

US lawmakers seek FBI, NSA answers on Trump, Russia



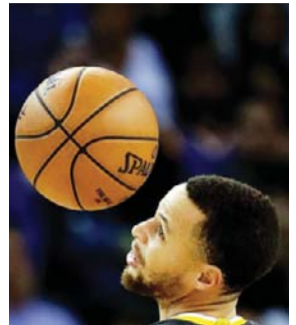
Brexit: The end of a loveless marriage



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150 FILMS
NO: 17174
40 PAGES

MAN 'ARMED WITH KNIFE' DISRUPTS CATHOLIC MASS

SUSPECT DETAINED; SECURITY BEEFED UP

Min 17°
Max 24°
High Tide 06:23 & 16:43
Low Tide 11:05

KUWAITI LAWYER SEEKS BAN ON EXPAT DRIVERS

By A staff reporter

KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti lawyer yesterday filed a lawsuit at Administrative Court demanding an "urgent suspension" of all driving licenses for expatriates and halting the issuance of new licenses for them to make it easier for citizens to drive on roads. Lawyer Mohammad Al-Ansari said he filed the lawsuit on behalf of several Kuwaiti citizens after the traffic problems have deteriorated reaching an "unbearable phase".

The lawyer said that because the ministries of interior and public works have failed to resolve the traffic problem in the country resulting to congestion which negatively impacted Kuwaiti citizens. He demanded that the court should "temporarily suspend the validity of all driver licenses held by expatriates and halt the issuance of new ones until the Interior Ministry issues new decisions to regulate the traffic matters in Kuwait".

The lawyer said that the traffic problems in the country have reached a dangerous level especially when citizens and expatriates go to their jobs and come back home. This has resulted in uncivilized behavior and practices

and with the absence of any imminent solution from the government, it is time that the judiciary ordered urgently the suspension of driving licenses held by expatriates with the exception of certain professions.

The court has not yet set a date for considering the case which is the first of its kind in the country but comes at a time when millions of expatriates have become an easy target and have been blamed for most of the country's problems and shortcomings. There are about 3.1 million foreigners living and working in Kuwait against just under 1.4 million Kuwaiti citizens.

For the past 10 years, the Interior Ministry had imposed highly strict rules for expatriates to be able to apply for driving licenses. A majority of expatriates are required to hold a university degree, earn a monthly salary of KD 600 and have lived in the country legally for at least two years to be able to apply for a driver's license. The court is extremely unlikely to issue the suspension because it clearly contradicts several provisions in the Kuwaiti constitution which envisages equality among all regardless of nationality or gender.

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TURKEY WELCOMES AMIR



ANKARA: Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (right) welcomes Kuwait's Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah upon his arrival at Esenboga International Airport in Ankara. — AFP

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and his accompanying delegation arrived yesterday in the Turkish capital Ankara on an official visit. His Highness the Amir was received at the airport by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, as well as senior government officials and top brass. Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey Ghassan Al-Zawawi and Consul General in Istanbul Mohammad Al-Mohammad, as well as

embassy staff were also present at His Highness's reception.

During his visit, His Highness the Amir is scheduled to hold talks with Turkish leaders over efforts to boost bilateral relations and cooperation in various domains. Amir's visit to Turkey is the second in less than a year as he led Kuwait's delegation to the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May 2016. The Turkish President also paid a state visit to Kuwait in April 2015. — Agencies

