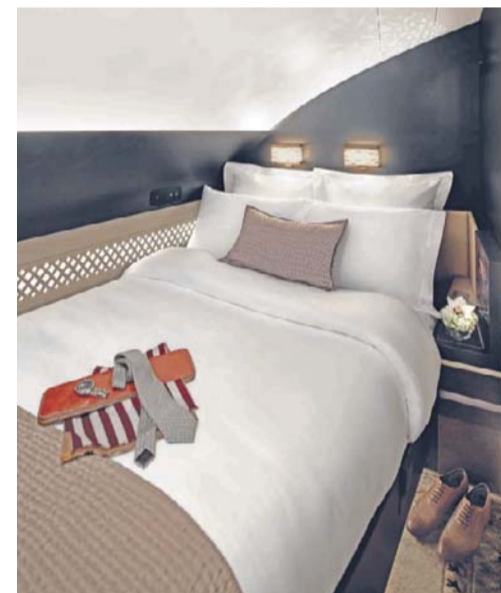
The nine First Apartments in First Class are private living spaces featuring a flat-screen television, a chilled mini-bar, personal vanity unit, wardrobe and a fully equipped shower room for the exclusive use of First Class guests. The 70-configured Business Studios are located on the upper deck of the A380, all offering direct aisle access, a fully flat bed and an increase of 20 per cent in personal space.

The Lobby, a luxurious lounge located between the First Class and Business Class cabins, features two comfortable sofas and a staffed bar, enhancing the sense of serenity.

Onboard Food and Beverage Managers, with experience of working in luxury hotels and top restaurants, guide guests travelling in Business Class through the extensive menu options available and provide recommendations on the perfect accompaniment for their meals.

And a Flying Nanny trained by the world-famous Norland College in the UK, is onboard every A380 to provide dedicated childcare support for families travelling with young children.

The main deck features 415 Economy Smart Seats which offer unique ergonomic fixed-wing headrests, lumbar support and an 11-inch personal, high-definition monitor screen to enjoy over 750 hours of on-demand movies, TV programs, improved gaming and live TV news and sports via the state-of-the-art Panasonic eX3 entertainment system. Flights to and from Paris can be booked at etihad.com, via Etihad Airways Contact Centres, or travel agents.



Bedroom in The Residence onboard Etihad Airways' A380

ENJOY SPECIAL OFFER FOR MOTHER'S DAY AT KORLOFF

ON MOTHER'S DAY, GULF BANK PRIORITY CUSTOMERS ENJOY EXCLUSIVE OFFERS AT KORLOFF AND OMEGA

KUWAIT: On the occasion of Mother's Day, Gulf Bank announced the launch of a special campaign for its Priority Banking customers who can now spoil their mothers with exceptional gifts from Korloff and Omega Boutiques. The campaign provides exclusive offers at Korloff and Omega boutiques starting 15 March 2017 until 22 March 2017.

Gulf Bank's Priority Banking customers can indulge in a wide selection of international renowned luxury brands to honor their mothers

for their outstanding sacrifices. Customers should use their Gulf Bank credit cards including Visa Infinite, MasterCard World, Visa Signature, Visa Platinum and MasterCard Platinum, to benefit from the privileges.

By going to Korloff Boutiques present in 360 Mall and Behbehani Luxury showroom in Salhiya, Gulf Bank's Priority Banking customers will benefit from an exclusive discount on all collections. As for the Omega Boutiques that are located in 360 Mall and the Avenues, customers

will be offered exclusive offers by simply using the Bank's credit cards. Gulf Bank invites its Priority Customers to pay tribute to their mothers by gifting them prestigious gifts tailored to all tastes and they get always get their spouses or themselves a gift from Omega.

Gulf Bank is committed to offering its Priority Banking customers with value added benefits and privileges matching their life style along with a range of financial and investment products and banking services.

UK CAN'T QUANTIFY IMPACT OF LEAVING EU WITHOUT TRADE DEAL

LONDON: The British government has not carried out an assessment of what effect leaving the European Union without a new trade deal would have on the economy, Brexit minister David Davis said yesterday. Prime Minister Theresa May, who is due to begin the formal exit process this month, has said she is prepared to walk away from negotiations with the EU without a deal if she is dissatisfied with the terms on offer.

In the absence of an agreement, trade between Britain and the other 27 EU members would default to World Trade Organization rules and tariffs, in contrast with the free access the UK has

enjoyed as a member of the EU's single market. Some proponents of a so-called 'hard Brexit' are relaxed about that scenario, while critics see it as potentially disastrous for the economy. Davis said he did not think that leaving with no deal would be as good an outcome as the free trade agreement Britain is seeking with the bloc, but he agreed with May it could be better than a bad deal.

"I can't quantify it for you in detail yet. I may well be able to do so in about a year's time. It is certainly the case that it is not as frightening frankly as some people think," he said.

"You don't have to have a piece of paper with

a number on it to have an economic assessment. I spent ... most of my working life before coming into politics dealing with business. You often knew what was a good deal even though you didn't have the numbers."

He told a parliamentary committee hearing the last available analysis on the 'no deal' scenario dated back to the campaign for the 2016 referendum in which Britons voted to leave the EU.

"One of the issues that's arisen is that those forecasts don't appear to have been very robust," said Davis, who became a minister in July after the vote. — Reuters

MANAGEENGINE TO HOST 5TH ME USER CONFERENCE IN DUBAI

DUBAI: ManageEngine, the real-time IT management company, yesterday announced it will be hosting its 5th Middle East User Conference on March 20-21, 2017, at The Address, Dubai Marina. Raj Sabhlok, president of ManageEngine, will unveil new developments at ManageEngine to the customers in the region.

He will also highlight some of the best practices in the realm of IT and discuss the latest technologies and innova-



Raj Sabhlok

tions that will help companies remain competitive in the Middle East market.

Following its success in the USA, the User Conference is designed for ManageEngine's customers to connect and interact with peers and technology experts as well as learn about new IT practices and new features of the company's products. This will be the second global user conference by ManageEngine this year.

"ManageEngine User Conference is a great platform for customers to find out how businesses across sectors use ManageEngine solutions and how our products helped meet industry needs," said Raj Sabhlok, President, ManageEngine. "This year, we want to raise awareness about the importance of IT security and

analytics, given the growth of the digital ecosystem and the need for IT management in the region. We look forward to another great year of insights, information and learning in Dubai."

The two-day conference will feature global experts who will provide sessions on IT management disciplines such as IT service management (ITSM), IT operations management (ITOM), Windows & Active Directory management, Enterprise mobility and end-point management, IT security and IT analytics. The company will hold training sessions on flagship products and will also discuss product use cases, share valuable insights on some of the challenges faced by organizations in the region and how ManageEngine can help solve

them. The training sessions will be focused on solving business problems through effective IT management in ensuring profitability.

ManageEngine delivers real-time IT management tools that empower IT teams to meet organizational needs for real-time services and support. Worldwide, established and emerging enterprises - including more than 60 percent of the Fortune 500 - rely on ManageEngine products to ensure the optimal performance of their critical IT infrastructure, including networks, servers, applications, desktops, and more. ManageEngine is a division of Zoho Corporation with offices worldwide, including the United States, India, Singapore, Japan, and China.

SECURING IOT DRIVES NEW KUWAIT 2035'S DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

KUWAIT: Securing the Internet of Things will drive New Kuwait 2035's national digital transformation, said one of the world's leading cyber security experts on the sidelines of his talk yesterday at KIACS Cyber Security. New Kuwait 2035 outlines an ambitious agenda for driving diversified economic growth. Experts agree that nationwide digital transformation will serve as the foundation for public and private sector organizations to operate in real-time and deliver new business models.

"In Kuwait, public-private partnerships are vital for leveraging best practices in IT to secure the Internet of Things, and drive New Kuwait 2035's diversified economic goals. Using the latest tools, such as artificial intelligence and blockchain, security can be built into systems and processes to run live, and to secure edge infrastructure," said Justin Somaini, Chief Security Officer, SAP, who participated in the panel 'Futurecasting Cyber Security and Innovations in ICS'.



Justin Somaini, Chief Cybersecurity Officer, SAP

As Kuwait's organizations embrace the Internet of Things, employees and customers need to use software and services from anywhere, any device, any time, with confidence and trust. Cyber security is vital, along with hyper-connectivity, super-computing, a smarter world, and the cloud.

"While digital transformation is intensifying security risks, machine learning and deep learning are fueling cyber security analytics that can automatically detect and respond to a cyber-attack before it can jeopardize information, systems and businesses. Kuwait's government, health-care, and energy sectors have the strongest potential for rapidly adopting these kinds of emerging cyber security solutions to protect sensitive data," added Justin Somaini.

SAP offers a broad portfolio of security solutions across the cloud, software, and applications, and is working closely with Kuwait's leading organizations on secure digital transformation.

LAS VEGAS OFFICIALS SEEK PERMISSION FOR LIGHT RAIL

CARSON CITY, Nevada: State and local government officials presented a legislative plan on Tuesday laying the groundwork to build a multi-billion-dollar light rail system to link McCarran International Airport with the Las Vegas Strip.

For two years, members of the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada have been drawing blueprints for the light rail and makeovers such as pedestrian bridges or wider sidewalks on the Strip. They're also considering high-capacity transit options to connect residential neighborhoods, college campuses, Sunrise Hospital and shopping hubs. But they need the state's permission to fund or implement any plans. The proposal heard in the Senate Transportation Committee would give local officials new authority to seek tax hikes or federal grants to finance an expanded portfolio of major transportation developments. Senate Bill 201 would also allow them to explore new technology, including self-driving cars.

down some hurdles to expand public transit in Reno and elsewhere.

Nevada law currently limits regional transportation commissions to organizing "fixed guideway" systems, which exclude the high-capacity systems including rail-ways being considered in Las Vegas. It's also unclear whether RTCs can autonomously secure funding for those high-capacity transportation systems. RTC of Southern Nevada spokeswoman Angela Castro said that could affect their chances of winning certain federal grants, should any become available.

"Everybody is waiting to see what the federal government does in terms of transportation infrastructure investments," Castro said. President Donald Trump campaigned on investing massively in transportation infrastructure as part of his pitch for new jobs. He has backed away from the pitch in interviews since winning the White House and has not proposed a specific funding plan.

Tina Quigley, general manager of the RTC of Southern Nevada, said she and a group of more than 30 other transportation experts based portions of SB149 on the light rail systems and transportation authorities in Denver, Phoenix, San Diego and Salt Lake City. Notably, she said, they drew from those states the need to very clearly define that regional transportation authorities have the jurisdiction to pursue mass transit systems. The Las Vegas infrastructure plans are far from finalized. Quigley's commission estimated in December they could cost as much as \$26 billion altogether. The light rail alone could cost up to \$12.5 billion and could take 20-30 years to plan and build. —AP

"If we can lead in the travel and tourism industry - and who can dispute that, accommodating more than 42 million visitors a year - I find it hard to believe our community cannot come together to help build a world-class transportation system," Manendo said.

His bill primarily intends to facilitate buildout in Las Vegas, but it is not limited to Clark County. It would also knock

SECURITY FLAW FOUND IN WHATSAPP, TELEGRAM

SAN FRANCISCO: A computer security firm yesterday revealed a flaw that could let hackers break into WhatsApp or Telegram messaging accounts using the very encryption intended to protect messages. Check Point Software Technologies said that it alerted Telegram and Facebook-owned WhatsApp last week, waiting until the vulnerability was patched before making it public.

Check Point did not specify how many messaging accounts were at risk, but did say the flaw posed a danger to "hundreds of millions" of users accessing the messaging platform from web browsers in computers, as opposed to mobile applications. "This new vulnerability put hundreds of millions of WhatsApp Web and Telegram Web users at risk of complete account take over," Check Point head of product vulnerability Oded Vanunu said in a release.

"By simply sending an innocent looking photo, an attacker could gain control over the account, access message history, all photos that were ever shared, and send messages on behalf of the user." The vulnerability made it

possible for an attacker to booby-trap a digital image with malicious code that could spring into action after the picture is clicked on for viewing, according to Check Point.

The malicious code could then hijack an account, and even spread itself like a virus by sending infected messages to those listed as contacts. WhatsApp and Telegram use end-to-end encryption designed to make certain only senders and recipients can see what is in messages.

The privacy protection had the side effect of preventing the services from being able to discern whether message contents included malicious code, according to Check Point.

To remedy the situation, both services shifted to finding and blocking viruses before messages are encrypted, the security researchers said. WhatsApp is one of the most popular instant messaging services in the world with more than a billion users. Telegram claims only 100 million or so users, but is often cited as a preferred communications tool of jihadists because of encryption to keep messages from the eyes of authorities. —AFP

SWEDISH STUDENT STARTUP DEAL TO BUILD ELECTRIC CARS

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS RAISE \$1.3M IN CROWDFUNDING FOR STARTUP

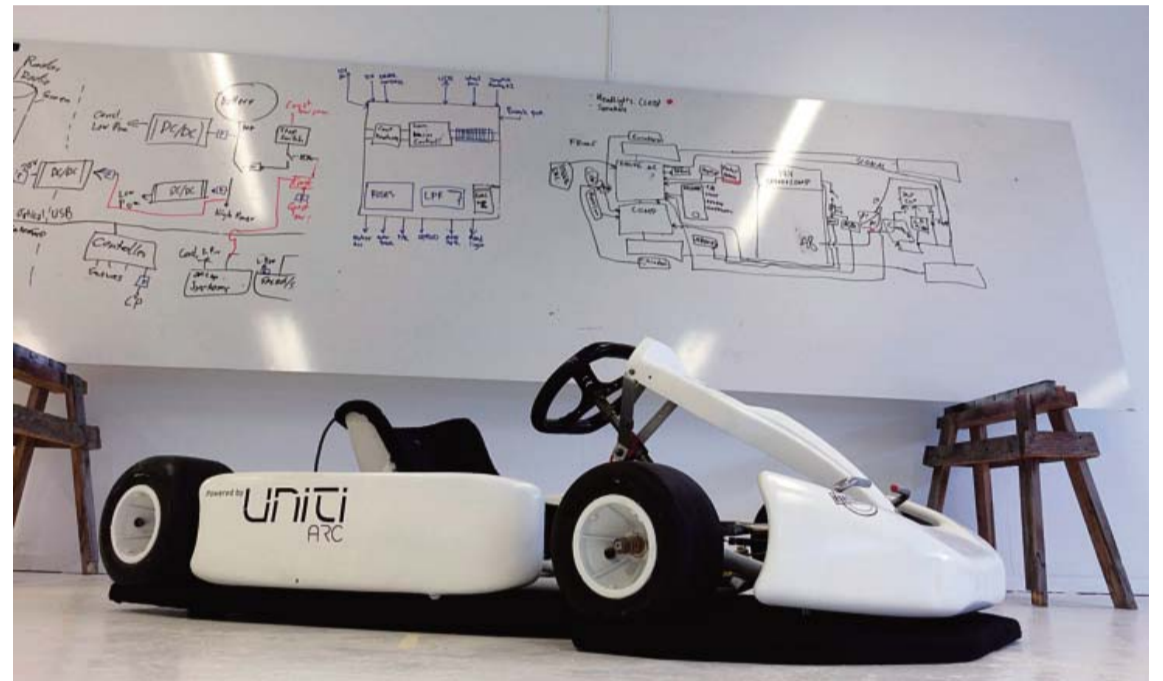
LUND, Sweden: A group of Swedish university students that raised 1.2 million euros (\$1.3 million) in crowdfunding for their startup to build electric cars has caught the attention of German industrial heavy-weight Siemens.

The two sides said yesterday that they were starting a partnership that will see them create 50,000 light-weight city cars annually starting next year. The twin-seat vehicles, called L7e, have 15kW engines with a maximum speed of 130 kilometers (81 miles) per hour. They weigh 400 kilograms (880 pounds) each and have a 150 kilometer (93 miles) range.

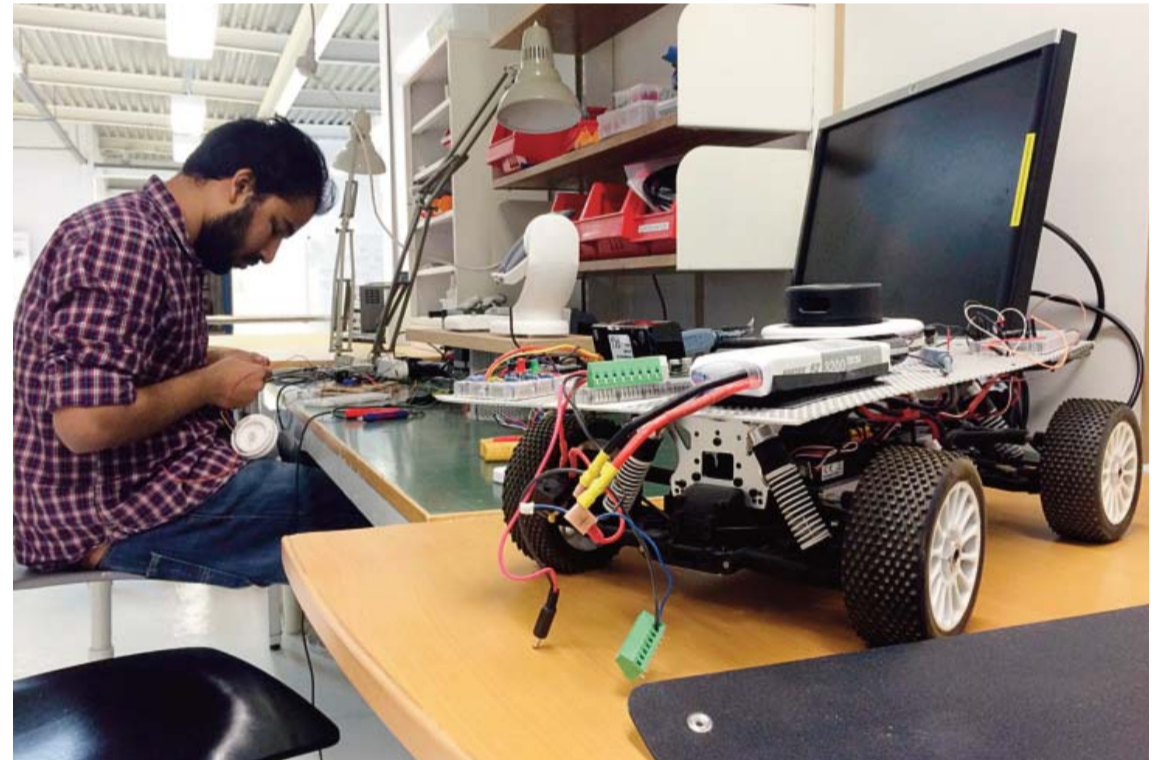
The cars are made from sustainable composite materials and will be unveiled in late 2017, with first deliveries scheduled for early 2019. The first high-end vehicle has a target price of 200,000 kronor (\$22,285) - the price for an electric Smart Car in Sweden is at least 210,000 kronor (\$23,400).

The vehicle's steering system resembles a Wii controller more than a traditional car's steering wheel. Lewis Horne, the CEO of the startup, called Uniti Sweden, says the deal gives his company "the opportunity to not only develop a sustainable car, but also manufacture it in a sustainable way at a large scale." Ola Janson of Siemens Industry Software said he was "really looking forward to having that partnership" between "Siemens as the very old, stable company, yet still innovative" and Uniti Sweden made up of "young people, innovative people, (who) don't have the legacy, don't have the limits like myself." The student startup's ambitions come at a time of feverish activity within the auto and tech industries on building more ecological cars, more autonomous driving systems and even fully self-driving vehicles.

"There definitely are some famous success stories of automotive startups, but there are a lot more companies that are trying to break in right now, some that we think will succeed and some that won't," said Tim Stevens, editor of the website Roadshow, on the sidelines of the Geneva Motor Show this month. "Making a car is very, very difficult thing, and certifying that car worldwide is very difficult thing too." The vehicle will be unveiled in the fall of 2017, with first deliveries scheduled for early 2019. —AP



LUND: A Uniti branded go kart sits in front a white board filled with engineering sketches in the startup's temporary production facility in Lund, Sweden. —AP



LUND: In this March 13, 2017 photo, a Uniti employee works on prototype steering controls, at the startup's temporary production facility in Lund, Sweden. —AP

DELL EMC TO HOST FIRST META EXECUTIVE PARTNER SUMMIT

DUBAI: Dell EMC yesterday announced the launch of its first ever META Executive Partner Summit 2017 which will be held at the Hilton Mauritius Resort and Spa from 15th - 17th March. Through the event, Dell EMC aims to empower its top channel partners to transform their businesses, deliver exceptional customer value and achieve unprecedented growth and profitability.



Havier Haddad

This two-day event will see Dell EMC shed light on its redefined channel strategy, formulated to help channel partners extend their reach into new and existing markets. Dell EMC will discuss its brand new Partner Program, formally introduced at the beginning of February, which preserves the best of legacy Dell and EMC programs to provide the means and opportunity along with the recognition and profitability that partners want and deserve. Built on three core tenets - to be Simple, Predictable and Profitable - the new integrated program establishes one extraordinary new program that addresses the needs of partners today and into the future. Designed to reaffirm Dell EMC's commitment to the channel, the new program

includes new tiers - Gold, Platinum and Titanium, as well as an exclusive invitation only Titanium Black status within the Titanium tier - specially created to strengthen the relationship with partners who are extremely aligned with Dell EMC. In addition, in order to simplify the program, it will operate on an annual calendar so partners can plan their investments and business knowing the rules for the next 12-months. The program is also formulated to deliver an automated rebate process, so partners know every week what they have earned.

Aligning with the overall 'Aspire' theme, the event will open with a keynote from Mohammed Amin, Senior Vice President, Middle East, Turkey & Africa, Dell EMC, highlighting Dell EMC's strong capabilities in the fastest-growing areas of the industry and how it is defining change in the marketplace. Following this, Javier Haddad, Senior Channel Director, Middle East, Turkey and Africa, Dell EMC will address the needs of the channel today and into the future.

According to IDC, ICT spending in the Middle East, Turkey, and Africa (META) is expected to reach \$236 bil-

lion in 2017. Positioned as a "Leader" in 15 Gartner Magic Quadrants with a portfolio of more than 20,000 patents and patent applications, through this event, Dell EMC aims to help partners gather a greater understanding of Dell EMC's industry leading and all-comprehensive IT solutions portfolio and enable them to leverage these solutions to tap new opportunities.

Dell EMC Executive Javier Haddad, Senior Channel Director, Middle East, Turkey and Africa, Dell EMC said, "IT innovation is key to driving business growth, and at Dell EMC we strive to facilitate innovation across industries. With this in mind, the META Executive Partner Summit 2017 is a perfect platform to provide our partners with a deeper understanding of our new Partner Program and channel strategy. Our new channel program is uniquely positioned to help partners leverage the combined strength of Dell EMC to increase their reach and meet customer demands in this digital age. With our broad, innovative and industry leading portfolio of solutions ranging from edge to core to cloud, we aim to enable our entire channel ecosystem to seize new opportunities and ensure partners are positioned to help customers through the current evolution of technology we are seeing through digital transformation."

INDICTMENTS FOR SUSPECTS IN EPIC YAHOO HACKS SOON

SAN FRANCISCO: US authorities are poised to issue criminal indictments targeting four people, three of them in Russia, in connection with epic hacking attacks on Yahoo, Bloomberg reported yesterday.

Bloomberg cited a person briefed on the matter as saying that one person was being tracked down in Canada and the others were in Russia. Yahoo chief executive Marissa Mayer reportedly lost an annual bonus and the company counsel his job after an investigation showed the company mishandled a 2014 hack that resulted in the

theft of personal data from more than 500 million user accounts. The pioneering Silicon Valley internet firm did not publicly disclose the hack until last September.

An independent committee determined that Yahoo's security team knew about the attack when it happened, the company said in a regulatory filing. Late that year, senior executives and some legal staff were made aware that "a state-sponsored actor had accessed certain user accounts" by exploiting an account management tool.

"While significant additional security

measures were implemented in response to those incidents, it appears certain senior executives did not properly comprehend or investigate," Yahoo said in the filing. In December, the company admitted to another cyberattack from 2013 that affected more than a billion users. Yahoo is currently in a deal to sell its core internet business to telecom giant Verizon, which demanded a \$350 million discount after the large-scale hacks became public. Under the revised terms of the delayed deal, Verizon's purchase of Yahoo assets will total \$4.48 billion. The deal with

Verizon will end Yahoo's run of more than 20 years as an independent company. Yahoo is selling its main operating business as a way to separate it from its more valuable stake in the Chinese internet giant Alibaba, which will become a new entity and act as an investment company.

Yahoo still faces probes and lawsuits related to the cyberattacks affecting more than 1.5 billion accounts, and the timing of the disclosures. US law requires companies that fall victim to such hacks to disclose them as soon as they are deemed to affect stock prices. —AFP

CLIMATE CHANGE IS MAKING PEOPLE SICK: US DOCTORS

WASHINGTON: From rising levels of air pollution to increased water contamination and a widening range for disease-carrying mosquitoes, climate change is making people sick, a coalition of 11 US medical groups said yesterday. Known as the Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health, the group represents more than half of US doctors, and aims to help policy makers understand the health dangers of global warming, and what must be done to guard against it in the coming years. "Doctors in every part of our country see that climate change is making Americans sicker," said Mona Sarfaty,

a physician and director of the new consortium. "Physicians are on the frontlines and see the impacts in exam rooms. What's worse is that the harms are felt most by children, the elderly, Americans with low-income or chronic illnesses, and people in communities of color." The group is releasing a report that highlights the ways climate change affects health, and calls for a speedy transition to clean renewable energy. The report, called "Medical Alert! Climate Change is Harming Our Health," will be circulated to members of the Republican-dominated Congress. Some of its key warnings relate to heart

and breathing problems associated with increasing wildfires and air pollution, as well as injury from extreme heat events.

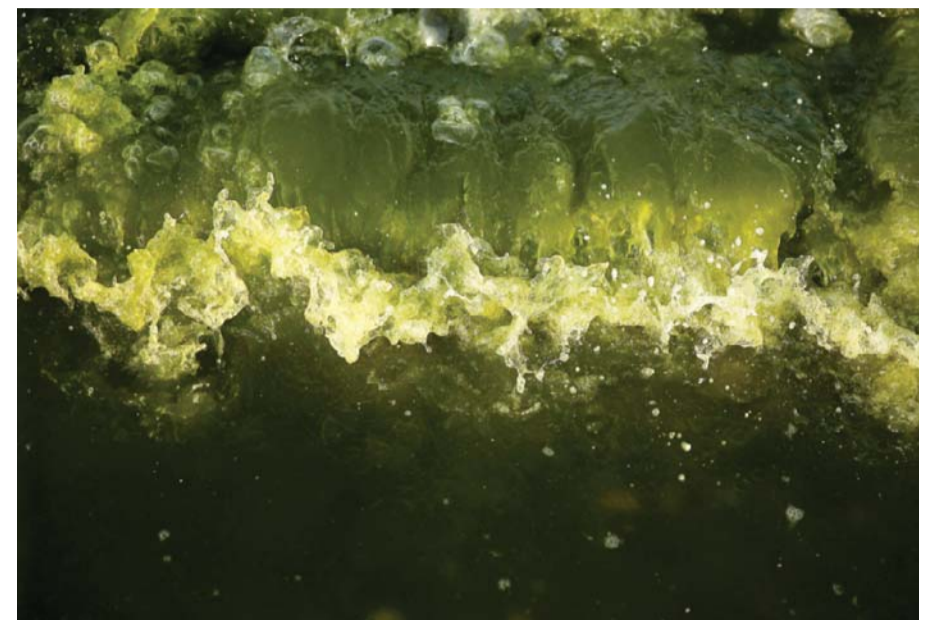
Infectious diseases can spread more widely as ticks carrying Lyme disease and mosquitoes with West Nile virus expand their range. Extreme weather, such as hurricanes and droughts, may become more common, destroying not only homes and livelihoods but also wreaking havoc on people's mental health, it warned. Most Americans are not aware that increases in asthma attacks and allergies are linked to climate change, according to the report. A poll

from 2014 suggested that only one in four Americans could name even one way in which climate change is harming our health.

People are not powerless, the group urged. They can push for a quicker transition to renewable solar and wind energy, and also do what they can to walk and bike more instead of driving. "Here's the message from America's doctors on climate change: it's not only happening in the Arctic Circle, it's happening here," said Sarfaty. "It's not only a problem for us in 2100, it's a problem now. And it's not only hurting polar bears, it's hurting us." — AFP



OMAN: In this photo, green algae swirls on the beach of Bandar Al-Jissah in Oman. — AP photos



OMAN: A wave colored with dark green algae washes on the beach of Bandar Al-Jissah, Oman.



OMAN: A wave colored with dark green algae washes on the beach of Bandar Al-Jissah, Oman underneath Bassem Al-Husn, 24.

GROWING ALGAE BLOOM IN ARABIAN SEA TIED TO CLIMATE CHANGE 'IT'S LIKE A VAN GOGH PAINTING'

BANDAR AL-ROWDAH, Oman: The Gulf of Oman turns green twice a year, when an algae bloom the size of Mexico spreads across the Arabian Sea all the way to India. Scientists who study the algae say the microscopic organisms are thriving in new conditions brought about by climate change, and displacing the zooplankton that underpin the local food chain, threatening the entire marine ecosystem. Khalid Al-Hashmi, a marine biologist at the Sultan Qaboos University in Oman, wrinkles his nose as the research vessel nears the bloom. "Sea stench," he says, referring to the algae's ammonia secretions. "It's here, you can smell it."

He signals the boat to stop as it speeds beneath a gigantic rock arch off the coast of Muscat, the capital of Oman, an arid sultanate on the southeastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula. The captain kills the engine and drops anchor into a slick of bright green muck surrounded by crystal-clear blue water. The swarms of microscopic creatures beneath the surface of the Gulf of Oman were all but invisible 30 years ago - now they form giant, murky shapes that can be seen from satellites. Across the planet, blooms have wrecked local ecosystems. Algae can paralyze fish, clog their gills, and absorb enough oxygen to suffocate them. Whales, turtles, dolphins and manatees have died, poisoned by algal toxins, in the Atlantic and Pacific. These toxins have infiltrated whole marine food chains

and have, in rare cases, killed people, according to the UN science agency.

US space agency

In the Great Lakes of North America, Thailand and the Seychelles, the algae bloom green. In Florida they are red, in the North Atlantic they are chalky white, and in Puget Sound they are orange. The Irish call it the "sea ghost," and the Taiwanese refer to the blooms as "blue tears." NASA uses satellites and floating robots to monitor the blooms, said Paula Bontempi, the manager for ocean carbon and biology projects at the US space agency. "It's like a Van Gogh painting," she said, referring to satellite images of swirls of chlorophyll spiraling across the world's oceans. "Absolutely beautiful." It's less attractive up close, where it can be "almost guacamole-like" in some lakes. "It smells bad, it looks bad," she said.

The satellite technology has enabled scientists to link the algae to higher levels of air and water pollution in recent decades, but Bontempi said questions remain. "We know that our Earth is changing," she said. "It may be in a direction we might not like." Scientists based at the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory at Columbia University trace Oman's blooms to melting ice in the Himalayas. Less ice has raised temperatures in South Asia and strengthened the Indian Ocean's southwest monsoon. As this weather front moves across the Arabian Sea every year, it

churned up oxygen-poor water thick with nutrients that have fueled the rise of a 1.2-billion-year old algae called *noctiluca scintillans*.

Desalination plants

For the past 15 years, observatory biogeochemist Joaquim Goes, Al-Hashmi and biological oceanographer Helga do Rosario Gomes have tracked blooms in the Arabian Sea using boats, satellites and remote sensors. Goes said the blooms have caused a "short-circuiting of the food chain," endangering other marine life. "Normally these things happen slowly, usually we talk about tens of hundreds of years. Here it's happening overnight," he said. "The transformation is happening before our eyes." The algae blooms pose a number of threats to Oman, whose fishing and trading ships have plied these waters for centuries.

Thick blooms reduce visibility, making it difficult for divers to repair undersea gas infrastructure. It can also clog the intake pipes of the desalination plants that produce up to 90 percent of the country's fresh water. Fishermen call Oman's marine research center when they spot blooms. Marine ecologist Ahmad al-Alawi adds these reports to four decades of observations before comparing them with satellite images of the swirling chlorophyll. He says the blooms are growing bigger and lasting longer, displacing the zooplankton at the bottom of the local food chain. The algae has attracted more whale sharks - a major draw for divers - but many tourists have cancelled their trips at the sight of the green, murky waves, said Ollie Clarke, a dive instructor at the Bandar Al-Rowdah marina near Muscat.

It also poses a threat to the country's fisheries. An outbreak of a different kind of algae in 2008 led to the beaching of 50 tons of oxygen-starved fish, which rotted up and down the coast, al-Alawi said. The researchers have found cause for both despair and hope by studying a live *noctiluca* culture in their lab: The blooms will likely spread as the Indian Ocean continues to absorb greenhouse gas emissions, but could be contained if they are sprayed with fresh water. Goes and Gomes hope to develop an early-warning system for Oman modeled on one operated by the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in Florida. But Saleh Al-Mashari, who learned to sail and fish as a boy in the small coastal village where he still lives, and who now captains a researcher vessel, said the damage is already done. "The fish are migrating," he said. "They can't get enough air here." — AP



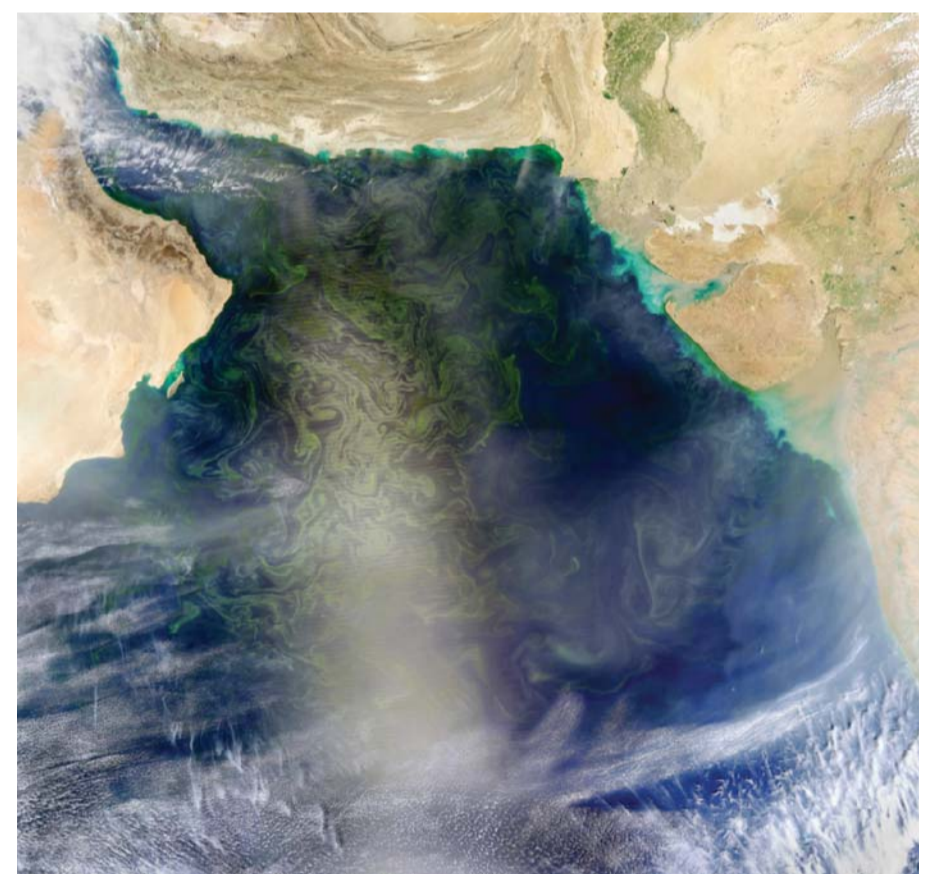
OMAN: Men play a game of shells called "hawalees" next to the coastal village of Haramel's mosque in Oman.



OMAN: Marine biologist Khalid Al-Hashmi, 50, holds a jar with a sample of an algae blooming in the Gulf of Oman.



OMAN: Marine ecologist Ahmad Al-Alawi, 26, warns, during an interview on the cliffs above the marina of Bandar Al-Rowdah, Oman, that a recurring and expanding algae bloom, stretching from India to Oman, threatens the entire marine ecosystem.



OMAN: Image from the NASA Aqua-MODIS satellite, a mass of the algae *noctiluca scintillans* blooms in the Arabian Sea off the coast of Oman stretching past Pakistan to India.

AUSTRALIAN BLOGGER GUILTY OVER CANCER CLAIMS

SYDNEY: A health blogger who lied about having brain cancer and curing herself through natural therapies was yesterday found guilty by an Australian court of misleading the public. Belle Gibson, 25, launched a popular cookbook and smartphone app in 2013 on the back of claims she had overcome the disease through alternative remedies such as Ayurvedic medicine and a diet free of gluten and refined sugar. But in 2015 she admitted to an Australian magazine that she had made up the diagnosis.

Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) took legal action against Gibson, and the Federal Court upheld most of their allegations, finding she had engaged in "misleading or deceptive conduct" after promoting her book and app on false assertions. The court has yet to announce what penalties Gibson will be hit with, but under consumer law she could face up to Aus\$220,000 (US\$166,500) in fines and her company up to Aus\$1.1 million, a CAV spokesman told AFP. "Ms Gibson deliberately played

on the genuine desire of members of the Australian community to help those less fortunate," Justice Debra Mortimer wrote in her judgment.