By Aakash Bakaya

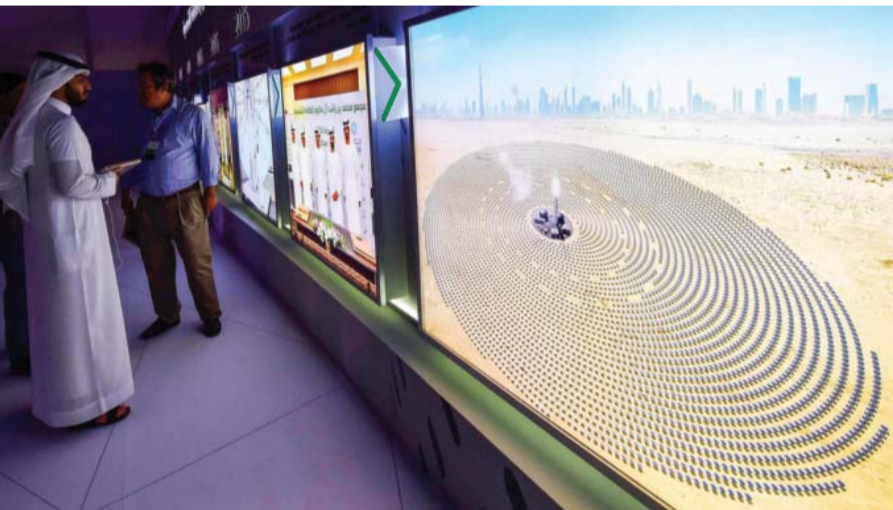
KUWAIT: A citizen, carrying a concealed knife, disrupted mass at the Catholic Church in Kuwait City Sunday evening. The man was later arrested by police. No one was hurt in the incident. Interior Ministry officials confirmed that a Kuwaiti man was taken by police after causing a disturbance at the Holy Family Cathedral Sunday evening. Two eye witnesses at the church confirmed to Kuwait Times that the man was carrying a long kitchen knife.

During the service, the man dressed in a traditional dishdasha walked inside the church and went straight to where the priest was speaking. A few parishioners nearby heard that the man was asking "to see the Pope". The man then walked to the podium and tried to seize the microphone from the priest. Several ushers then came forward and escorted him from the church premises. After being led from the church, the man was handed over to police. When he saw officers approaching, the man dropped the knife that had been hidden inside his dishdasha.

An Interior Ministry official noted that the citizen, in his 60s, suffers from mental health issues. According to the same official, who has that his name not to be published, the citizen was taken by police to the Psychiatric Hospital for monitoring, where he already has a file and has been receiving treatment. The official denied involvement of any terrorist organization or threat to the church or its parishioners.

Officials from the Holy Family Cathedral confirmed the incident as well but noted that the church is well protected - police are regularly stationed outside the church during hours of operation. There is a sizable Christian community in Kuwait, approximately 750,000 adherents. There seven officially recognized churches and many of the country's expatriate residents from India, the Philippines and other countries attend regular church services. The Catholic Church has an estimated 500,000 followers in Kuwait.

Attacks on churches or the Christian community in Kuwait are largely unheard of. But after the June 2015 suicide bombing of the Imam Al-Sadiq mosque in Kuwait City, the Interior Ministry expanded security at local churches with a regular posted police presence.



DUBAI: Visitors look at screens displaying images of the Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum Solar Park yesterday, at the solar plant in Dubai. — AFP

DUBAI HARVESTS DESERT SUN AT ITS SOLAR PLANT

DUBAI: Dubai yesterday completed a solar plant big enough to power 50,000 homes as part of a plan to generate three-quarters of its energy from renewables by 2050. The 200 megawatt plant sprawls over 4.5 square kilometers of desert and includes some 2.3 million photovoltaic panels. It is the second phase of the Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum Solar Park, which is set to pump out a total of 1,000 megawatts by 2020, the Dubai Electricity and Water Authority said.

The \$326 million (300 million euro) second phase was built by a consortium including Saudi Arabia's ACWA Power and Spain's TSK. DEWA chief Saeed Al-Tajer said the operators would sell power to the public utility company. The project is the

"largest and first solar power project of its kind in the region", he said. "The state has begun early in preparing to say goodbye to the last drop of oil, through a clear strategy including investments in power generation plants that use various solar power technologies," Tajer said.