"Her 'pitch' overwhelmingly used groups likely to evoke sympathy because of their vulnerabilities—young girls, asylum seekers, sick children," Mortimer added that she was open to the possibility Gibson might have "suffered from a series of delusions about her health condition", as there was not enough evidence to show she did not genuinely believe she had cancer. "Not all human beings are rational and reasonable all of the time," Mortimer wrote. "The Whole Pantry" was a cookbook with 80 mostly plant-based recipes that drew inspiration from Gibson's purported battle against cancer. Gibson's lie began unraveling when it emerged in early 2015 that she had failed to donate Aus\$300,000 in profits from the sales of her cookbook to charity as promised and friends started to question her diagnosis via the media. —AFP

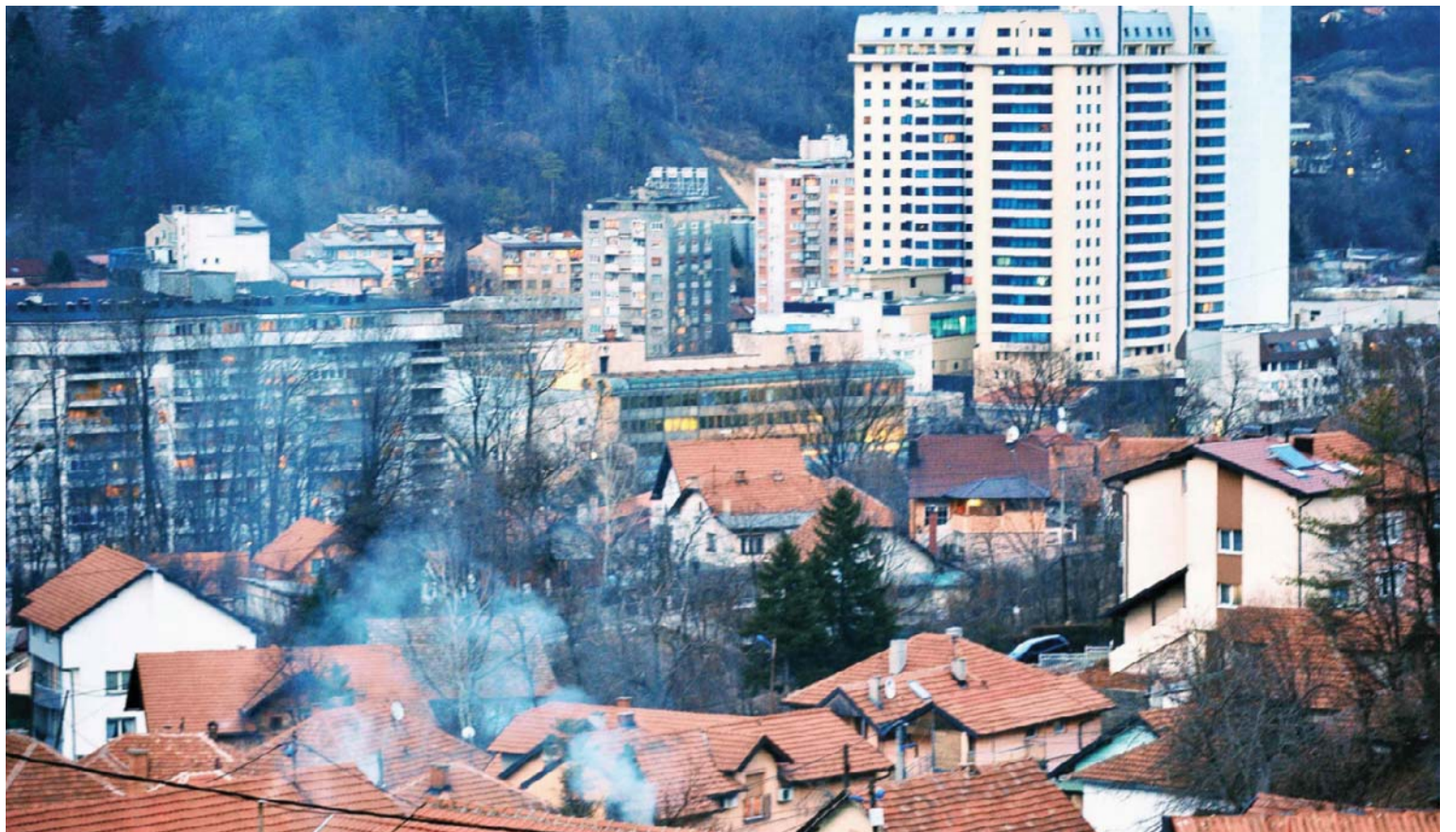
POPULAR WEEDKILLER DOESN'T CAUSE CANCER: EU AGENCY

BRUSSELS: The EU's chemicals agency said yesterday that glyphosate, one of the world's most widely used weedkillers, should not be classified as a carcinogen. The assessment paves the way for Brussels to make a final decision on the chemical, despite deep divisions in the 28-member European Union over its use. Glyphosate is used in the best-selling herbicide Roundup, produced by the US agro-chemicals giant Monsanto. "Glyphosate should not be classified as carcinogenic," Jack de Bruijn, director of the risk assessment committee of the European Chemicals Agency, said at a news conference.

De Bruijn said the weedkiller had not been found to cause genetic or reproductive defects, a finding based on "extensive evaluation of all the information that was available for this substance". In July 2016, EU member states approved an 18-month extension of an approval for glyphosate

pending the agency's report, but limited its use. Among member states, France and Malta opposed re-approving the chemical, while Germany was one of seven countries to abstain on the issue. The European Commission has been waiting for the agency's assessment to make a final decision on approving glyphosate for general use.

The commission said that it "takes note" of yesterday's announcement, and that a decision is expected by the end of this year. Opponents of glyphosate, led by Greenpeace, point to research from the World Health Organization that concludes it may be carcinogenic, and are calling for an outright ban. In May, a review carried out by experts from both the WHO and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization said "glyphosate is unlikely to pose a carcinogenic risk to humans from exposure through the diet". — AFP



TUZLA, Bosnia and Herzegovina: A picture shows downtown Tuzla in northeastern Bosnia. — AFP photos

POLLUTED AIR CAUSING EARLY DEATHS IN FOSSIL-FUELLED BALKANS

TUZLA, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Stuck between a landfill and a coal-fired power plant, residents of the Bosnian village of Divkovići are dying of asphyxia, poisoned by some of the most polluted air in Europe. "In a few years, it will be like Chernobyl here: houses without souls," said unemployed Goran Stojak. His father died last year of lung cancer, and he is afraid to undergo medical tests for fear of "bad news". His sons, aged just one and two, are already suffering from respiratory problems. Tuzla, the industrial city housing the power plant, is one of five Balkan cities that are among the 10 most polluted in Europe based on concentrations of particulate matter, according to the World Health Organization.

Pljevlja in Montenegro and the Macedonian cities of Skopje, Tetovo and Bitola are also in the dirty top 10. All are home to industries based on coal or lignite, which is used in addition to heat homes. At the bottom of the basin in which Tuzla sits and polluted air is trapped, the 110,000 residents suffocate in winter. In Divkovići, where one can see the red and white chimneys of the power plant, the atmosphere is saturated with sulphur dioxide as well as fine particles. "Only about 30 of Divkovići's 500 or so residents remain. Those who can, leave. Cancer is wreaking havoc on the village, where life expectancy is 42 years according to our calculations," said Stojak, who is 43. In the Macedonian capital meanwhile, Aco Ivanov, who lives in the most polluted neighborhood of Novo Lisice, said he has not left his house for a month. "The winters in Skopje are a hell for me," he said. "The air is acrid, stifling, especially in the evening."

Outdated power plants

The Western Balkan countries of Bosnia, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Kosovo are together home to about 15 thermal power stations, on which they are highly dependent. According to a study published in March 2016 by the Brussels-based Health and Environment Alliance, these plants dating back to communist Yugoslavia are responsible for a public health bill of around 2.5 to 8.5 billion euros (\$2.6 to 9 billion). It claims that damage is suffered not only by those living in the region but by people in other European countries, affected by pollution carried in the winds.

"In Tuzla's thermal power plant, production

units are among the oldest in Europe," said Zvezdan Karadzina, a professor of environmental security in Tuzla. "Emissions of some pollutants, such as sulphur dioxide, can be up to 30 times higher than the top levels authorized by European standards." Contacted by AFP, Elektroprivreda BiH, the public company that runs the Tuzla plant, declined to comment. Karadzina said that a second "chronic" problem was that homes were being heated with coal fires, which he termed "the leading cause of pollution in winter". The mining and electricity sectors employ around 23,000 people in Bosnia, which has a population of 3.5 million. One of the poorest countries in the region, it produced some 14,400 gigawatts of electricity in 2015, 60 percent of it from coal-fired power stations. It is one of the few Balkan states to export electricity, which brought in 165 million euros in 2016.

But this has a cost. The head of Tuzla's pulmonary clinic, Suvad Dedic, reports a 33-percent rise in new cases of lung cancer in two years from 216 cases in 2014 to 287 last year. He said the disease usually afflicts people between the

ages of 55 and 61, but in the Tuzla area it is starting to strike earlier. "There are more and more who are 50 or 51 years old, or even under 50. And we've even had some cases of children suffering from lung cancer," said Dedic.

Increase in deaths

Dzemila Agic at the Centre for Ecology and Energy, a Bosnian NGO, is worried about the increase in deaths in Tuzla over winter, noting that the numbers were up by 50 percent in January 2017 from January 2015. According to her, investing around 100 million euros in a desulphurisation device could reduce toxic emissions of the power plant by 90 percent. But she said that for the plant's operators, this measure was too expensive. "They do not take into account the damage to health," said Agic. In late 2015, the Bosnian government adopted a plan to reduce emissions from power stations from about 273,000 tons a year to nearly 50,000 tons by 2018 and 23,000 by 2028. It intends to do this by closing production units, adding filtering devices and constructing more modern infrastructure. — AFP



TUZLA, Bosnia and Herzegovina: A picture shows ash being disposed outside Bosnia's largest coal burning electrical power plant near Tuzla in northeastern Bosnia.

CURBING POLLUTION CAN PREVENT 3 MILLION CHINESE DEATHS A YEAR

PARIS: China can avoid three million premature deaths each year if it slashes a type of fine particle air pollution to UN recommended levels, a study said yesterday. The average daily particle concentration in 38 of China's largest cities between January 2010 and June 2013 was about 93 micrograms per cubic metre (ug/m3) of air, researchers reported in The BMJ medical journal. This was way over the World Health Organization (WHO) standard of 20 ug/m3. The measurement applies to so-called PM10 particles, which are less than 10 microns or 10 millionths of a meter across—several times thinner than a human hair. Generated by the burning of coal and oil in cars and power plants, but also forest fires, volcanic eruptions and dust storms, airborne fine particles can penetrate into the airways to cause respiratory problems. They also blacken buildings and contribute to acid rain. Over 350,000 deaths were reported in the 38 Chinese cities chosen for the study in three-and-a-half years, said the researchers.

They calculated that every 10 ug/m3 increase in daily PM10 concentrations was associated with a 0.44-percent rise in daily deaths, mainly from cardiorespiratory ail-

ments such as asthma and chronic lung disease. People over 60 had a higher risk of death from particle pollution, and women were more affected than men, said the team. Extrapolating to the country as a whole, China "would save three million premature deaths each year" by reducing the daily PM10 level to the WHO standard, they calculated—a conservative estimate.

Premature deaths are defined by researchers as people dying before reaching a certain, expected age for their peer group. Many of these deaths are considered preventable. "Our findings suggest that adopting and enforcing tighter air quality standards in China will bring about tremendous public health benefits," said the study. China, India, Iran and Indonesia are among the countries hardest hit by air pollution. New Delhi, for example, has been known to exceed PM10 levels of 700 ug/m3. Another important measure of air pollution is so-called PM2.5 fine particles, whose diameter is 2.5 microns or less. They are a particular source of worry for health monitors as they are light and tiny and can reach even deeper into the lungs. The study focused on PM10 pollution. — AFP



BEIJING: This file photo shows a group of people wearing masks during a visit to Tiananmen Square in Beijing. — AFP photos



BEIJING: This file photo shows a man wearing a mask walking ahead of a group of people as he visits the Temple of Heaven amid heavy air pollution in Beijing.

CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times
248 33 199



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KAS STUDENTS VISIT KUWAIT TIMES



Students from the Kuwait American School visited the Kuwait Times on Tuesday, March 14 to learn more about journalism, publishing and printing in Kuwait. The Grade 11 students, accompanied by their teacher Paul Worsley Brown, listened to lectures on newspaper and media marketing and public relations, journalistic writing and also toured the facilities and visited the printing press. — Photo by Joseph Shagra.



Ambassadors inaugurate a 'Nowruz' celebration organized by the International Women's Group. — Photos by Joseph Shagra



IWG, AMBASSADORS CELEBRATE 'NOWRUZ'

By Faten Omar

The International Women's Group (IWG) held its annual spring heritage cultural festival yesterday at Ruby Tuesday restaurant.

"Seventeen embassies are celebrating the beginning of spring today," Narjis Al-Shatti, IWG member told the Kuwait Times. "Some countries call it 'Nowruz' which is a global day marked in celebration of the spring season. IWG organized this celebration in cooperation with ambassadors in order to show the cultural and heritage side of their respective countries," she added.

IWG also prepares to host its monthly meeting next April. "The meeting's theme will be about Spain and its culture," Shatti said. "We will also be preparing for an event about women's health organized by Dar Al-Shefa Hospital. IWG is invited by Kazakhstan to participate in the international fashion show there and we invited some of famous Kuwaiti fashion designers to represent Kuwait in Kazakhstan."

Dr Zubaydullo Zubaydov, Ambassador of Tajikistan to Kuwait, said meanwhile that the Embassy of Tajikistan appreciates the existing cultural ties between his country and Kuwait. "We are participating to celebrate Nowruz, the annual feast of Tajikistan."

He added that 'Nowruz' is considered as a day in which many people turn a new leaf, try to forget about their problems, and start fresh. Tajikistan celebrates Nowruz on March 21 every year with great splendor and joy; it is declared a three-day holiday, and the whole country would be in a festive mood, the ambassador said.

Zubaydov noted that the first day of spring is celebrated in a similar way the beginning of a new year is celebrated, since it signifies the awakening of life. Many customs, ceremonies and performances are celebrated during Nowruz. "Many couples try to plan their weddings to take place on Nowruz day to have a new fresh day in their marriage life," he added.



Dr Zubaydullo Zubaydov, Ambassador of Tajikistan to Kuwait welcomes visitors at his country's booth.





HARDEE'S SENDS 120 VIP WINNERS TO SKULL ISLAND

Not everyone gets to visit Skull Island, but thanks to Hardee's, 120 lucky and brave individuals in Kuwait did just that. In the lead up to the Kong: Skull Island premiere, Hardee's customers who went large on their meals were given a voucher code to enter into a microsite for a chance to visit Skull Island.

120 winners were notified that they'd won and would be trekking to Skull Island - otherwise known as the Cinescape Cinema in the 360 Mall, on March 7th for the 8:30pm grand premiere of the movie! Not only that, on arrival to the cinema each adventurer was rewarded with a VIP goodie bag and a large popcorn and drink. We would never let anyone go hungry. We are delighted to say the event was a huge success, and Kuwait has 120 new explorers to celebrate. Where will we send Hardee's customers next? That's all to be revealed.



FLOW HOUSE OFFERS SURFING FOR FIRST TIME IN KUWAIT



Flow House Kuwait is offering visitors the chance to enjoy a surfing experience presented for the first time in the country. The company launches today its newest project in Abu Hlaifa, which includes a family pool, a second pool dedicated for children, in addition to sliders, CEO Hamad Al-Khaneeni said in a statement. The place also includes 34 rest areas open daily from 10:00 am to 10:00 pm, where parents can sit and watch their children play, he said.

The pools are 100 percent safe and were designed specifically for Flow House, Khaneeni said. Visitors can also enjoy the 'Oxygen Bar' offered at the facility, or spend half an hour under water where they can take underwater pictures or play games, he added.

The entrance ticket is available for KD 8 per person, which includes access to the surfing area, swimming pools and to children's games, whereas the Oxygen Bar's tickets are available for KD 12 per person, Khaneeni said. A housemaid's ticket is available for KD 3, he added. The place is open every day, while entrance on Friday is exclusive for families, Khaneeni said, adding that a day dedicated for women will be announced soon.

Meanwhile, Public Relations Director Maha Saleem said that the project is a gift for families, adding that special offers will be presented to companies, banks and other institutions.



Hamad Al-Khaneeni



Maha Saleem



FLARE SPORTS FESTIVAL THE LARGEST STUDENT SPORTS EVENT IN MIDDLE EAST

KUWAIT: Flare Fitness announced the launch of the Flare sports festival for the third year in a row at Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST) today, which includes two sports challenges and Gallery for Kuwaiti Youth Project, as the prize money estimated around \$10,000.

On this occasion, Yousef Ahmed, the Managing Partner of the Fitness Flare said that "The Flare Sports Festival is a student sports competition includes a range of physical challenges looks like rounds depends on the strength, flexibility and endurance, which contributes to raise the spirit of positive competition among student circles.

He added that this festival, which is the biggest students sporting event takes place in the Middle East, aims to disseminate physical awareness, attract people to sporting events and participating, thus



Yousef Ahmed

contributes to the elimination of severe obesity that generally prevalent in Kuwait and among students in particular, also publishes health

awareness and motivate students to exercise sports in modern and sophisticated manner.

Yousef stressed that "this year, the festival includes many events and activities, whether sports or social, whereas is not limited to sports leagues, but also includes a small exhibition for small Kuwaiti youth projects. He pointed out that the festival includes, in addition to the exhibition, two necessary challenges; the first challenge is Fitness Competition, as contains 100 Challenger divided into two categories, male students category are 80 challenger and 20 of the female students are challenger. The second challenge is called Hindrance Race, which includes a running race with obstacles for a distance of more than 1.3 kilometers and consists of two categories of students and general for all to participate.



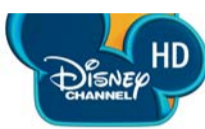
OSN MOVIES ACTION

00:00 The Night Crew
02:00 Twixt
04:00 Tekken: Kazuya's Revenge
06:00 Six Days Seven Nights
08:00 Tracers
10:00 Tekken: Kazuya's Revenge
12:00 Escape
14:00 Real Steel
16:15 Ladder 49
18:15 Pompeii
20:15 Hitman: Agent 47
22:00 Son Of A Gun

ANIMAL PLANET HD

00:50 Ten Deadliest Snakes With Nigel Marvin
01:45 Bondi Vet
02:40 Restoration Wild
03:35 Tanked
04:25 Escape To Chimp Eden
04:50 Escape To Chimp Eden
05:15 Gator Boys
06:02 Ten Deadliest Snakes With Nigel Marvin

05:30 Dirty Jobs
06:20 Mythbusters
07:00 Dick 'n' Dom Go Wild
07:25 Awesome Adventures
07:50 Bondi Vet
08:40 How It's Made
09:05 How It's Made
09:30 Prototype This
10:20 Mythbusters
11:10 Bondi Vet
12:00 Bear Grylls: Born Survivor
12:50 How It's Made
13:15 How It's Made
13:40 Dirty Jobs
14:30 Dick 'n' Dom Go Wild
14:55 Awesome Adventures
15:20 Mythbusters
16:10 Prototype This
17:00 Strip The Cosmos
17:50 NASA's Unexplained Files
18:40 What Happened Next?
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21:10 Strip The Cosmos
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22:50 What Happened Next?
23:15 What Happened Next?
23:40 Bear Grylls: Born Survivor



00:10 Hank Zipzer
00:35 Binny And The Ghost
01:00 Violetta
01:45 The Hive
01:50 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
02:15 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
02:40 Hank Zipzer
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05:10 Hank Zipzer
05:35 Binny And The Ghost
06:00 Violetta
06:45 The Hive
06:50 The 7D
07:00 Jessie
07:25 Jessie
07:50 Tsum Tsum Shorts
07:55 The Zucchini
08:20 Elena Of Avalor

06:30 Henry Hugglemonster
06:45 Loopdidoo
07:00 Zou
07:15 Calimero
07:30 Loopdidoo
07:45 Henry Hugglemonster
08:00 Minnie's Bow-Toons
08:05 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
08:15 Jake And The Neverland Pirates
08:30 Miles From Tomorrow
08:45 Goldie & Bear
08:55 The Lion Guard
09:20 PJ Masks
09:35 Jake And The Neverland Pirates
09:50 Doc McStuffins
10:00 Goldie & Bear
10:15 PJ Masks
10:30 Minnie's Bow-Toons
10:35 The Lion Guard
11:00 Sofia The First
11:30 Doc McStuffins
11:55 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
12:20 My Friends Tigger & Pooh
12:50 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
13:15 Gummi Bears
13:40 Sofia The First
14:10 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
14:35 PJ Masks
15:00 My Friends Tigger & Pooh
15:30 The Lion Guard
15:55 Unbungaleivable
16:00 Sofia The First
16:30 Doc McStuffins
16:55 Goldie & Bear
17:20 The Lion Guard
17:50 PJ Masks
18:15 Sofia The First
18:40 Doc McStuffins
19:05 Jake And The Neverland Pirates
19:30 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
20:00 Sofia The First
20:30 Sofia The First
21:00 Unbungaleivable
21:05 Goldie & Bear
21:35 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
22:00 My Friends Tigger & Pooh
22:25 Gummi Bears
22:55 Minnie's Bow-Toons
23:00 The Lion Guard
23:30 The Lion Guard
23:55 PJ Masks