The solar park's first phase came online in 2013, with 152,000 panels producing 13 megawatts. DEWA said in December the second phase of the project had set a world record for cheap solar energy, at 5.6 US cents (5.2 euro cents) per kilowatt hour. Last year, DEWA awarded the third and final phase of the project, an 800 megawatt extension to the park, to a consortium led by Abu Dhabi's Masdar. — AFP

'BEAUTY AND THE BEAST' PULLED FROM THEATRES

By Athoob Al-Shuaibi, Agencies

KUWAIT: 'Beauty and the Beast' was pulled from theatres in Kuwait yesterday. The step comes as the Ministry of Information asked theatre companies to make additional cuts to the film. The popular Disney movie was recently remade with UK actress Emma Watson as lead character, Belle. But it has sparked controversy within the first week of release in some Muslim countries due to alleged 'gay' scenes. Malaysia has banned the film after Disney refused to remove the controversial scenes.

In Kuwait, the movie has not been officially banned and was in fact shown in theatres since its release on March

16. But yesterday, the Information Ministry called for additional scenes to be cut. Duaij Al-Khalifa Al-Sabah, a board member at the National Cinema Company, which operates 11 of Kuwait's 13 movie theaters said a newly edited version of the movie may be in theaters later this week.

He said concerns center on a scene late in the movie involving the character LeFou, which director Bill Condon describes as an "exclusively gay moment." "We were requested to stop the screening and further censor the movie for things that were deemed offensive by the Ministry of Information's censorship department," Al-Sabah said.

Continued on page 13



This image released by Disney shows Dan Stevens as The Beast (left) and Emma Watson as Belle in a live-action adaptation of the animated classic "Beauty and the Beast." — AP

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KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is seen off at the airport by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah before his departure to Turkey yesterday.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is seen off by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan photos



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is seen off by Deputy Chairman of the National Guard Sheikh Meshaal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

AMIR'S VISIT TO TURKEY IMPORTANT: AKARCA

ANKARA: His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's visit to Turkey will boost bilateral relations, Chief of the Turkish Directorate General for Press and Information Mehmet Akarca said.

The visit looks into means to boost relations on all possible levels, Akarca said, adding that both nations were aware of the historical importance of this visit. Akarca revealed that both countries were eager to follow up on an agreement signed in 2014 to develop media ties.

Media cooperation plays an important part in the development of relations, said the Turkish official who noted that through this domain, Kuwait and Turkey could look into more means to develop the overall ties linking the two states. Meanwhile, the Turkish official touched on the importance of unifying the Islamic media front against campaigns aimed at belittling Islam and



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is seen off by His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is seen off by Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Mohammad Al-Khoder.

painting a distorted image of this great faith. Akarca said that fighting terror groups like the so-called Islamic State (IS) and other similar entities required from Islamic media outlets to stand firm in spreading the true message of Islam to the world. Connected to this topic, the Turkish official revealed that a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed recently to establish an Islamic media center. He hoped that Kuwait would partake in the efforts to establish the center, which will provide a trusted and comprehensive media database and news for subscribers. The Turkish Presidency media office had said on Sunday that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was set to decorate His Highness the Amir with Turkey's Order of State during his visit to Ankara. The two sides were also set to sign cooperation agreements and hold talks on a host of bilateral and regional issues, it added. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah welcomes Omani Interior Minister Hamoud bin Faisal Al-Busaidi. — KUNA



MUSCAT: Members of the Kuwaiti judicial delegation discuss with Oman's Public Prosecutor Hussein bin Ali Al-Hilali and Justice Ministry's Undersecretary Issa bin Hamad Al-Azri bilateral judicial ties.

OMANI INTERIOR MINISTER IN KUWAIT FOR CHILD CONFERENCE

KUWAIT/MUSCAT: Omani Interior Minister Hamoud bin Faisal Al-Busaidi arrived in Kuwait yesterday, leading a security delegation to attend a regional conference on child protection from social media hazards.

The Omani minister was received at Kuwait International Airport by Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah, Acting Undersecretary of the Interior Ministry Major General Mahmoud Al-Dosari and Omani Ambassador to Kuwait Hamed Al-Ibrahim and several senior security officials. The two-day conference, the first of its kind in Kuwait, opens today under the aegis of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

In other news, a visiting judicial delega-

tion from Kuwait has discussed with Oman's Public Prosecutor Hussein bin Ali Al-Hilali and Justice Ministry's Undersecretary Issa bin Hamad Al-Azri ways to boost bilateral judicial ties. The delegation's visit, representing the Judiciary Administrative Affairs Council in Kuwait, is part of bilateral "scientific" visits between supreme and cassation courts in GCC States, said Counselor Ali Bourisly, Cassation Court's Procurator.

The visit aims at reviewing the Sultanate's judicial experience, which will help in boosting and enhancing joint cooperation between the two countries, Bourisly said, affirming the Kuwaiti council's keenness in benefiting from regional and international expertise and expanding judicial cooperation prospects. — KUNA

KUWAIT URGES UNHRC NOT TO NEGLECT ISRAELI VIOLATIONS

GENEVA: Kuwait is pushing the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to keep addressing the issue of Israeli violations on Arab soil and that it should be part and parcel of UNHRC's agenda. The remarks were made by Kuwait's permanent delegate to the UN Ambassador Jamal Al-Ghunaim yesterday, during compelling discussions held with the UN's Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Michael Lynk. The Kuwaiti diplomat noted that his country's unwavering commitment to the Palestinian issue stems from the "graveness of Israeli violations that are tantamount to war crimes and crimes against humanity."

Moreover, Ghunaim said that "turning a blind eye to Israeli violations will only embolden the country to continue violating international humanitarian laws, adding that Kuwait vehemently condemns "Israeli aggressions against the Palestinian people." Meanwhile, Kuwait's permanent delegate to the UN voiced Kuwait's growing concerns over increasing Israeli settlements on Palestinian land, practices he slammed as unlawful and catastrophic. Ghunaim also excoriated Israel for its blockade on Gaza, which induced a wide array of humanitarian crises, saying that Kuwait will remain steadfast in its support of the Palestinian people. — KUNA

PARLIAMENT SPEAKER URGES CONCERTED RESPONSE AGAINST ISRAELI VIOLATIONS

RABAT: It is imperative that Arab parliaments act in unison against Israeli violations of United Nations (UN) resolutions, Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said yesterday. Ghanem made the remarks to open the 24th conference of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union (AIPU) in the Moroccan capital, where he underscored the need for AIPU to act in a coherent and organized manner.

The former AIPU Chairman also noted that time for talk was over and that diplomacy should be utilized as a tool to pile up pressure on Israel, citing UN resolution 2334, which deals with Israeli settlements on Palestinian lands. "We remain steadfast in our aim to use an event of such magnitude to take a clear political stance on Israel," Ghanem said.

He added that diplomatic action against Israel is needed, including "the suspension of the Israeli Knesset's membership in the Inter-Parliamentary Union for its infraction of the very essence of the union." Moreover, the Kuwaiti National Assembly Speaker spoke of his sanguine expectations that "Arab nations will ultimately succeed."



RABAT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem participates in the 24th conference of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union (AIPU). — KUNA

Ghanem is heading a Kuwait parliamentary delegation comprising Undersecretary of the Parliamentary Caucus Rakan Al-Nisf, Caucus Secretary Dr Odah Al-Ruwaiee, Treasurer Walid

Al-Tabtabaei, members of the Caucus Executive Committee Omar Al-Tabtabaei and Yousef Al-Fadhlah, besides MPs Safaa Al-Hashem, Al-Humaidi Al-Subaiee and Ali Al-Deqbasi. — KUNA

KUWAIT PLEDGES \$5 MILLION FOR NEW FUND TO PROTECT HERITAGE IN CONFLICT ZONES

PARIS: Representing His Highness the Amir, Kuwaiti Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Acting Information Minister Sheikh Mohammad Mubarak Al-Sabah announced yesterday Kuwait's pledge of \$5 million for a fresh fund for the protection of heritage in conflict zones.

The Kuwaiti minister made the announcement during a conference held in the Louvre Museum in Paris, bringing together representatives and delegates from 40 countries, organizations and entities. The gathering is mainly intended to give support to an emerging international effort to protest cultural heritage in areas of conflict worldwide.