00:20 Street Outlaws
01:10 Made By Destruction
01:35 Made By Destruction
02:00 How Do They Do It?
02:25 How Do They Do It?
02:50 Impossible Engineering

19:25 Gamer's Guide To Pretty Much Everything
19:55 K.C. Undercover
20:20 Kickin' It
20:45 Mighty Med
21:10 Danger Mouse
21:40 Disney Mickey Mouse
21:45 Marvel's Avengers Assemble
22:10 Marvel Ultimate Spider-Man vs The Sinister 6
22:35 Booster
23:00 Programmes Start At 6:00am KSA



00:05 Mariah's World
00:55 Mariah's World
01:50 El News
02:50 Hollywood & Football
03:45 Hollywood & Football
04:40 Hollywood & Football
05:30 Celebrity Style Story
06:00 LA Clippers Dance Squad
06:55 El News
07:10 LA Clippers Dance Squad
08:10 El News
09:10 Rob & Chyna
10:05 Rob & Chyna
11:00 Rob & Chyna
12:00 El News
12:15 Revenge Body With Khloe Kardashian
13:10 Revenge Body With Khloe Kardashian
14:05 Revenge Body With Khloe Kardashian
15:00 El News
15:15 Mariah's World
16:10 Mariah's World
17:05 Mariah's World
18:00 Celebrity Style Story
18:30 Celebrity Style Story
19:00 El News
20:00 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
21:00 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
22:00 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
23:00 El News
23:15 So Cosmo



00:00 Food Network Star
01:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
01:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
02:00 Man Fire Food
02:30 Man Fire Food
03:00 Chopped
04:00 Guy's Grocery Games
05:00 Barefoot Contessa: Back To Basics
05:30 Barefoot Contessa: Back To Basics
06:00 The Kitchen
07:00 The Pioneer Woman
07:30 The Pioneer Woman
08:00 Siba's Table
08:30 Siba's Table
09:00 The Pioneer Woman
09:30 The Pioneer Woman
10:00 The Kitchen
11:00 The Pioneer Woman
11:30 The Pioneer Woman
12:00 Siba's Table
12:30 Siba's Table
13:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
13:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
14:00 Chopped
15:00 The Kitchen
16:00 The Pioneer Woman
16:30 The Pioneer Woman
17:00 Chopped
18:00 Iron Chef America
19:00 Tia Mowry At Home
19:30 Tia Mowry At Home
20:00 Patricia Heaton Parties
20:30 Patricia Heaton Parties
21:00 Rev Run's Sunday Suppers
21:30 Rev Run's Sunday Suppers
22:00 Guy's Grocery Games
23:00 Tia Mowry At Home
23:30 Tia Mowry At Home



00:10 The Chase
01:00 Emmerdale
01:30 Coronation Street
02:00 Coronation Street
02:30 The Jonathan Ross Show
03:25 Paul O'Grady: The Sally Army And Me
03:55 Paul O'Grady: The Sally Army And Me
04:25 Autopsy: The Last Hours Of... Home Fires
06:10 The Chase
07:05 The Jonathan Ross Show
08:00 Paul O'Grady: The Sally Army And Me
08:30 Paul O'Grady: The Sally Army And Me
09:00 Autopsy: The Last Hours Of... Home Fires
10:00 Home Fires
10:55 The Chase
11:50 The Jonathan Ross Show
12:45 Emmerdale
13:15 Coronation Street

13:45 Coronation Street
14:15 The Chase
15:10 The Jonathan Ross Show
16:00 Don't Tell The Bride
17:00 5 Star Family Reunion
17:50 Home Fires
18:45 Emmerdale
19:15 Coronation Street
19:45 Coronation Street
20:10 The Jonathan Ross Show
21:00 Don't Tell The Bride
22:00 5 Star Family Reunion
22:50 Emmerdale
23:15 Coronation Street
23:40 Coronation Street



00:00 Hangar 1: The UFO Files
01:00 Patton 360
02:00 Cities Of The Underworld
03:00 America's Book Of Secrets
03:50 Ancient Aliens
04:40 Ancient Top 10
05:30 Hangar 1: The UFO Files
06:20 Patton 360
07:10 The Universe
08:00 Cities Of The Underworld
09:00 The Universe
10:00 Ancient Aliens
11:00 Ancient Top 10
12:00 Hangar 1: The UFO Files
13:00 Patton 360
14:00 Cities Of The Underworld
15:00 The Universe
16:00 Ancient Aliens
17:00 Ancient Top 10
18:00 Hangar 1: The UFO Files
19:00 Patton 360
20:00 Cities Of The Underworld
21:00 America's Book Of Secrets
22:00 Ancient Aliens
23:00 Million Dollar Genius



00:20 Battle 360
01:10 Counting Cars
01:35 Car Hunters
02:00 Forged In Fire
02:50 Storage Wars
03:15 American Pickers
04:05 Pawn Stars
04:30 Pawn Stars
05:00 Mountain Men
06:00 American Restoration
06:50 Shipping Wars
07:15 Shipping Wars
07:40 Counting Cars
08:05 Car Hunters
08:30 Pawn Stars
08:55 Pawn Stars
09:20 Storage Wars Texas
09:45 Storage Wars Texas
10:10 American Pickers
11:00 Alone
11:50 Time Team
12:40 Swamp People
13:30 Ax Men
14:20 Mountain Men
15:10 Shipping Wars
15:35 Shipping Wars
16:00 Counting Cars
16:25 Counting Cars
16:50 Pawn Stars
17:15 Pawn Stars
17:40 Forged In Fire
18:30 Counting Cars
18:55 Car Hunters
19:20 Mountain Men
20:10 American Pickers
21:00 Outlaw Chronicles: Hells Angels
21:50 Search For The Lost Giants
22:40 Hunting Hitler
23:30 American Pickers



00:15 Sara's Australia Unveiled
00:40 Grandma's Boy
01:05 Tripping Out With Allie & Georgia
01:30 Dog Whisperer
02:20 This Is Brazil
03:10 Valentine Warner Eats Scandinavia
03:35 Maximum Foodie
04:00 Confucius Was A Foodie
04:50 Wineroads
05:20 Raw Travel
05:45 Raw Travel
06:15 Miguel's Feasts
06:40 Andy And Ben Eat The World
07:10 Tripping Out With Allie & Georgia
07:35 Dog Whisperer
08:30 This Is Brazil
09:25 Valentine Warner Eats Scandinavia
09:55 Maximum Foodie
10:20 Confucius Was A Foodie
11:15 Wineroads
11:45 Raw Travel
12:10 Raw Travel
12:40 The Best Job In The World
13:05 Dog Whisperer
14:00 Cool Spaces
14:55 Valentine Warner Eats Scandinavia



INVICTUS ON OSN MOVIES HD

15:25 Maximum Foodie
15:50 Confucius Was A Foodie
16:45 Wineroads
17:15 Raw Travel
18:10 Andy And Ben Eat The World
19:05 Valentine Warner Eats Scandinavia
19:30 Maximum Foodie
20:00 Confucius Was A Foodie
20:55 Wineroads
21:20 Raw Travel
22:10 Andy And Ben Eat The World
23:00 The Best Job In The World
23:25 Dog Whisperer

00:00 Cronoring Tiger, Hidden Dragon
10:00 Tracks
12:00 A Perfect Day
13:45 And Justice For All
15:45 Selma
18:00 The Keeping Room
20:00 Slow West
22:00 The Revenant



01:00 Savva
02:45 Dixie And The Zombie Rebellion
04:30 The Adventures Of Don Quixote
06:00 Curious George
07:45 True Story Of Puss'n Boots
09:15 Jock The Hero Dog
10:45 Savva
12:30 Dixie And The Zombie Rebellion
14:00 Pirates Who Don't Do Anything
16:00 Jock The Hero Dog
18:00 Harriet The Spy
20:00 Bark Ranger
21:30 Pirates Who Don't Do Anything
23:15 True Story Of Puss'n Boots



01:30 The Color Of Money
03:45 The Taking Of Pelham 123
05:45 Big
07:45 Invictus
10:00 Jackie & Ryan
11:45 Words And Pictures
13:45 Man Of The House
15:30 Raising Helen
17:30 The Fugitive
19:45 American Sniper
22:00 Public Enemies



00:40 Mythbusters
01:30 How Do They Do It?
01:55 Food Factory
02:20 How The Earth Works
03:10 Strangest Weather On Earth
04:00 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
04:48 Mythbusters
05:36 How Do They Do It?
06:00 Food Factory
06:24 How The Earth Works
07:12 Strangest Weather On Earth
08:00 How Do They Do It?
08:26 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
11:05 Food Factory
12:00 Alaska Fish Wars
12:55 World's Deadliest Snakes
13:50 Baby Animals In The Wild
14:45 Zoo Confidential
15:40 Unlikely Animal Friends
16:35 Safari Brothers
17:30 Dr. K's Exotic Animal ER
18:25 Wild Australia
19:20 Zoo Confidential
20:10 Unlikely Animal Friends
21:00 Safari Brothers
21:50 Dr. K's Exotic Animal ER
22:40 Wild Australia
23:30 Alaska Fish Wars



00:20 Snake Underworld
01:10 Dangerous Encounters
02:00 World's Deadliest Snakes
02:50 Bear Nomad
03:45 Zoo Confidential
04:40 Unlikely Animal Friends
05:35 Asia's Deadliest Snakes
06:30 Bear Nomad
07:25 Zoo Confidential
08:20 Unlikely Animal Friends
09:15 Safari Brothers
10:10 Dr. K's Exotic Animal ER
11:05 Freaks & Creeps
12:00 Alaska Fish Wars
12:55 World's Deadliest Snakes
13:50 Baby Animals In The Wild
14:45 Zoo Confidential
15:40 Unlikely Animal Friends
16:35 Safari Brothers
17:30 Dr. K's Exotic Animal ER
18:25 Wild Australia
19:20 Zoo Confidential
20:10 Unlikely Animal Friends
21:00 Safari Brothers
21:50 Dr. K's Exotic Animal ER
22:40 Wild Australia
23:30 Alaska Fish Wars



00:30 Beyond The Mask
02:30 Batman Unlimited: Animal Instincts
04:00 Inside Out
06:00 The Hunchback Of Notre Dame II
07:30 Batman Unlimited: Animal Instincts
09:00 White Fang
11:00 Inside Out
13:00 Brother Bear
15:00 White Fang 2: Myth Of The White Wolf
17:00 Winnie The Pooh
18:30 Alice In Wonderland
20:30 Peter Pan Live!
23:00 White Fang 2: Myth Of The White Wolf



00:00 Road Trip
02:00 Big Ass Spider!
04:00 Take Care
06:00 Big Ass Spider!
08:00 Take Care
12:00 Pixels
14:00 Mr. Popper's Penguins
16:00 It Boy
18:00 With This Ring
20:00 Death At A Funeral
22:00 Three Night Stand



00:00 Belles Familles
02:00 Lost River
04:00 Half Of A Yellow Sun
06:00 Land Of Mine



00:20 An Hour To Save Your Life
01:10 Botched Up Bodies
02:00 My Big Fat Fabulous Life
02:25 Say Yes To The Dress: Bridesmaids
02:50 Love At First Swipe
03:15 Cake Boss
03:35 Oprah: Where Are They Now?
04:20 Little People, Big World
04:45 Little People, Big World
05:10 Toddlers & Tiaras
06:00 Ultimate Shopper
06:50 Cake Boss
07:15 Cake Boss
07:40 Designer Darlings
08:30 Little People, Big World
08:55 Little People, Big World
09:20 Kate Plus 8
10:10 Love At First Swipe
10:35 Cake Boss
11:00 My Big Fat Fabulous Life
11:25 Say Yes To The Dress: Bridesmaids
11:50 Ultimate Shopper
12:40 Oprah: Where Are They Now?
13:30 Toddlers & Tiaras: Coach Wars
14:20 Too Ugly For Love?
15:10 Toddlers & Tiaras
16:00 Little People, Big World
16:25 Little People, Big World
16:50 Kate Plus 8
17:40 Love At First Swipe
18:05 Cake Boss



SON OF A GUN ON OSN MOVIES ACTION

01:35 Last Tango In Halifax
02:30 DCI Banks
03:20 DCI Banks
04:05 Doctors
04:35 Me & Mrs Jones
05:05 New Tricks
06:00 Doctors
06:30 Me & Mrs Jones
07:00 Holby City
07:55 Father Brown
08:45 Doctor Who
09:35 New Tricks
10:30 Doctors
11:00 Me & Mrs Jones
11:35 Father Brown
13:15 New Tricks
14:15 Doctors
14:45 Me & Mrs Jones
15:20 Father Brown
16:10 Doctor Who
17:05 New Tricks
18:00 Doctors
18:30 Eastenders
19:05 Father Brown
20:00 Holby City
21:00 Mum
21:30 Uncle
22:00 The Detectives
23:30 The Detectives
23:55 Pramface

08:45 Bunk'd
09:10 Stuck In The Middle
09:35 Wizards Of Waverly Place
10:00 Wizards Of Waverly Place
10:25 A.N.T. Farm
10:50 A.N.T. Farm
11:15 Good Luck Charlie
11:40 Good Luck Charlie
12:05 Shake It Up
12:30 Shake It Up
12:55 Disney Mickey Mouse
13:00 Welcome To The Ronks
13:15 Gravity Falls
13:40 Hank Zipzer
14:05 Star Darlings
14:10 Austin & Ally
14:35 Jessie
15:00 Bunk'd
15:25 Kirby Buckets
15:50 Sunny Bunnies
15:55 The Zucchini
16:20 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
16:45 Elena Of Avalor
17:10 Stuck In The Middle
17:35 Descendants Wicked World
17:40 Girl Meets World
18:05 Bizaardvark
18:30 Bunk'd
18:55 Best Friends Whenever
19:20 Disney Mickey Mouse
19:25 The Next Step
19:50 Austin & Ally
20:15 Star Darlings
20:20 Shake It Up
20:45 Backstage
21:10 Liv And Maddie
21:35 Cracked
21:40 Dog With A Blog
22:05 Best Friends Whenever
22:30 Jessie
22:55 Tsum Tsum Shorts
23:00 Kirby Buckets
23:25 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
23:50 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch

03:40 Fast N' Loud
04:30 Storage Hunters
05:00 How Do They Do It?
05:30 How Do They Do It?
06:00 Outback Truckers
06:50 Street Outlaws
07:40 Fast N' Loud
08:30 The Island With Bear Grylls
09:20 Storage Hunters
09:45 How Do They Do It?
10:10 How Do They Do It?
10:35 Made By Destruction
11:00 Made By Destruction
11:25 How Do They Do It?
11:50 How Do They Do It?
12:15 Impossible Engineering
13:05 How Do They Do It?
13:30 Storage Hunters
13:55 Storage Hunters
14:20 Alaska: The Last Frontier
15:10 The Island With Bear Grylls
16:00 Outback Truckers
16:50 Fast N' Loud
17:40 Street Outlaws
18:30 How Do They Do It?
18:55 How Do They Do It?
19:20 The Island With Bear Grylls
20:10 Storage Hunters
20:35 Storage Hunters
21:00 What On Earth?
21:50 Treasure Quest: Snake Island
22:40 The Wheel: Survival Games
23:30 Fast N' Loud



06:00 Gravity Falls
06:25 Counterfeit Cat
06:50 Atomic Puppet
07:15 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
07:25 Danger Mouse
07:40 Supa Strikas
08:10 K.C. Undercover
08:35 Star Wars Freemaker Adventures
09:00 Lab Rats
09:25 Lab Rats
09:50 Danger Mouse
10:20 Supa Strikas
10:45 Supa Strikas
11:10 Counterfeit Cat
11:35 Pair Of Kings
12:00 Pair Of Kings
12:30 Future-Worm!
12:55 Lab Rats: Bionic Island
13:20 Lab Rats: Bionic Island
13:45 Atomic Puppet
14:10 Disney Mickey Mouse
14:15 Counterfeit Cat
14:40 Supa Strikas
15:05 Lab Rats
15:30 Gamer's Guide To Pretty Much Everything
15:55 Right Now Kapow
16:25 K.C. Undercover
16:50 Future-Worm!
17:15 Gravity Falls
17:40 Lab Rats
18:05 Disney Mickey Mouse
18:10 Mighty Med
18:35 Right Now Kapow
19:00 Atomic Puppet



PIXELS ON MOVIES COMEDY HD



00:00 My Ghost Story: Caught On Camera
01:00 My Haunted House
02:00 Paranormal State
03:00 My Crazy Ex
04:00 My Ghost Story: Caught On Camera
05:00 My Haunted House
06:00 Paranormal State
07:00 Diabolical Women
09:00 Fred Dinenage: Murder Casebook
10:00 Homicide Hunter
11:00 It Takes A Killer
14:00 It Takes A Killer
15:00 Diabolical Women
16:00 Fred Dinenage: Murder Casebook
17:00 Homicide Hunter
18:00 Killers
19:00 It Takes A Killer
19:30 It Takes A Killer
20:00 The First 48
21:00 Fred Dinenage: Murder Casebook
22:00 Diabolical Women
23:00 Homicide Hunter



00:30 Prototype This
01:20 Wildest Africa
02:10 Lost & Found With Mike & Jesse
03:00 What Happened Next?
03:25 What Happened Next?
03:50 Bear Grylls: Born Survivor
04:40 How It's Made
05:05 How It's Made

For labor-related inquiries and complaints:
Call MSAL hotline 128



PHARMACIES ON 24 HRS DUTY

GOVERNORATE	PHARMACY	ADDRESS	PHONE
Ahmadi	Sama Safwan Abu Halaifa Danat Al-Sultan	Fahaeel Makka St Abu Halaifa-Coastal Rd Mahboula Block 1, Coastal Rd	23915883 23715414 23726558
Jahra	Modern Jahra Madina Munawara	Jahra-Block 3 Lot 1 Jahra-Block 92	24575518 24566622
Capital	Ahlam Khaldiya Coop	Fahad Al-Salem St Khaldiya Coop	22436184 24833967
Farwaniya	New Shifa Ferdous Coop Modern Safwan	Farwaniya Block 40 Ferdous Coop Old Kheitan Block 11	24734000 24881201 24726638
Hawally	Tariq Hana Ikhlas Hawally & Rawdha Ghadeer Kindy Ibn Al-Nafis Mishrif Coop Salwa Coop	Salmiya-Hamad Mubarak St Salmiya-Amman St Hawally-Beirut St Hawally & Rawdha Coop Jabriya-Block 1A Jabriya-Block 3B Salmiya-Hamad Mubarak St Mishrif Coop Salwa Coop	25726265 25647075 22625999 22564549 25340559 25326554 25721264 25380581 25628241