Addressing the conference, the Kuwaiti

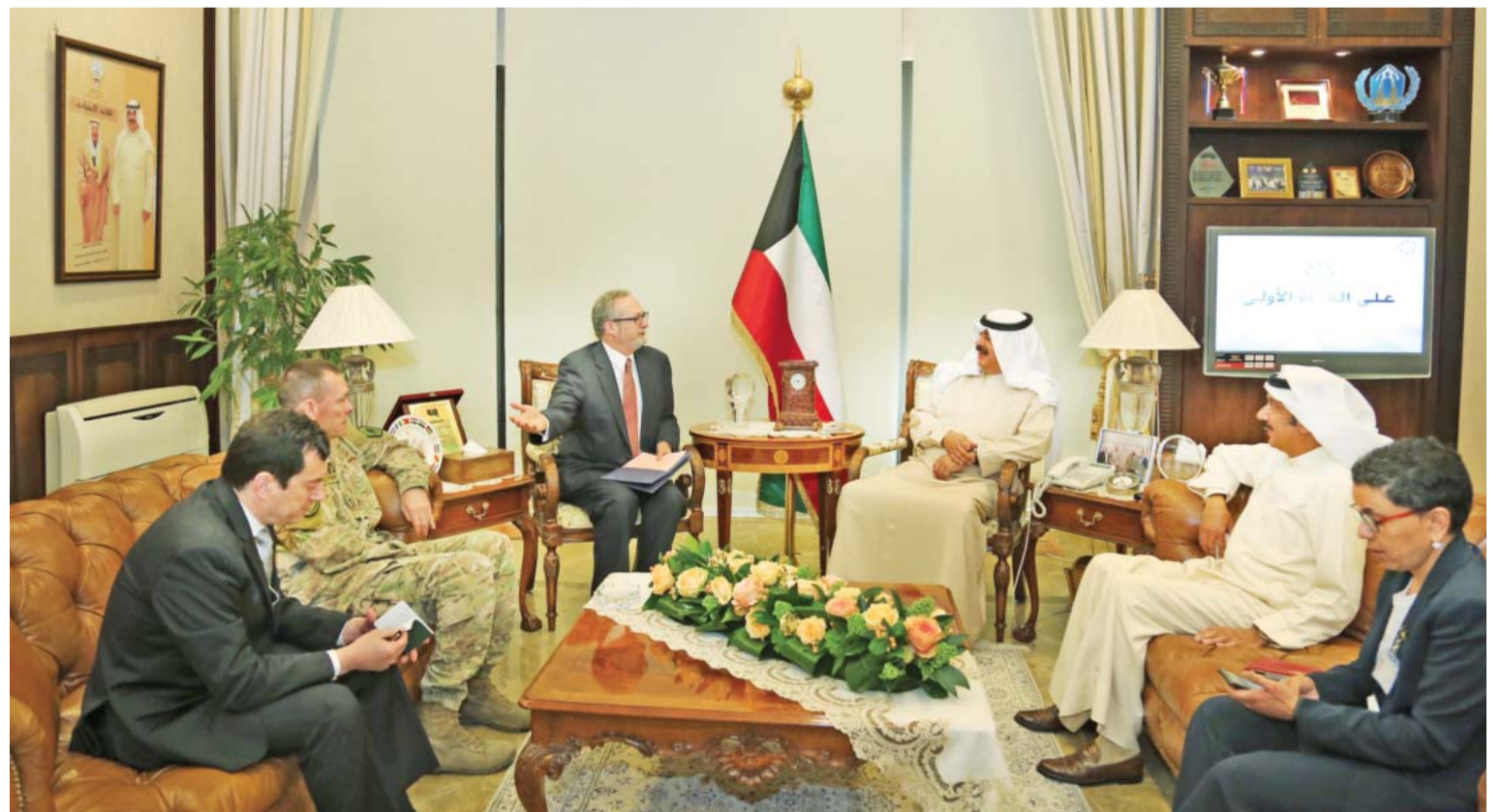
Minister stressed that the Gulf Country was keen on helping with this cause that was noble and worthy and merited attention especially for preserving cultural heritage for future generations.

He said he was "honored to represent His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah" at the conference, and voiced thanks to the organizers.

The Kuwaiti minister stressed the State of Kuwait's keenness on providing all kinds of support and help to all efforts aiming at protecting heritage. He also lauded the joint efforts of France and United Arab Emirates (UAE) to create an international alliance to protect threatened cultural heritage. — KUNA



PARIS: Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Acting Information Minister Sheikh Mohammad Mubarak Al-Sabah speaks during the conference. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah met Sunday with US Ambassador to Kuwait Lawrence Silverman, discussing bilateral relations, as well as latest regional and international developments. The meeting was also attended by Assistant Foreign Minister for Al-Jarallah's Office Affairs Ambassador Ayham Al-Omar and Assistant Foreign Minister for the Americas' Affairs Ambassador Reem Al-Khaled. — KUNA

COORDINATION TO SUPPLY MARKET IN CASE OF LIVESTOCK SHORTAGE

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry, Acting State Minister for Youth Affairs Khaled Al-Roudhan said that the commerce ministry coordinated with the Kuwait Livestock Trading and Transport



Khaled Al-Roudhan

Company to supply the local market with enough supplies of livestock in case any shortages were detected. The ministry's consumer protection department continues to monitor prices in order to prevent any fabricated increase in prices, he added.

The minister was speaking on the sidelines of the 2nd Corporate Governance in GCC States Conference. In his opening speech, he stressed the importance of protecting the institutions of state and private sectors from the negative impacts of slow economic growth through applying the modern standards of corporate governance. Protecting such institutions is also done through reviewing active economic legislations and issuing modern laws that are in line with the latest applied laws and regulations worldwide, Roudhan said.

Applying corporate governance in only one sector would not attain the desired goals and results due to its close connection to the other sector, the minister noted, affirming corporate governance's credibility in attaining economic efficiency, investment development, transparency and justice values, in addition to transforming Kuwait into a global commercial and financial hub in accordance to His Highness the Amir's vision.

Meanwhile, Roudhan indicated that the three-day conference is held under the auspices of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and will discuss a number of subjects related to economic reformations in GCC countries.

SOCIAL AID TO REMAIN INTACT: MINISTER SABEEH

KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs and Labor Hind Al-Sabeeh denied yesterday impending social aid cuts for those eligible for it, saying that such pecuniary support is only just for those entitled to it. Speaking to the press, Sabeeh, who is also Minister of State for Economic Affairs, said that the social aid is distributed to those who meet all the prerequisites for it. The minister added that the aid is merely "supplementary and not a paycheck as some people often deem it."

Moreover, she spoke of ongoing studies that aim to uncover the economic repercussions of social aid, noting that the government's primary concern is to provide jobs for the nation's youth. She also pointed



Hind Al-Sabeeh

out that a number of studies are being conducted over the beneficiaries of social aid and how dependent are certain social segments on that aid. — KUNA

ELECTRICITY MINISTRY IMPROVES PRODUCTION CAPACITY, UP 2000 MW



Mohammad Boushehri

KUWAIT: The Undersecretary of Kuwait's Ministry of Electricity and Water Mohammad Boushehri revealed yesterday that production capacity of the electrical network increased by 2000 MW due to two major projects, northern Al-Zour power station and Subbiya.

Boushehri said in an interview with Al-Anbaa daily that Al-Zour power station, which entered service with full production capacity in November of last year will contribute 1,500 megawatts, equivalent to 10 percent of the total energy in the electric grid.



Dr Mashaan Al-Otaibi

Meanwhile, Assistant Undersecretary of the Electricity and Water Ministry for Planning and Training Dr Mashaan Al-Otaibi said that a meeting before applying the new tariffs on power and water consumption took place with civil society organizations and non-profit organizations, and discussion focused on the gradual increase in prices.