INTERNATIONAL CALLS



Afghanistan	0093	Lithuania	00370
Albania	00355	Luxembourg	00352
Algeria	00213	Macau	00853
Andorra	00376	Macedonia	00389
Angola	00244	Madagascar	00261
Anguilla	001264	Majorca	0034
Antigua	001268	Malawi	00265
Argentina	0054	Malaysia	0060
Armenia	00374	Maldives	00960
Australia	0061	Mali	00223
Austria	0043	Malta	00356
Azerbaijan	00994	Marshall Islands	00692
Bahamas	001242	Martinique	00596
Bahrain	00973	Mauritania	00222
Bangladesh	00880	Mauritius	00230
Barbados	001246	Mayotte	00269
Belarus	00375	Mexico	0052
Belgium	0032	Micronesia	00691
Belize	00501	Moldova	00373
Benin	00229	Monaco	00377
Bermuda	001441	Mongolia	00976
Bhutan	00975	Montserrat	001664
Bolivia	00591	Morocco	00212
Bosnia	00387	Mozambique	00258
Botswana	00267	Myanmar (Burma)	0095
Brazil	0055	Namibia	00264
Brunei	00673	Nepal	00977
Bulgaria	00359	Netherlands	0031
Burkina	00226	Netherlands Antilles	00599
Burundi	00257	New Caledonia	00687
Cambodia	00855	New Zealand	0064
Cameroon	00237	Nicaragua	00505
Canada	001	Niger	00227
Cape Verde	00238	Nigeria	00234
Cayman Islands	001345	Niue	00683
Central African	00236	Norfolk Island	00672
Chad	00235	N. Ireland (UK)	0044
Chile	0056	North Korea	00850
China	0086	Norway	0047
Colombia	0057	Oman	00968
Comoros	00269	Pakistan	0092
Congo	00242	Palau	00680
Cook Islands	00682	Panama	00507
Costa Rica	00506	Papua New Guinea	00675
Croatia	00385	Paraguay	00595
Cuba	0053	Peru	0051
Cyprus	00357	Philippines	0063
Cyprus (Northern)	0090392	Poland	0048
Czech Republic	00420	Portugal	00351
Denmark	0045	Puerto Rico	001787
Diego Garcia	00246	Qatar	00974
Djibouti	00253	Romania	0040
Dominica	001767	Russian Federation	007
Dominican Republic	001809	Rwanda	00250
Ecuador	00593	Saint Helena	00290
Egypt	0020	Saint Kitts	001869
El Salvador	00503	Saint Lucia	001758
England (UK)	0044	Saint Pierre	00508
Equatorial Guinea	00240	Saint Vincent	001784
Eritrea	00291	Samoa US	00684
Estonia	00372	Samoa West	00685
Ethiopia	00251	San Marino	00378
Falkland Islands	00500	Sao Tome	00239
Faroe Islands	00298	Saudi Arabia	00966
Fiji	00679	Scotland (UK)	0044
Finland	00358	Senegal	00221
France	0033	Seychelles	00284
French Guiana	00594	Sierra Leone	00232
French Polynesia	00689	Singapore	0065
Gabon	00241	Slovakia	00421
Gambia	00220	Slovenia	00386
Georgia	00995	Solomon Islands	00677
Germany	0049	Somalia	00252
Ghana	00233	South Africa	0027
Gibraltar	00350	South Korea	0082
Greece	0030	Spain	0034
Greenland	00299	Sri Lanka	0094
Grenada	001473	Sudan	00249
Guadeloupe	00590	Suriname	00597
Guam	001671	Swaziland	00268
Guatemala	00502	Sweden	0046
Guinea	00224	Switzerland	0041
Guyana	00592	Syria	00963
Haiti	00509	Serbia	00381
Holland (Netherlands)	0031	Taiwan	00886
Honduras	00504	Tanzania	00255
Hong Kong	00852	Thailand	0066
Hungary	0036	Togo	00228
Ibiza (Spain)	0034	Tonga	00676
Iceland	00354	Tokelau	00690
India	0091	Trinidad	001868
Indian Ocean	00873	Tunisia	00216
Indonesia	0062	Turkey	0090
Iran	0098	Tuvalu	00688
Iraq	00964	Uganda	00256
Ireland	00353	Ukraine	00380
Italy	0039	United Arab Emirates	00976
Ivory Coast	00225	United Kingdom	0044
Jamaica	001876	Uruguay	00598
Japan	0081	USA	001
Jordan	00962	Uzbekistan	00998
Kazakhstan	007	Vanuatu	00678
Kenya	00254	Venezuela	00582
Kiribati	00686	Vietnam	0084
Kuwait	00965	Virgin Islands UK	001284
Kyrgyzstan	00996	Virgin Islands US	001340
Laos	00856	Wales (UK)	0044
Latvia	00371	Yemen	00967
Lebanon	00961	Yugoslavia	00381
Liberia	00231	Zambia	00260
Libya	00218	Zimbabwe	00263
Lesotho	00266		

STATE OF KUWAIT DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION METEOROLOGICAL DEPARTMENT



Tel: (+965) 161 Ext: 2627 - 2630
Fax: (+965) 24348714
www.met.gov.kw

Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

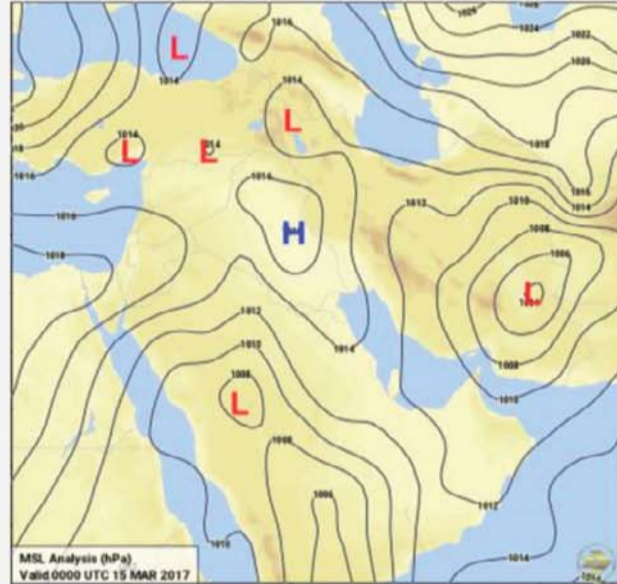
Issued 15/03/2017-07:00 LT UTC +3hr

Max Temperature 28 °C

By Day : Sunny with light variable wind changing to light to moderate easterly wind, with speed of 08 - 26 km/h

By Night : Fair with light to moderate south easterly wind, with speed of 10 - 30 km/h

SFC. CHART



MSL Analysis (hPa)
Valid 0000 UTC 15 MAR 2017

Four-Day Forecast

	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Expected Weather	sunny + raising dust over open areas	sunny	clouds to increase gradually + scattered rain	partly cloudy to cloudy+dust+ rain might be thundery at times
Min Temp °C	15	13	15	16
Max Temp °C	32	27	30	28
Wind Direction	south easterly changing to north westerly later on	north westerly to light variable	south easterly	south easterly
Wind Speed km/h	15 - 40	08 - 28	12 - 35	25 - 50

All times are local time (GMT+3) unless otherwise stated

Warnings & Weather Watches

no warnings or weather watches

Kuwait Forecast

Station	MIN °C	REC	Max °C	EXP
KUWAIT CITY	18		28	
KUWAIT AIRPORT	12		28	
ABDALY	13		27	
BUBYAN	13		27	
JAHRA	15		29	
FAILAKA ISLAND	16		26	
SALMIYAH	18		23	
AHMADI	18		24	
JAL ALIYAH	14		28	
QAROH ISLAND	17		23	
UMM AL-MARADEM	17		23	
NUWAISIB	15		25	
WAFRA	12		29	
SALMY	12		27	
MUTRIBA	12		29	

Recorded Yesterday at Kuwait Airport

Max Temp (°C)	27
Min Temp (°C)	17
Max Rel Hum (%)	50
Min Rel Hum (%)	18
Max Wind Speed (km/h) and Direction	43 N
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR	0 mm

Sunrise	05:57
Sunset	17:56

Prayer Times

Fajr	04:38
Sunrise	05:57
Zuhr	11:57
Asr	15:22
Sunset	17:56
Isha	19:13



PRIVATE CLINICS

Ophthalmologists	Plastic Surgeons
Dr. Abdallah Al-Mansoor	25622444
Dr. Samy Al-Rabeea	25752222
Dr. Masoma Habeeb	25321171
Dr. Mubarak Al-Ajmy	25739999
Dr. Mohsen Abel	25757700
Dr. Adnan Hasan Alwayl	25732223
Dr. Abdallah Al-Baghly	25732223
Ear, Nose & Throat (ENT)	Psychiatrists
Dr. Ahmed Fouad Mouner	2455050 Ext 510
Dr. Abdallah Al-Ali	25644660
Dr. Abd Al-Hameed Al-Taweel	25646478
Dr. Sanad Al-Fathalah	25311996
Dr. Mohammad Al-Daory	25731988
Dr. Ismail Al-Fodary	22620166
Dr. Mahmoud Al-Booz	25651426
General Practitioners	Gynaecologists & Obstetricians
Dr. Mohammed Y Majidi	2455050 Ext 123
Dr. Yousef Al-Omar	24719312
Dr. Tarek Al-Mikhaazem	23926920
Dr. Kathem Maarafi	25730465
Dr. Abdallah Ahmad Eyadah	25655528
Dr. Nabeel Al-Ayoobi	24577781
Dr. Dina Abdallah Al-Rfae	25333501
Urologists	Internists, Chest & Heart
Dr. Ali Naser Al-Serfy	22641534
Dr. Fawzi Taher Abul	22639955
Dr. Khaleel Abdallah Al-Awadi	22616660
Dr. Adel Al-Hunayan FRCS (C)	25313120
Dr. Leons Joseph	66703427

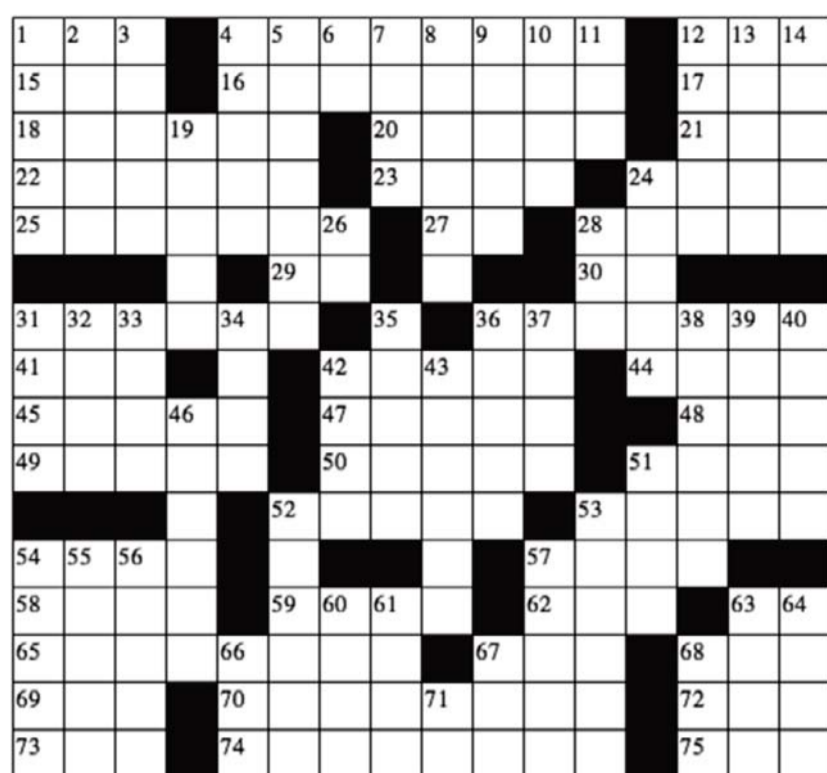
Paediatricians	Endocrinologist
Dr. Khaled Hamadi	25665898
Dr. Abd Al-Aziz Al-Rashed	25340300
Dr. Zahra Qabazard	25710444
Dr. Sohail Qamar	22621099
Dr. Snaa Maarooof	25713514
Dr. Pradip Gupaje	23713100
Dr. Zacharias Mathew	24334282
Dermatology	Physiotherapists & VD
Dr. Mohammed Salam Bern University	23845955
Dr. Anil Thomas	3729596/3729581
Dr. Shamah Al-Matar	22641071/2
Dr. Anesah Al-Rasheed	22562226
Dr. Abdallah Al-Amer	22561444
Dr. Faysal Al-Fozan	22619557
Dr. Abdallateef Al-Katrah	22525888
Dr. Abdallah Al-Duweisan	25653755
Dr. Bader Al-Ansari	25620111
Neurologists	Rheumatologists:
Dr. Sohal Najem Al-Shemeri	25633324
Dr. Jasem Mola Hassan	25345875
Dr. Sami Aman	22636464
Dr. Mohammad Al-Shamaly	25322030
Dr. Foad Abdallah Al-Ali	22633135
Gastrologists	Consultant Cardiologist
Dr. Farida Al-Habib MD, PH.D, FACC	2611555-2622555
Inaya German Medical Center	
Te: 2575077	
Fax: 25723123	

Dr. Abdallah Al-Mansoor	25622444
Dr. Samy Al-Rabeea	25752222
Dr. Masoma Habeeb	25321171
Dr. Mubarak Al-Ajmy	25739999
Dr. Mohsen Abel	25757700
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Dr. Fawzi Taher Abul	22639955
Dr. Khaleel Abdallah Al-Awadi	22616660
Dr. Adel	

CROSSWORD 1549



ACROSS

1. An honorary degree in science.
 4. Large red-skinned apple.
 12. Having undesirable or negative qualities.
 15. The month following February and preceding April.
 16. Reprehensible acquisitiveness.
 17. The month following March and preceding May.
 18. (of farmland) Capable of being farmed productively.
 20. Intelligence derived from non-communications electromagnetic radiations from foreign sources (other than radioactive sources).
 21. An independent agency of the United States government responsible for collecting and coordinating intelligence and counterintelligence activities abroad in the national interest.
 22. The act of putting something in working order again.
 23. A set of related records (either written or electronic) kept together.
 25. Coming next after the eleventh and just before the thirteenth in position.
 27. (astronomy) A measure of time defined by Earth's orbital motion.
 29. The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
 30. A white metallic element that burns with a brilliant light.
 31. A drug (trade names Atarax and Vistaril) used as a tranquilizer to treat anxiety and motion sickness.
 41. The syllable naming the sixth (submediant) note of a major or minor scale in solmization.
 44. One thousand grams.
 45. Jordan's port.
 47. More than enough in size or scope or capacity.
 48. Take something away by force or without the consent of the owner.
 49. A region of Malaysia in northeastern Borneo.
 50. Large dark brown North American arboreal carnivorous mammal.
 54. Type genus of the Amiidae.
 58. A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
 59. A fastener for a door or lid.
 62. Either extremity of something that has length.
 65. British statesman who as Prime Minister bought controlling interest in the Suez Canal and made Queen Victoria the Empress of India (1804-1881).
 69. The compass point midway between northeast and east.
 70. An abnormal tufted growth of small branches on a tree or shrub caused by fungi or insects or other physiological disturbance.
 72. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
 73. The habitation of wild animals.
 74. A river in northeastern Brazil that flows generally northward to the Atlantic Ocean.
 75. A compartment in front of a motor vehicle where driver sits.
- DOWN**
1. Showing mental alertness and calculation and resourcefulness.
 2. English Cavalier poet whose lyric poetry was favored by Charles I (1595-1639).
 3. Hanging cloth used as a blind.
 4. The civil and religious leader of a Muslim state.
 5. Tax excessively.
 6. An intensely radioactive metallic element that occurs in minute amounts in uranium ores.
 7. (Judaism) Not conforming to dietary laws.
 8. An ancient Semitic folklore.
 9. Departing or being caused to depart from the true vertical or horizontal.
 10. Denoting a quantity consisting of one more than eight and one less than ten.
 11. An audiotope recording of sound.
 12. An indehiscent fruit derived from a single ovary having one or many seeds within a fleshy wall or pericarp.
 13. Relating to or having the characteristics of bees.
 14. Any of numerous low-growing cushion-forming plants of the genus *Draba* having rosette-forming leaves and terminal racemes of small flowers with scapose or leafy stems.
 19. (Norse mythology) God of light and peace and noted for his beauty and sweet nature.
 24. A cut of meat (beef or veal or mutton or lamb) from the upper part of the leg.
 26. A hemoprotein composed of globin and heme that gives red blood cells their characteristic color.
 28. Aircraft landing in bad weather in which the pilot is talked down by ground control using precision approach radar.
 32. The basic unit of money in Bangladesh.
 33. According to the Old Testament he was a pagan king of Israel and husband of Jezebel (9th century BC).
 34. A woman hired to suckle a child of someone else.
 35. United States outlaw who fought as a Confederate soldier and later led a band of outlaws that robbed trains and banks in the West until he was murdered by a member of his own gang (1847-1882).
 36. A single splash.
 37. Being of the age 13 through 19.
 38. A full skirt with a gathered waistband.
 39. The fluid (red in vertebrates) that is pumped by the heart.
 40. A cruel and brutal fellow.
 42. (military) Signal to turn the lights out.
 43. Activity involved in maintaining something in good working order.
 46. A shop where a variety of goods are sold.
 51. Being the one previously mentioned or spoken of.
 52. Common house and field crickets.
 53. A nation in northern North America.
 55. A state in New England.
 56. Realistic Norwegian author who wrote plays on social and political themes (1828-1906).
 57. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
 60. (botany) Of or relating to the axil.
 61. Used of the language of the deaf.
 63. A small cake leavened with yeast.
 64. An Arabic speaking person who lives in Arabia or North Africa.
 66. Of southern Europe.
 67. Japanese ornamental tree with fragrant white or pink blossoms and small yellow fruits.
 68. Committee formed by a special-interest group to raise money for their favorite political candidates.
 71. (astronomy) The angular distance of a celestial point measured westward along the celestial equator from the zenith crossing.

Yesterday's Solution

D	A	B		B	A	L	A	R	A	M	A		A	S	K	
A	G	E		A	M	A	D	A	V	A	T		G	C	A	
D	N	A		C	A	S	E	W	O	R	M		R	A	M	
A	I	R	P	O	S	T		W	A		D	A	M	A		
			D	A	N	T	E		S	A	C	U				
O	S	B	I	X				A	L	A	R	M	I	N	G	
S	H	E	I	K	A		P	M			N	A	T	A	L	
C	A	P	R	I		G	A	B	A		A	S	C	I	I	
A	D	O		D	J		D	A	B	A			H	A	O	
R	E	S	E	D	A			D	R	A	C	H	M		N	M
			D		T	E	A		S		Y	E	N	T	A	
A	D	A	D		R	A		V	E	S	P	A				
M	O	N	A	C	O		P	I		Q	A	T	A	R	I	
A	Z	O		U	P	P	E	R	C	U	T		R	A	D	
Z	E	D		S	H	A	N	G	H	A	I		C	J	D	
E	N	E		P	A	R	N	A	I	B	A		H	A	M	

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Making your mark on the world for now may come as a team player. Achievement, ambition and authority are motivating factors in your decision-making process. Professionally, you will find yourself organizing and administering people often. Your favorite scenario from a professional stance, however, is what happens when groups are gathered to accomplish, perform or change ideas, laws or lifestyles. You like your life best when you are involved in group goals and you have a lot to offer, whether it is in the workplace or the hobby club. Stay aware of the urges that motivate you. Carry your enthusiasm in the professional world, to your private world. A hobby club can be of benefit to the less fortunate. This evening you enjoy something unusual.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Demands from work can be exhausting and you are learning to streamline your energy by focusing on one thing at a time. You could receive unexpected backing for what you want to accomplish and, in general, your efforts are successful in reaching your goals. This is a time during which you are driven to complete the old and begin the new. You may even find yourself moving in new and unexpected directions by this afternoon. There is optimism and faith-a time when you can put your practical insights into words and convey them to others. Communication with authority figures is also prevalent. Tonight you may try a little dancing. You will see that the movement of the body helps to expel the negative and relieve you from the stress of the day.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

You are ready to widen your scope of education and may find yourself attending a class or actually enrolling in a nearby community college. You should be attentive in all the work you do particularly today as there could be a tendency to gloss over mistakes. Be especially cheerful in the business transactions you handle with the public now-someone is in a grouchy mood and could challenge you. You can be very eloquent or forceful in speaking or communicating; people will understand just what you mean. You might enjoy attending a home or computer show this evening. There are some new storage ideas as well as new inventions to view. There should be some interesting developments in finances through the end of this month.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Business is looking good today. As much as you like to have everything the same, make an effort to become more flexible and adaptable. Things could change in the twinkling of an eye. Interestingly enough, you may seek professional placement in a job that demands you to be flexible. For you, change is the ultimate challenge. Your home life may get some changes occasionally, but unless you are pushed, become angry or just need the change, you will probably keep your lifestyle the same for a very long time. A good investment is as close as your computer screen and you have a way of weeding out the good from the bad. When you get ready to actually invest, check out the people who will be taking your money for the investment.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

There may be a bit of a slowdown in business today. Don't be too surprised if commerce and cash flows slowly. Some stabilizing factors can be beneficial, however. For example, this slowdown will give you a chance to catch your breath and plot and plan for the next phase. A love relationship can be intensified now. Financial security and enjoying the finer things in life, appreciating and creating things others long to have, assume a high priority. You enjoy music and may enjoy some get-together with other musicians after the workday has ended. Several of you from the workplace might join an aerobics group. You want to be in great shape for the summer-aerobics, competitive sports and other activities that burn calories are all favored.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Your dream could become a reality, in a most unexpected way. You might think you would like to be in a different field of work or department, but you should investigate all the angles before making any moves just now. You seem to be guided by sensible actions. Coordinate plans for the evening with a companion whose lifestyle and preferences you admire. Talk at the noon break centers around some law that seems unjust. You and a few others talk of ways to change this law. You will find your mind beginning to turn away from the material and become more concerned with the inward and spiritual. Spend some time out-of-doors today. This is a time of exploring your feelings: a kind of restlessness for new emotional experiences.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

You are not easily swayed by others' opinions, especially today. You could become involved with an exciting play of conversation this morning. You see no problem in expressing yourself vociferously in almost any situation, but be careful to make sure your opinion is really requested-especially in the work world. There are people around you that keep up with the news and it would not hurt for you to do the same. Keeping up-to-date will help you to make suggestions on product improvements. You are charming and graceful with eloquence in speech and writing. Consider writing short stories, especially if you have not tried your hand at this work yet. You are inventive, original and high tech. This is a great time to celebrate new beginnings!



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Although this can be a stressful day, it is a great day for making money. There is a feeling that anything is possible. There are optimism, faith and a tendency to take chances at the deepest emotional levels. This afternoon is a great time to reflect and understand your own situation, just how you feel about your goals and your progress. Emotions in particular-or the feelings of those around you-may be very clear. Bigger and better is the theme when it comes to creativity, romance and self-expression. This is a time when taking chances pays off beyond your wildest expectations. A social event may be just what is needed to give you a lift and encourage your energies. The evening is yours to enjoy. Everything conspires to reveal you at your most elegant.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Work, success and ambition are things that mean a lot to you. You are at your mental best with sharp ideas and clear thoughts. This is an excellent time to make decisions and take care of mental work. This is a good day for moneymaking ventures. Make sure that you give yourself plenty of time to think through major decisions. Major relationships, especially family ones, are in a positive upswing. You may have a little time this afternoon to think on someone's life and how that person manages life, which may cause you to be very compassionate and understanding of him or her. There may be little time to see friends or family this afternoon or you may find yourself enjoying long conversations, writing letters and making special phone calls.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You have a strong will and exhibit a great deal of ambition. Your situation in the business world is looking up, especially if you are in the construction business. Your accomplishments bring more respect your way. Today you find plenty of optimism, faith and a tendency to take chances. Close personal relationships are likely to undergo some testing. This is a time to cement your ties to others-to make sure they are rock-solid. If they are not, these ties are apt to crack under stress. Fairness with and responsibility to the other people in your life is emphasized now. There is fluency in your social skills, making this afternoon a good time to be with friends or loved ones. You may attract a new love interest while out having fun with friends later today.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

You may come face to face today with someone who has very different values than you. You could find yourself cast in a conflicting position that might require a compromise on your part. You do very well at solving problems-others learn from the way you handle yourself. The time or place is not right for you to make your feelings known and you are very good at moving on to another subject or project. At home or among your friends this afternoon, you can express your feelings freely. A clear-minded insight into your own plans is available to you. This is a very good time to communicate your goals and give them dates. Family or friends will give you great support. Your intimacy with a person you love will deepen at this time.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You have to be quiet in the workplace today. You must stop humming. Perhaps you can take a break and climb stairs or walk quickly around the block and hum at the same time. This way you can express some of that extra energy you are feeling just now. You keep a good countenance and can see yourself through most difficult times. You set a good example for others to follow. Music is captivating and you will often find a tune running around in your head that helps you maintain your calm manner, particularly as you work through the day. Good things happen today, which may mean a difficult person becomes a good friend or a lost transaction becomes found. Of course, this evening you enjoy a social gathering.

WORD SEARCH

Radiohead Songs

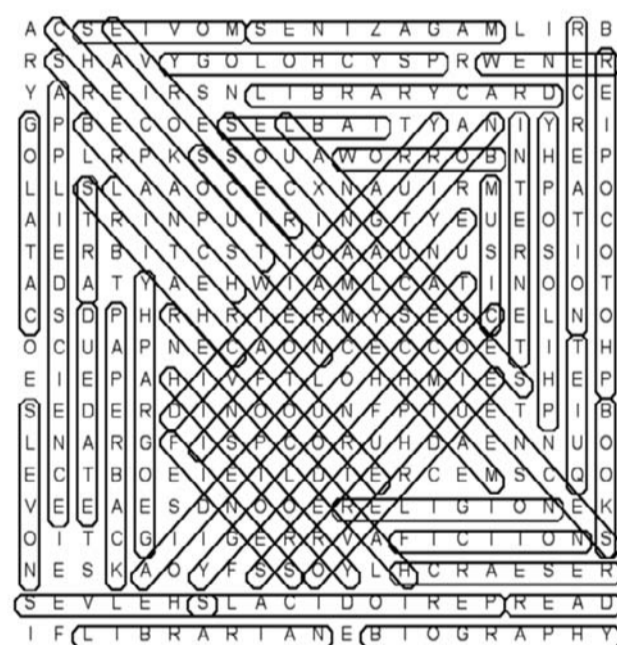
Find and circle all of the Radiohead songs that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell an additional song by Radiohead.



- | | | | |
|----------------|---------------|------------------|--------------|
| AIRBAG | HIGH AND DRY | MORNING BELL | PYRAMID SONG |
| ALL I NEED | HUNTING BEARS | MY IRON LUNG | RECKONER |
| BLACK STAR | IN LIMBO | NICE DREAM | RIPCORD |
| BLOW OUT | JUST | NO SURPRISES | SULK |
| BODYSNATCHERS | KARMA POLICE | NUDE | THE BENDS |
| BONES | KID A | OPTIMISTIC | THE TOURIST |
| CREEP | KNIVES OUT | PARANOID ANDROID | TREEFINGERS |
| ELECTIONEERING | LET DOWN | PLANET TEXEL | VEGETABLE |
| FAUST ARP | LUCKY | PROVE YOURSELF | VIDEOTAPE |
| FITTER HAPPIER | LURGEE | | |

Yesterday's Solution

Public Library



- | | | | |
|-----------------|--------------|-------------|-----------------|
| APPLIED SCIENCE | ENCYCLOPEDIA | MAGAZINES | QUIET |
| ARTS | FICTION | MATHEMATICS | READ |
| BIOGRAPHY | FINES | MOVIES | RECREATION |
| BOOKS | GEOGRAPHY | MUSIC | RELIGION |
| BORROW | HARDCOVER | NEWSPAPERS | RENEW |
| BRANCH | HISTORY | NOVELS | RESEARCH |
| CATALOG | INFORMATION | OVERDUE | RESERVE |
| CHAIRS | INTERNET | PAPERBACK | SHELVES |
| CHECKOUT | LANGUAGES | PERIODICALS | SOCIAL SCIENCES |
| COMPUTERS | LIBRARIAN | PHILOSOPHY | TABLES |
| DICTIONARY | LIBRARY CARD | PHOTOCOPIER | TECHNOLOGY |
| DUE DATE | LITERATURE | PSYCHOLOGY | |

The hidden message is: A LIBRARY IS NOT A LUXURY BUT ONE OF THE NECESSITIES OF LIFE

Daily SuDoku

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			8		6	5		
		2	4		6		8	
4					1	3	2	
9	3	5					4	
7		8		9	5			
5	3		1					
	9	7						

Yesterday's Solution

5	3	2	4	8	6	1	7	9
8	7	1	2	9	3	5	4	6
4	6	9	1	5	7	8	2	3
2	9	8	6	4	1	7	3	5
3	5	7	9	2	8	4	6	1
6	1	4	7	3	5	9	8	2
9	2	6	8	1	4	3	5	7
1	4	5	3	7	2	6	9	8
7	8	3	5	6	9	2	1	4

FEATURES



People visit the Art Dubai exhibition in the Gulf emirate, on the eve of the opening of the 11th annual art fair, billed as the largest contemporary art show in the Middle East and North Africa. — AFP photos

Visitors walk past art work by Ahmed Morsi title "Eyeing Time" at the Art Dubai exhibition.

Visitors walk past art work by Ahmed Morsi title "Eyeing Time" at the Art Dubai exhibition.



A curator of the Zilberman Gallery, which was founded in Istanbul in 2008, works at her exhibition during the opening of the Art Dubai in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.



A man takes photo of the structures of the world-renowned Spanish born architect Santiago Calatrava.



A waiter works on final touches on 'The Room - Cooking Liberty,' a large-scale interactive installation created by Beirut-based art collective Atfal Ahdath, a surrealist visual and gastronomic experience inspired by Salvador Dalí's cookbook, Les Dinners de Gala.

GET YOUR OWN FACTS, IGNORE MEDIA, PALESTINIAN ARTIST HALABY TELLS SUCCESSORS

Palestinian painter Samia Halaby has blunt advice for aspiring Arab artists - get your inspiration first-hand, whether from ordinary people or historical documents, avoiding the "lies" of the media. Halaby, who made her name with abstract paintings, drew on both kinds of source for her most overtly political project, a series of drawings of the 1956 massacre of Palestinians by Israeli border police at Kafr Qasem.

The drawings, and a separate exhibition of her multicolored abstracts called "Illuminated Space", make up a Halaby double bill on display at Dubai's Ayyam Gallery for Dubai Art Week. "My advice to young aspiring artists in the Arab world and other similar countries that are torn by political, economic and social problems caused by imperialist challenges is to concentrate on history and its details, and to not follow the existing media, because there are a lot of lies,"

she told Reuters. "They should be attentive to their surroundings and their societies ... specifically the common class of society."

The Kafr Qasem project grew out of a visit in 1999 to the village where, on Oct. 29, 1956, Israeli border guards killed 48 people and an unborn child. More than half the dead were women and children. The victims were returning home from work across the de facto border between Israel and Jordan, unaware that they were infringing a military curfew declared on the eve of war with Egypt. Israel's late president, Shimon Peres, formally apologized for the massacre in 2007. "I started to draw about my experience and, as time went by, I realised that it was an extremely significant experience," Halaby said. She started not only drawing more but also interviewing villagers and seeking documentation. The book that emerged last November, "Drawing the Kafr Qasem massacre", is

more than a collection of drawings; much of it is devoted to interviews with the survivors.

So how does this political engagement fit with the better known abstract works of an artist who was born in Jerusalem in 1936, but left her homeland upon the creation of Israel in 1948, and has made her life in the United States? "Palestine is very present in my life, but when you ask me where it lies in my paintings - it exists, but you wouldn't find one of my abstract paintings about Palestine, you can't find Palestine in the paintings' titles," she says. "But it has affected me differently, by making me politically progressive, which made me think about art and what it is ... Hence my choice of abstract art - because it is an optimistic kind of art, a futuristic one rather than an art that lives in the past." — Reuters



Visitors pass inside a 4D creative animation tunnel called the 'Meraas Experience' by Meraas development during the opening of the Art Dubai in Dubai.



A woman looks at an artwork titled Fresque de craies by Pascale Martine Tayou from Cameroon during the opening of the Art Dubai in Dubai.



Women look at a piece titled 'Deployed' by Iraqi visual artist Adel Abidin.



A woman looks at an artwork titled Fresque de craies by Pascale Martine Tayou from Cameroon during the opening of the Art Dubai in Dubai.

This comfy, cushioned cubby is an inviting, cozy workspace

It's a quiet but cozy workspace, designed to promote focus and creativity while providing an alternative to a traditional desk or office. It's also a bright pink cubby covered in comfy cushions. The pink seating is the brainchild of Karen Bala, Jen Taylor and Michelle Bristol of Dyer Brown, an architectural firm. It was one element of Dyer Brown's Boston office space design for Criteo, a tech company that works with retailers to personalize online ads for consumers.

The cubbies are "a very welcoming, inviting space that you want to be in," said Taylor. "As people spend more time in the office, comfort is a priority. Creating these informal amenity spaces that replicate the comforts of home can help companies attract and retain talent." The comfy cubbies - three in all - are located in a lounge area. Each consists of a rectangular space recessed into a wood-paneled wall. The front of the cubbies are open but the top, sides, floor and back are lined with pink foam

bolsters covered with FilzFelt, a type of felt. The soft materials increase comfort and absorb sound.

The bold color contrasts with the cozy vibe, and ties in with "the energy and excitement" of the company's fun, young office culture, Taylor said. "The rest of their office is heavily packed with work stations," said Bristol. "We wanted to make sure that this worked with their office culture of being very vibrant and energetic." The color - actually a magenta - matches a hue in some of the company's branding documents. And there was no concern that pink might be off-putting to men: "We've seen the trend move away from pink as a gender-specific color," Taylor said.

Each nook has a single overhead light fixture but no electric outlet. "We wanted it to be an unplugged zone," Bristol said. "We wanted them to use it for heads-down work, where someone has to write something or make a phone call." Employees

do take laptops in the cubbies, but the lack of outlets helps "keep the spaces open so nobody is hogging them," Taylor said. The feedback, they said, was extremely positive, with workers telling them, "I want to try it out! I want to be in that place!"

How could the concept be adapted for home design?

A simple reinterpretation would be to cushion a window seat or convert a closet by removing a door and adding a bench. An unused corner, or space between furniture and a wall, might also work. Do-it-yourselfers might consider building a pod-like structure with plastic or wooden panels. Wrapping the material in foam and fabric for comfort and sound insulation would be key to maintaining the cozy aesthetics.

Bright colors work well in a kid's bedroom or playroom, lending a sense of energy even if the cubby is designed to be more of a quiet spot. Calmer colors might work best in a

home office, especially if the space is intended to help users disconnect a bit from technology so they can dig into a book or craft. An inexpensive stick-on light could easily illuminate the space. Dimensions will depend on the intended user and available space. The office cubbies are 3 1/2 feet deep, 4 feet wide and 5 feet tall.

Cushioning the space is important not just for comfort and mood but also to increase the quiet. Bristol said that even in an office with hundreds of employees, the padding muted background noise. In a home environment, a quiet nook could promote concentration on a task like doing the taxes or organizing recipes, even if kids were playing nearby in a family room. — AP



Photo shows Jen Taylor (left) and Michelle Bristol of Dyer Brown, an architectural firm, seated in workspaces they designed for the Boston offices of Criteo, a tech company.

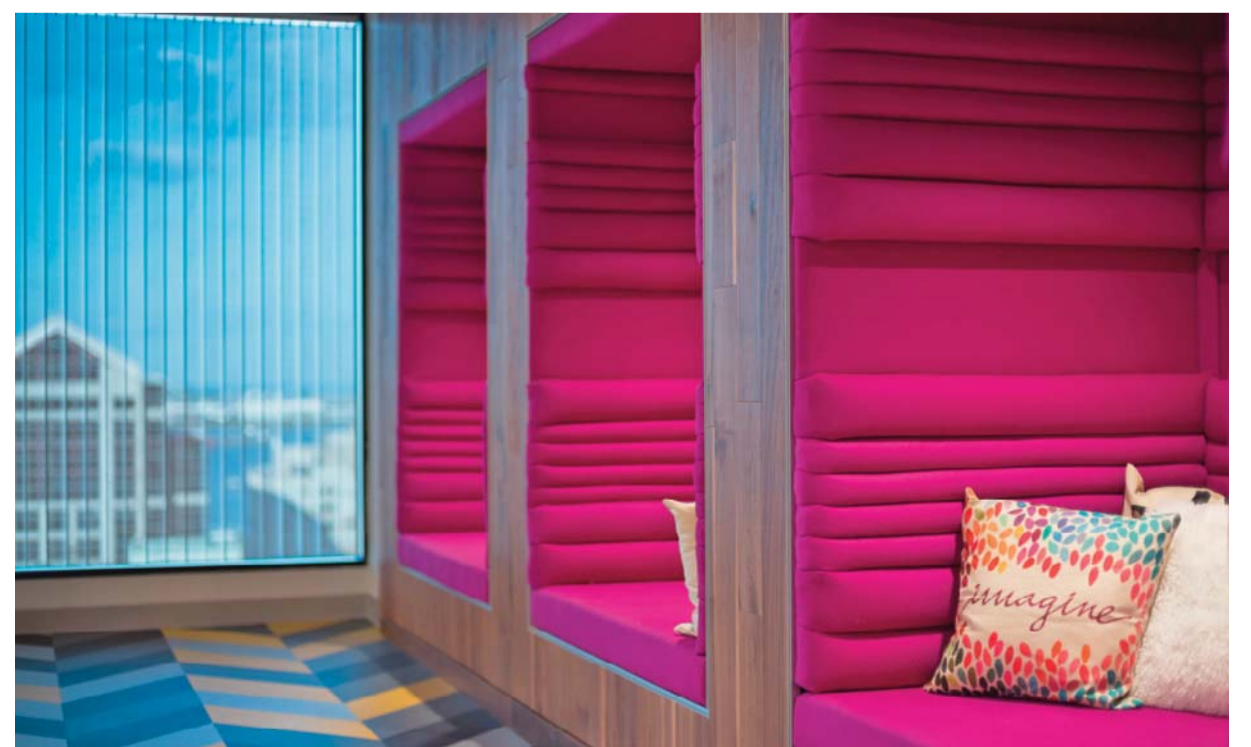


Photo shows cubby-like workspaces in the Boston offices of Criteo, a tech company.— AP photos

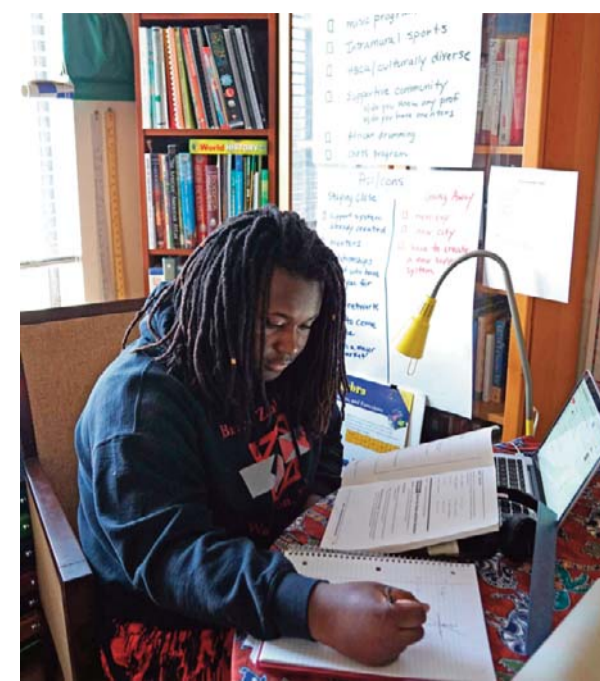
FEATURES



Ayinde (left), age 10, who is homeschooled by his mother Monica Utsey, takes part in an African drumming class as an extracurricular activity in Mount Rainier.



Ayinde (2nd left), age 10, who is homeschooled by his mother Monica Utsey, takes part in an African drumming class as an extracurricular activity in Mount Rainier.



Zion, 17, who is homeschooled by his mother Monica Utsey, works at his desk at home.

Black American families take school into their own hands

While plugging away at college entrance exam preparations, Zion Utsey momentarily jolts up from his laptop and drums on the dining room table, slapping the wood with expert rhythm. "See, that's the kind of thing you get in trouble for in school," his mother and teacher-Monica Utsey says with a satisfied smile. "But I know when he's frustrated or thinking he'll stop and bang on the table for five minutes."

Though he is in his Washington home, Zion, 17, is in fact in school: He, along with his 10-year-old brother Ayinde, are two of the roughly 1.8 million homeschooled students in the United States. The Utseys also belong to a growing subgroup of African-American homeschoolers, families dissatisfied with traditional education opting to take matters into their own hands. Few statistics exist regarding homeschooling, particularly when it comes to race, but the National Center for Education Statistics estimates some five percent of US homeschoolers are black.

Research suggests that proportion is growing: Ama Mazama, a scholar of African American education at Temple University, said at least 200,000 black families homeschool today, more than double the 90,000 who educated their kids at home in 1999. Many parents keep their kids at home to give them a more free-wheeling, exploratory education; others cite religious or moral grounds. But Utsey ultimately chose homeschooling because she feared her sons

would grow up without an appreciation for their African heritage.

Like many other black parents, she also pointed to racism. Disciplinary policies in American schools disproportionately affect students of color: black students account for some 40 percent of all students who have received multiple suspensions, according to the American Civil Liberties Union, though they represent just 16 percent of public school enrollment. "I never wanted them to have to walk through a metal detector when they go to school," Utsey said of her sons. "I wanted them to feel that excellence is who you are." "A lot of times schools do not cultivate that kind of culture."

'Growing dissatisfaction'

Mazama said most black families she speaks to cite "a growing dissatisfaction with the public school system and a disillusion with integration." "African Americans fought really hard to get into the public schools," she said. "But now 50 years later we realize the promises have not been kept." "Black children are being made invisible, disenfranchised." When she first began homeschooling Zion, Utsey figured she would eventually send him to school. She grounded him in African civilization and history in preparation.

"I thought to myself once he gets to school, he'll be bombarded with slavery, so our focus now is going to be before then," she said. "The



Ayinde, 10, who is homeschooled by his mother Monica Utsey, works at his desk at home.

way that history is taught in general, the focus is on the contributions of a smaller group of people." When Zion hit 10, Utsey committed to homeschooling her boys until they were college-aged. Now overflowing bookshelves line her walls, maps of Africa paper the apartment and her small dining room bursts with art supplies and math games. Both boys study African percussion and play sports; on this day the younger

Ayinde was focusing on spelling, math and penmanship. Zion also takes courses at a science, technology and math-focused program for homeschoolers.

'Love being black'

Though Zion said he has wondered about the social aspects of traditional school, leaving his homeschool environment "would be step-

ping down." "Whatever field you want to go into, homeschooling is there for you," he said, noting that he plans to study engineering in college. In 2004 Utsey founded the Sankofa Homeschool Community to support homeschooling families of color in the Washington metropolitan area. The collective began as a virtual community and since 2012 has offered Afrocentric history and culture courses. A single mother since her husband's 2013 death, Utsey both steers her children's education and works part-time at a youth center.

Money is tight and Utsey wishes government funding were available to homeschooling parents. Charities distribute some funds to homeschooling families in need, but the government does not offer specific financial help to homeschoolers. Nevertheless, educating her boys at home has been worth the challenges, Utsey said. She often reminisces on a moment from Zion's childhood, when he glanced up from his workbook to tell her, "Mom, I love being black. I just love the color of my skin." Utsey said the memory exemplifies the "blessing" homeschooling has been: "a lot of children-especially African American children-don't grow up feeling that way about themselves."—AFP



This file photo shows Snoop Dogg, as he arrives for the 2013 BET Awards at the Nokia Theatre L.A. Live in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

Trump calls out Snoop Dogg over shooting video

Donald Trump took aim yesterday at Snoop Dogg, saying the rap star would have gotten "jail time" had he pointed his gun at Barack Obama rather than the current US president in a video. Snoop Dogg, an early figure in California gangsta rap who has mellowed in recent years, this week released a video pegged to the release of his album "Lavender" in which most actors are clowns. One clown-unmistakably a parody of Trump, sporting bouffant hair and a red tie that dangles below the waist-gesticulates wildly at the podium of "The Clown House." The clown puts his hands up as if under arrest as Snoop Dogg draws a pistol, with a flag popping out that says "Bang!"

"Can you imagine what the outcry would be if @SnoopDogg, failing career and all, had aimed and fired the gun at President Obama? Jail time!" Trump wrote on Twitter. Snoop Dogg was one of the leading rappers of the 1990s with hits such as "What's My Name?" and "Gin & Juice." In recent years, he has shed his gangsta image, branching out into reggae, starring in multiple television series and pursuing a marijuana business. Trump won last year's election despite widespread antipathy from the entertainment world. —AFP

Costume jewelry worn by Hollywood's Golden Age stars up for auction

From the coral necklace worn by Vivien Leigh in "Gone With the Wind" to Marilyn Monroe's gold and pearl drop earrings from "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," the glittering adornments made for Hollywood's stars will go up for auction this year. About 700 pieces of ornate costume jewelry made by Hollywood costume jeweler Eugene Joseff will be exhibited in Ireland's Newbridge Silverware Museum of Style Icons from March until May before going under the hammer in November at Julien's Auctions in Los Angeles. "Buying a piece of this isn't like buying a diamond necklace from Cartier, you're actually owning a piece of Hollywood memorabilia," said Isabel Yeo, Julien's Auctions' jewelry specialist. The auction house has not yet set estimates for the jewelry. Costume jewelry pieces do not tend to contain precious stones and metals.

Joseff made custom pieces of jewelry for major film studios during the 1930s and 1940s, the early years of Hollywood's Golden Age of cinema, lending the items so that he retained the majority of his collection. The jeweler died in a plane crash in the late 1940s and the pieces of his collection have not been offered for auction until now. Yeo said Joseff developed a special method of jewelry-making that involved plating metals to give it a softer glare under studio lighting, a secret formula that has been kept within his family. —Reuters

MUSICIAN YOUSSEU NDOUR BACKS SENEGAL'S WAR ON MALARIA

Yousseu Ndiour, Senegal's most famous musician, is throwing his weight behind malaria eradication in his homeland to combat an illness that has for too long held back Africa's economic development. Malaria killed more than 400,000 people last year, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) — the vast majority of them children living in sub-Saharan Africa. Ndiour has performed and toured since the 1970s, blending Senegalese music with soul, hip-hop and jazz to international acclaim, but has also become known for his work as a longtime campaigner for malaria prevention.

The disease remains all too common in Senegal, despite a government pledge to eradicate it by 2018, with 500,000 recorded Senegalese cases in 2015, according to the WHO. "It's first of all a serious public health problem. But we also see the economic impact around it and the weaknesses we have at the level of development in Africa because of malaria," Ndiour told AFP in an interview in Senegal's capital Dakar.

A new \$32 million initiative is aiming to finally stamp out malaria in the west African nation, to which Ndiour has lent his support. More than 2.5 million people will receive mosquito nets impregnated with insecticide, 1.6 million rapid diagnosis tests will be distributed and 70,000 doses of anti-malarial drugs will be delivered as part of the project, along with advice and training for healthcare workers. The Lives and Livelihoods Fund, which targets health projects in Muslim-majority nations and is funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and several Gulf states, is backing the project with the Senegalese government.

Ndiour speaks with anger about the children's lives lost



Senegalese musician Yousseu N'Diour gestures during an interview at a restaurant in Dakar. — AFP

needlessly to the disease over the years. He believes the Senegalese have frequently minimized malaria's deadly impact in the past, allowing the parasite carried by mosquitos to wreak damage that is far more dangerous to children. "Here there are a lot of people who will tell you 'oh I just have a touch of flu' while in fact they have malaria," Ndiour said, sporting a white and black checked traditional Senegalese robe.

The risks are not only to health, he emphasized. "When children don't go to school, there are no jobs, you can't work. So poverty is always hovering in the background." He noted the strong link between malaria and poverty—the disease has a \$12 billion impact on the global economy every year, hitting sub-

Saharan Africa's fragile economies by far the hardest. Senegal has made huge gains in reducing malaria rates in recent years, which the project aims to consolidate to put the country on the path to complete eradication.

Star power

Ndiour remains a massive star at home, where his music blares from seemingly every taxi and corner shop, while he is best known in the West for "Seven Seconds", his 1994 duet with Neneh Cherry. Using his fame as a weapon, he has participated in prevention campaigns aimed at getting families to sleep under mosquito nets, while promoting his cause abroad with giant concerts with fellow African and international musicians. Ndiour has toured the world for the last five decades, but old images he was shown in the US stick out when he tries to picture an Africa without malaria.

"They showed me these old photos in Washington, and at the time there were mosquitos. How come (the disease) is gone?" he asked himself, learning that the government and citizens had mobilized together to beat malaria after World War II. "With the example of Washington, tomorrow we should be able to say: Senegal, Burkina Faso, Mali, that the problem in these places has been fixed to allow these African nations to take off," the singer added. Efforts must be far more concerted now that the end is in sight, he believes. "We have to pick up the pace to actually eradicate malaria," he emphasized. "I hope to see it happen in my lifetime." —AFP

Horror icon Michael Rooker on serial killing and lifesaving

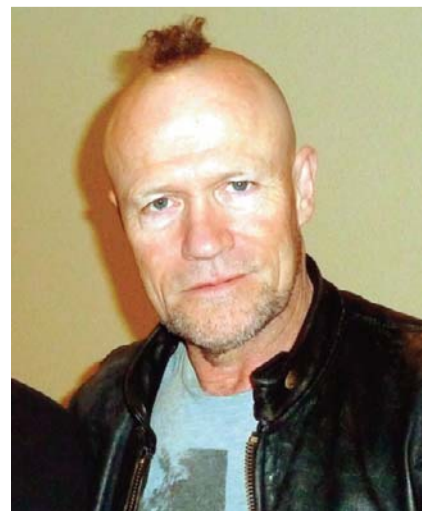
Michael Rooker could be the answer to a difficult trivia quiz question—who is that actor whose work you know well, even if you can't quite match the face to the movie? Yet from "Days of Thunder," to "JFK," "Mississippi Burning" and "Mallrats," his movies are cultural touchstones that have amassed the thick end of \$1 billion at the box office. Now 61, the veteran character actor finds himself stopped in the street, with his tough guy roles in "The Walking Dead" and as blue-faced mercenary Yondu in Marvel's "Guardians of the Galaxy" finally cementing his celebrity status.

"It's an opportunity to look at me, enjoy my newest stuff, and then go 'Wow that was that guy?' People do that all the time. I think it's great," he says, noting approvingly that a whole new generation of fans are discovering his 30-year body of work. Rooker was in Beverly Hills to promote his 63rd movie, "The Belko Experiment," in which he plays against type as the kindly janitor in an office block that becomes the grim venue for a deadly "kill or be killed" social experiment. Before he was cast as Daryl Dixon's dastardly brother Merle in AMC's "The Walking Dead," the most successful basic cable show in history, Rooker was known in horror circles for his various thugs and villains in films like "The Dark Half" (1993) and "The Bone Collector" (1999). His big screen debut, which remains his most disturbing

role, came when he was cast fresh out of theater school in John McNaughton's bloody and hugely controversial "Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer."

'Cool dude'

Rooker had been making his name on stage when he won the part of real-life serial killer Henry Lee Lucas, who was convicted of slaughtering 10 people, although he actually confessed to hundreds of murders. Shot over 28 days in Chicago in 1985 for



Michael Rooker

just \$110,000, "Henry" depicts in graphic detail Lucas's killing spree, and the production spent years in battles with censors and struggling to get distribution deals. Rooker went deep into the role, refusing to mix with the cast and crew and disappearing into a darkened room between takes. "I tried my best to stay in character all day and, at the end of the day, I'd come out of character and live my regular life, and try not to have so much spillover-but the spillover still happened," he says.

Pressed to explain "spillover," Rooker says he became introspective and shy, like his character. "I didn't go around with a knife, but I did have this quietness about me," he recalls. The film has gained cult status over the years as a low budget tour-de-force, while Rooker's acclaimed depiction of clinical psychopathy opened the door to mainstream roles opposite the likes of Gene Hackman, Kevin Costner and Tom Cruise, whom he describes as "a cool dude." Rooker was raised among eight brothers and sisters in Jasper, Alabama before moving with his mother and siblings to Chicago at 13 when his parents divorced.

Local hero

He gained local celebrity as a lifeguard at Lake Michigan after saving a group of bathers from drowning when they were suddenly caught out by a strong undertow. "They were being pulled out, and they

weren't swimmers. I was the first guard to spot it and went in, blowing my whistle," the father of two recalls. "Altogether we pulled out about 14 to 18 people that day, from that one incident only, and because of that, I ended up receiving rookie of the year." "The Belko Experiment," which hits theaters on Friday, is one of several movies Rooker has made with cult filmmaker James Gunn, bookended by horror comedy "SLITHER" (2006) and "Guardians of the Galaxy" (2014).

Rooker doesn't go big on self-analysis, but he clearly still can't quite believe he is getting paid handsomely to do something he loves and seems to enjoy talking about it. He plays to the gallery during a roundtable press event before his interview with AFP, his infectious shriek echoing around the 15th floor of the plush W Hotel in West Hollywood as he reels off a series of engaging anecdotes and observations. Pressed for details on his return as Yondu in the hotly-anticipated "Guardians" sequel, due out in May, and in "Avengers: Infinity War" in 2018, a conspiratorial grin spreads across his face as he leans in, seemingly about to divulge the studio's secrets. "To hell with Marvel. What do you want to know? I trust you'll never print it," he jokes, roaring with laughter, before revealing precisely nothing. —AFP

MUSIC & MOVIES



Work by TATS CRU is on display at the, The Point in the Bronx in New York.



Bronx-based graffiti artist, turned professional muralist, BG183, alias Sotero Ortiz, works on a project in an old Bronx warehouse. — AFP photos



The Bronx looks to capitalize as hip-hop's birthplace

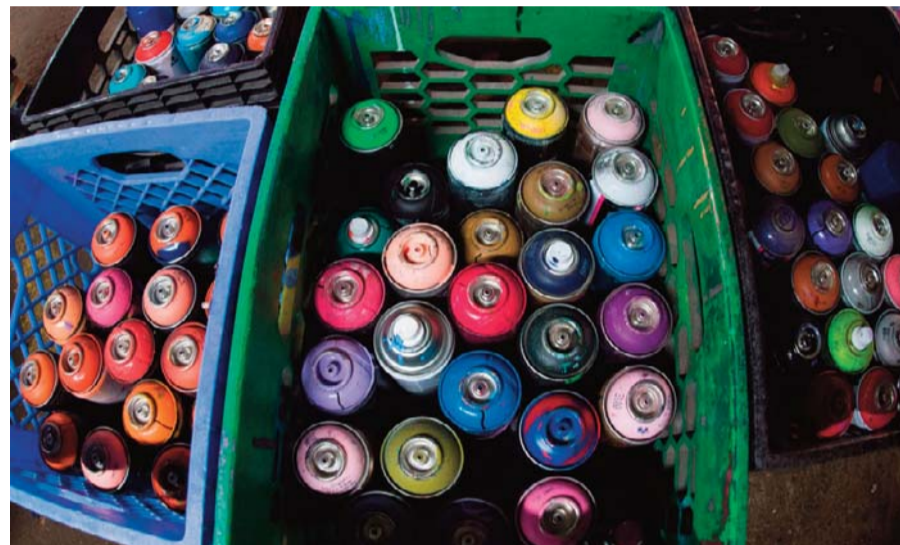
In the 1970s, DJs, dancers, graffiti artists and the first rappers came together in the burned-out buildings of The Bronx, giving birth to hip-hop. Today, hip-hop is a multibillion-dollar industry and The Bronx is on the mend, but New York's northernmost borough is struggling to capitalize on its heritage. Hip-hop began at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue on the two-tone linoleum floor of a ground-floor room in an anonymous brick house, under an impromptu neon light. There on August 11, 1973, Clive Campbell-nicknamed Kool Herc-mashed together snippets of recordings on two turntables and, without knowing it, became the first hip-hop DJ. Coke La Rock became the first MC as he delivered spoken-word lyrics over the music.

Hip-hop culture—with its mix of DJing, rapping, graffiti and dance—has gone on to become a global phenomenon. The Bronx has restored several emblematic sites including Cedar Playground, the scene of the first open-air hip-hop parties, and the Bronx River Community Center where pioneering DJ Afrika Bambaataa had his start. The early days of hip-hop have also been dramatized in a television series, "The Get Down," which premiered in August. But little of the giant hip-hop industry now comes out of or benefits The Bronx, which despite recent growth remains less prosperous than glamorous Manhattan or fast-growing Brooklyn.

A plan to create a hip-hop museum in The Bronx has repeatedly been proposed and resurrected but has not come to fruition. Rocky Bucano, a businessman and producer behind the Universal Hip Hop Museum, has since teamed up to create a foundation to support the project, enlisting several figures from the first generation of hip-hop including Kurtis Blow. The current plan calls for a complex over several acres on the Harlem River, which separates The Bronx and Harlem. Alongside the museum will be businesses, green space and affordable housing.

Showcasing a new Bronx

Bucano said he has received support from several city and state elected leaders and, if the city government gives the green light, he will seek support from "the companies that have benefited from the exploitation of rap music." The museum will be "a beacon of economic activity for the borough that gave birth to hip-hop," he said. Borough president Ruben



Spray paints used by Bronx-based graffiti artist, turned professional muralist, BG183, as he works on a project in an old Bronx warehouse.



Signs honoring Hip-Hop pioneers Rock Steady Crew and US sex therapist Dr Ruth Westheimer hang from a lamp post as part of the Bronx Walk of Fame in the Bronx.

Diaz Jr. said that the museum could also show visitors the fresh construction and lowering crime of The Bronx and not the "rundown buildings" they are expecting. "Hip-hop with a museum like this would be an excellent way where folks could come in and say: It's not like it was. But we haven't lost our flavor. We totally embrace that this is the birthplace of hip-hop," he said.

He likened a hip-hop museum to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame—the shrine to rock culture in Cleveland that has increasingly been inducting rappers, with the late Tupac Shakur to be honored next month when the gala comes to Brooklyn. "This is no disrespecting rock and roll or the Smithsonian, but one of the most embarrassing things is when you get hip-hop artists that are being inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. It would have been nicer if they had been inducted into a hall of fame right here, where it all started," he said. Diaz was hopeful for the museum but said it was critical to bring commitments from the hip-hop world. "I think it will

not happen until pioneers of hip-hop, financiers and moguls of hip-hop, the new artists of hip-hop, until all of hip-hop comes together."

New embrace of hip-hop

Debra Harris has found a growing market by bringing tourists to The Bronx to see hip-hop history. Relatively few are American as she sees more interest from visitors from Britain, France and Germany as well as Australia and Japan. But the reputation of The Bronx remains such that, 15 years after she launched the tours, Harris starts her visits in Harlem so as not to scare people off. "It's all about Manhattan and now it's about Brooklyn. Eventually The Bronx will catch up and people will start getting interest, but as long as there's a level of fear, you may not feel comfortable going there," she said. The number of murders in The Bronx has tumbled six-fold since 1990, even if the borough still has the highest crime rate in New York.

And with prices in Manhattan and Brooklyn increasingly out of reach for many New Yorkers, developers have invested heavily in the southeastern tip of The Bronx in the past few years. Developers, for their part, have clearly seen the benefit of bringing a touch of hip-hop to a street of building. BG 183, the alias of Sotero Ortiz of the graffiti collective TATS Cru, said that developers are constantly reaching out in hopes that a splash of spray paint can bring a badge of authenticity—as with a former factory in the Hunts Point neighborhood that will reopen as an office building months after its graffiti mural. The irony is not lost on the TATS Cru, who for years had been dodging the police as they took their art to streets and trains and now are invited to art galleries. "They were telling us: you can't do this here, you're going to get caught," BG 183 said. "Now they're giving us awards." — AFP

Paul Simon to promote biodiversity with new tour

Folk rock legend Paul Simon has announced a US tour to promote biodiversity efforts as fears mount for the long-term survival of life on Earth. The 75-year-old songwriter, who a year ago had been mulling retirement, said all proceeds from his 17-date tour would fund the E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation. Started by the Harvard scientist of the same name, the foundation supports education and research into biodiversity—the interconnected lives of the planet's vast array of species.

Wilson, one of the foremost experts on ants, has warned that the planet is in the midst of a sixth great extinction as the destruction of rain forests, climate change and other human actions cause species to die out at a fast-accelerating rate. Simon, announcing the tour through an interview with the environmental site Mongabay on Monday, said he met Wilson in 2007 and was struck by his phrase that "Earth's a jewel, but it's endangered." "It's going to take a little while, maybe 100 years, maybe 200 years, to fix it. But we can, and then it would be like living in paradise."

"But he said it's only going to take 75 to 100 years to make it into a desolate place," Simon said. With some officials in President Donald Trump's administration denying the scientific consensus on climate change, Simon described Wilson's message as optimistic. "It is more inspiring in this particular way than fear. It's not always the case in human nature, but in this particular case, predictions of dire consequences for our actions tend to produce denial," Simon said. Simon will open his tour on June 1 in St Augustine, Florida and play 16 solo shows across

the country, mostly in open-air venues. The 17th show will come when he headlines Eaux Claires, the festival in Wisconsin launched three years ago by Bon Iver frontman Justin Vernon.

Simon, formerly in a duo with Art Garfunkel, released a string of classic hits including "Bridge over Troubled Water" and "Mrs. Robinson" and helped shape the genre of world music fusion with his 1986 album "Graceland." Simon spoke of retirement before two shows last year at the Forest Hills stadium in his home of Queens, New York. But he returned soon afterwards, singing at the Democratic National Convention and touring Europe. — AFP



Paul Simon

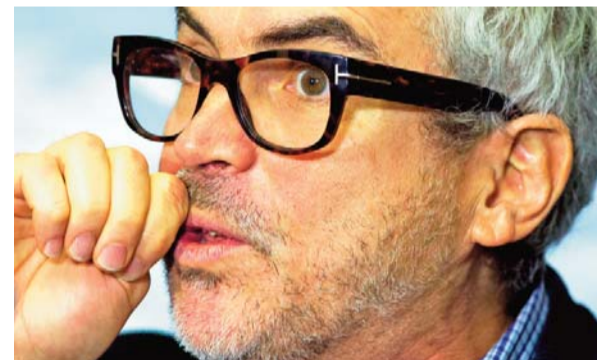
Mischa Barton threatens legal action over sex tape

Actress Mischa Barton is the victim of "revenge pornography," her attorney said Tuesday, threatening legal action against anyone touting sexually explicit images of the 31-year-old actress. Several media outlets have reported the existence of a tape of the "The OC" star taking part in sex acts with an unidentified man, dressed in a black hoodie. A broker said the tape was being touted around pornographic websites, with an asking price of \$500,000, the Daily Mail newspaper reported on Monday.

"It has been reported that naked or sexually explicit images of Ms. Barton are being 'shopped around,'" attorney Lisa Bloom said in a statement released via Twitter. "Ms Barton does not consent to any disclosure of any such images. She believes she was recorded without her consent by someone she was seeing at the time. There's a name for this disgusting conduct: Revenge pornography." Bloom described the footage as "a form of sexual assault," and "a crime and a civil wrong in California," adding: "We will not stand for it." Barton

will speak out about the case at a news conference at Bloom's offices in southern California on Wednesday, the lawyer said. "I have a message for anyone who attempts to traffic in these photos or videos of Ms Barton: We will find you, and we will come after you," Bloom added.

"We will fully prosecute you under every available criminal and civil law." London-born Barton was considered an up-and-coming star thanks to her role in teen drama "The OC" from 2003 to 2007 but she has struggled to emulate her early success. She was arrested for drunk driving in West Hollywood in 2007 and held in psychiatric care following a mental breakdown in 2009 before various legal battles over property with a landlord and her own mother. She made headlines again in January when she was caught on video yelling at a neighbor while hanging over her backyard fence, later telling People magazine she had been given a date-rape drug the night before. — AFP



Mexican director Alfonso Cuarón answers questions during a press conference following the end of filming of his new movie 'Roma,' in Mexico City. — AP

Alfonso Cuarón wraps filming on 'Roma' in his native Mexico

For Oscar-winning director Alfonso Cuarón, returning to film in his native Mexico was an itch that took 16 years to finally scratch. Ever since Cuarón found international success with the movie "Y Tu Mama Tambien," commitment after commitment, among them "Children of Men" and "Gravity," delayed his plans for a more personal project back home. "Movies are like a cereal box - at the bottom there is the promise of a toy," Cuarón said Tuesday at a news conference in the Mexican capital, paraphrasing friend and colleague Guillermo del Toro to describe why he filmed his latest in Mexico.

"Gravity" was that cereal box and I got that little toy, which usually leads to a bigger film with more production, with more stars," Cuarón told reporters. "But I decided to return to Mexico City to make this movie with the resources I had always dreamed about." Cuarón has now wrapped shooting on "Roma," a 1970s period piece about a year in the life of a middle-class family that is infused by the director's experiences as a child and his Mexican identity. "I can live abroad, but my head keeps thinking in Mexican, in 'chilango,'" Cuarón said, employing a local slang referring to denizens of the capital. "I am very much up on the happenings of my country, and I miss where I am from."

Cuarón, who kept quiet on details of the plot of "Roma," was accompanied by production designer Eugenio Caballero, who won an Academy Award for his work on "Pan's Labyrinth" and is art director for the new film. Both thanked Mexico City authorities and apologized to locals for the inconvenience of several main streets being shut down. Among those was a thoroughfare where they recreated the 1971 Corpus Christi Massacre of dozens of student protesters by a paramilitary group known as "Los Halcones," or "The Hawks." "We weren't thinking about this frivolously," Cuarón said. "We did this to re-create a historic moment in Mexicans' consciousness. ... For that very reason it was essential to film this scene where the events happened."

"By the nature of the project, being a period film, we had to close streets," Caballero said. "In addition to the support from the authorities, the people understood what the project was about and it was interesting to talk about that city for which many people were stirred by nostalgia." Cuarón, whose credits also include "A Little Princess," "Great Expectations" and "Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban," will spend the rest of the year on post-production for "Roma" ahead of its expected premier in 2018. — AP

BEN AFFLECK SAYS HE'S UNDERGONE TREATMENT FOR ALCOHOLISM

Hollywood star Ben Affleck announced on Facebook that he has undergone treatment to combat alcoholism, as he acknowledged his ongoing struggle with the condition. The Oscar-winning actor and director cited his children as a major motivation to pursue treatment, in order to "live life to the fullest and be the best father I can be." "I have completed treatment for alcohol addiction," Affleck wrote in a Facebook post late Tuesday. "This was the first of many steps being taken towards a positive recovery." The actor then turned to his family.

"I want my kids to know there is no shame in getting help when you need it, and to be a source of strength for anyone out there who needs help but is afraid to take the first step," he wrote. "I'm lucky to have the love of my family and friends, including my co-parent, Jen, who has supported me and cared for our kids as I've done the work I set out to do." Once one-half of Hollywood's famed "Bennifer" married couple, Affleck and his now-estranged wife Jennifer Garner announced plans to divorce in June 2015, one day after their 10-year wedding anniversary.

Affleck, 44, has Oscars for writing and producing. He directed critical and commercial hits "The Town," "Gone Girl" and "Argo," which won the best picture award at the Oscars in 2013. His younger brother Casey this year took home a best acting Oscar for his starring role in the melancholy Hollywood hit "Manchester by the Sea." Garner is known for her breakout work in the spy drama "Alias" on television, and for various roles on the big screen, including a well-received turn in the 2004 hit movie "13 Going on 30." — AFP



This file photo shows actor Ben Affleck as he arrives for the world premiere of Warner Bros. — AP

FASHION



Syrian-Kurdish women model traditional Kurdish attire during a fashion show in the northeastern Syrian city of Qamishli which coincides with the Day of Kurdish Clothing. — AFP photos



A Syrian-Kurdish man models traditional Kurdish attire during a fashion show.



A Syrian-Kurdish woman modeling traditional Kurdish attire poses in front of a Kurdish flag during a fashion show.

SYRIA'S KURDS HIT CATWALK TO PROMOTE TRADITIONAL ATTIRE



In a shimmering dress, Efin Hissu strides confidently down a runway to the beat of Kurdish music at a fashion show in northeast Syria showcasing a revival of the minority's traditional clothing. Her outfit is a riot of contrasting patterns, starting with her full-length gown, a sienna shade overlaid with a delicate leaf-like pattern in dark brown and gold thread. The exaggerated sleeves extend out at the cuff to form a point that sweeps delicately as she moves her arms.

Over the dress is a black jacket, heavily embroidered in gold, and over her head and shoulders is a black, white and yellow headscarf held in place by a gold headpiece with dangling coins. Such an outfit would not have been seen in public in Syria's Kurdish regions in years past, under restrictions on the minority that also banned their language and denied them Syrian nationality. But after Syria's uprising began in March 2011, the government first relaxed some restrictions and then in 2012 withdrew most of its forces from Kurdish-majority areas in the country's north.

In the wake of the withdrawal, the Kurdish community, who made up around 15 percent of Syria's pre-war population, has worked to revive its language and culture, including its sartorial traditions. "This show is the first of its kind," said Medea Akko, 25, who helped supervise the fashion show held in the Kurdish-majority city of Qamishli. "Our goal is to counter the marginalization of Kurdish clothing and to introduce it to society and the world," she added. "Before the Syrian revolution, we couldn't even say that we were Kurds, but now the situation is different—I can wear my clothes and speak Kurdish in our streets and our cities." The fashion show was held to coincide with the Day of Kurdish Clothing, on March 10, which has been marked in neighboring Iraqi Kurdistan for years but only more recently in Syria's Kurdish areas.

'Feel like a queen'

"Some people think that Kurdish clothing enhances beauty," Akko told AFP. "And I feel like I'm a queen when I wear Kurdish clothing." The show was sponsored by a local political party and featured 15 women and seven men modeling a range of traditional attire. It culminated with the arrival of a model in a traditional bridal outfit: a red robe with a heavy gold necklace and a diaphanous red veil. As the men and women walked the runway, observers clapped along to the music and filmed the proceedings on cellphones. After the show, Hissu and her fellow models walked proudly through the neighborhood still wearing the traditional clothes.

"We're thrilled by this day-to be able to wear our traditional Kurdish clothing and wander around in it in the streets of Qamishli and to celebrate this day in front of everyone," she told AFP. A traditional Kurdish outfit for women consists primarily of an ornate dress with exaggerated long sleeves and a pointed cuff known as "krass".

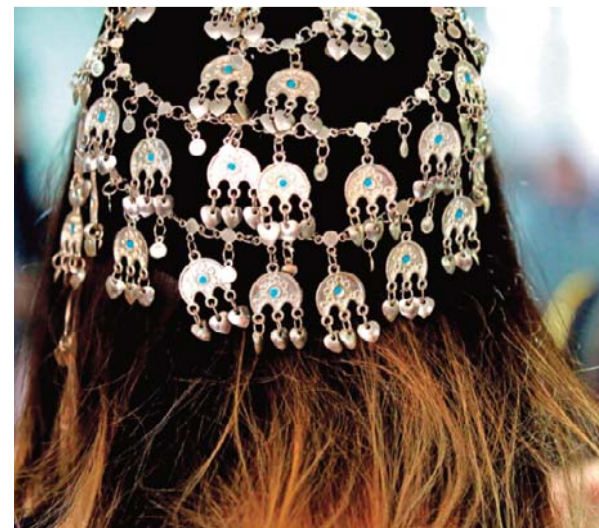
The gown is sometimes worn over a pair of wide trousers and accentuated with an embroidered coat. Ornamenting the outfit is an array of jewelry, including necklaces and bracelets, nose studs, anklets and a decorative belt of silver or gold. Men's outfits are simpler, though still distinctive, featuring trousers that billow out from the hips and nip back in at the ankles, secured with a thick belt of often-colorful fabric. The outfit includes a simple shirt and matching jacket or waistcoat and is topped with a turban wrapped from a scarf often featuring flowers or other patterns.



Tailors working non-stop

In the past, Kurdish clothing was rarely seen in shops, with tailors instead creating pieces at home, behind closed doors and away from the eyes of the authorities. But today the situation is reversed, and Qamishli's tailors are dealing with growing demand, particularly with the approach of the Nowruz spring festival on March 21, when traditional dress is favored by celebrating Kurds. "There is growing demand for Kurdish clothes since the revolution. They're worn particularly during the Nowruz festival and for weddings," said Sami Moussa, who works in Qamishli's tailors' district.

"Nowadays we don't stop working because demand is so high," he told AFP. "We're working on perhaps 100 pieces a month, particularly in the spring, while before (2011) we didn't do more than 10 pieces a month," he added. His dresses range in price from 40,000 Syrian pounds (\$80, 75 euros) to 80,000 (\$160) depending on the fabric and sewing work involved. Tailor Raed Yusef, 38, speaks proudly about the array of options now available to those seeking traditional Kurdish attire. "In the past, Kurdish clothes were made in secret," he said, seated by his sewing machine. "But today we have customers in Europe who we send clothes for them to wear at weddings and on Nowruz." "A few days ago, for the first time, I made a traditional bridal gown for a bride to wear on her wedding day." — AFP





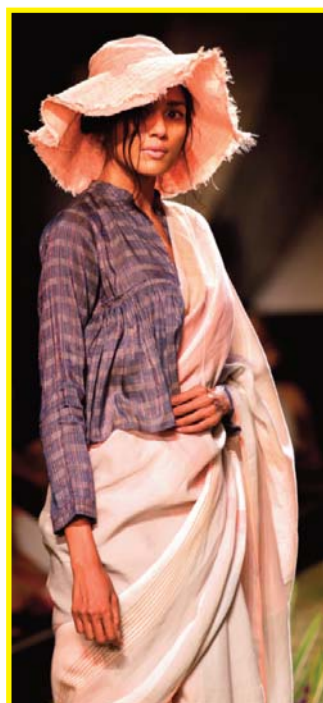
A man takes a photo on a phone of Syrian-Kurdish women modeling traditional Kurdish attire.



Amazon India Fashion Week



Models display creations by Indian designers during Amazon India Fashion Week Autumn-Winter 2017 in New Delhi, India, yesterday. — AP photos



SAO PAULO FASHION WEEK



Models display creations during from the Osklen collection during Sao Paulo Fashion Week in Sao Paulo, Brazil, Monday. — AP photos

Lifestyle

THURSDAY, MARCH 16, 2017

38

Syria's Kurds hit catwalk to promote traditional attire



In this photo a member of the 'HK Typhoon' underwater hockey club completes a lap as she takes part in exercise drills during the team's once-a-week practice session at a 25-metre school pool in Hong Kong. — AFP photos



Head coach Nowie Ignacio Cornelia (left), 37, from the Philippines, and geologist and former competitive swimmer Henry Chan (right), 28, who founded the 'HK Typhoon' underwater hockey club, chat after their once-a-week team practice session.



Members of the 'HK Typhoon' underwater hockey club prepare to dive for the puck during their once-a-week team practice session at a 25-metre school pool in Hong Kong.



Members of the 'HK Typhoon' underwater hockey club prepare to dive for the puck during their once-a-week team practice session at a 25-metre school pool in Hong Kong.

Different strokes: Underwater hockey makes splash in Hong Kong

The gravity defying sport of underwater hockey has gained a worldwide following—now a Hong Kong team is diving in as the game takes off in Asia. Invented by British navy divers in the 1950s, the acrobatic six-a-side sport requires participants to hunt a heavy plastic puck and hit it into their opponents' net with a short curved stick. Competitors wear snorkels, fins, ear protectors and gloves, resembling a school of fish as they swarm around the puck, diving and somersaulting to gain possession.

The sport has built up a loyal fanbase in Canada, Australia and South Africa and has spread to Asian countries in recent years, including China and Malaysia. Hong Kong's amateur team, which has around 25 active players, draws from all walks of life, including teachers, an artist, a pilot and geologist Henry Chan, who founded the club which is nicknamed "HK Typhoon". A former competitive

swimmer, Chan, 28, learned to play the sport while studying in the US. He decided to set up a Facebook page seeking fellow fans on his return to Hong Kong in 2010 as he missed playing what he describes as a "fast-paced and three-dimensional" game.

"I started receiving messages from veterans from all over the world who had transferred to Hong Kong to work. They have a lot of experience in playing, teaching and even competing at the highest level," Chan told AFP. Chan's Facebook group is followed by nearly 200 people and his fellow Hong Kong players have now formed a competitive team, taking part in their first tournament in May last year. They came third out of 11 Chinese cities that participated in the China Cup in Chengdu. The team's long-term aim is to secure a place in the underwater hockey world cup—but for now they are setting their sights on this year's China Cup in May. "We are aiming for

the first prize and I'm very confident about it," said Chan of the upcoming tournament in Hangzhou.

'Like dancing'

The Hong Kong team practices once a week at a 25-metre school pool, working to improve their power, endurance and lung capacity. Experienced players swim whole lengths without coming up for air in training, to help when they dive to chase the puck. But head coach Nowie Ignacio Cornelia, from the Philippines, says the skills do not come easily. "Being great comes with time. Your muscles have to get used to being underwater," said Cornelia, 37, who is a freelance cinematographer. "The key ingredient is to be very calm and relaxed," Cornelia added. But Chan says it is cooperation that is the key. "There are six (opponents) to defeat before scoring," he said.

"You have to make good use of your teammates and you

should really be passing the puck around, take a breath, advance to a better location quicker and receive the puck again." Out of the pool, the team reviews tactics and analyses underwater footage, along with visits to the gym. But while there is a hard core of enthusiasts in Hong Kong, Chan says he would like to see more awareness of the game as well as technology and pools designed to help spectators engage fully with the sport. Team member Flora Tang, 31, said that while water polo and scuba diving were well-known in the city, underwater hockey was still a mystery for most. For her, it is a welcome escape from her day job in sales. She said: "I enjoy the underwater feeling. It feels like you're dancing." — AFP



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