The meeting also welcomed the decision on tariff unifications, especially since the ministry aims to rationalize consumption, Otaibi added. — KUNA

KIB VISITS AL-EHSSAN SCHOOL AS PART OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PROGRAM

KUWAIT: In line with the Bank's student-focused social responsibility program, a team from the Corporate Communications Unit at Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently organized a visit to Al-Ehssan School. The visit aimed to instill in students the values of savings and spread financial literacy within schools in Kuwait.

Within this context, Fahad Al-Sarhan, Team Leader of Corporate Communications at KIB, stated: "This visit is a great example of the Bank's significant role within the community and is one of the many visits KIB is planning throughout this year. We are very keen on engaging with the different

segments in the community, particularly with students.

For that reason, we consider these visits as opportunities to introduce students to savings skills from a young age, believing that they are the foundation on which we can build this country's future."

KIB has always been dedicated to supporting the education sector. Through its leading social responsibility program, the Bank supports cultural initiatives and student-organized activities that aim to nurture youth and further their knowledge. KIB believes students to be the key for the development of the community.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah chairs the Cabinet's meeting yesterday. — KUNA

CABINET INSTRUCTS ESTABLISHING NATIONAL CYBER-SECURITY CENTER

MINISTRY TO PROVIDE FUNDING FOR KHOR ABDULLAH DEVELOPMENT

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Cabinet has asked Public Authority for Communications and Information Technology to establish a national cyber-security center. This came during a customary weekly cabinet meeting held yesterday under chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. The center is primarily meant to address the risks and challenges of information security in the country, and to protect different agencies and services from relevant hazards.

The move reflects the government's keenness on promoting the information system under an environment that ensures the flow of information in a confidential and safe manner. The cabinet also asked the Ministry of Public Works to coordinate with the Ministry of Finance to provide necessary funding for developing naviga-

tion in Khor Abdullah watercourse in line with relevant legal regulations.

Meat stock

The Consumer Protection Authority was entrusted by the cabinet to carry out investigations into reported attempts to monopolize meat prices, and to take necessary measures to provide strategic meat stock at competitive prices. Also during the cabinet meeting, Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Khaled Al-Roudhan elaborated on measures to solve the problem of high rentals of shops at Souq Al-Mubarakiya.

Meanwhile, Roudan said that the Cabinet has approved a draft decree extending Kuwait Direct Promotion Authority (KDIPA) Director General Sheikh Dr Meshaal Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-

Sabah's term. At the onset of the meeting, First Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah briefed the ministers on the outcomes of the recent visit by the Maltese foreign minister to Kuwait, which focused on ways of promoting and developing bilateral ties.

Afterwards, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Anas Al-Saleh briefed the ministers on the outcomes of his recent tour of London, New York, Boston and Los Angeles in a step that aimed to attract international bond investors to Kuwait's planned subscription for public debt bonds.

Furthermore, the cabinet condemned recent "terrorist" attacks in Saudi Arabia's Al-Qatif and Paris, reiterating Kuwait's relentless and principled stance based on rejecting all forms and violence and terrorism.



KUWAIT 39TH HAPPIEST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Kuwait ranked 39th worldwide and fourth amongst Arab countries in the World Happiness Report 2017, which was released yesterday. According to the report, the United Arab Emirates came first amongst Arab countries and 21st worldwide. The list of Arab countries include Qatar (35th worldwide), Saudi Arabia (37), Bahrain (41), Algeria (53), Libya (68), Jordan (74), Lebanon (88), Somalia (93), Tunisia (102), Egypt (104), Iraq (117), Sudan (130), Yemen (146) and Syria (152). In the latest report released by the UN's Network for Sustainable Development, Norway has jumped from the fourth place in 2016 to the first place this year, followed by Denmark, which shows that Scandinavian countries are the happiest. Iceland, Switzerland, Finland, Holland, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and Sweden round up the top ten, while South Sudan, Liberia, Guinea, Togo, Rwanda, Tanzania, Burundi and Central African republic came last on the index.

Inactive auditing

Chairman of the parliament's budgets and final statements committee Adnan Abdul Samad said that the committee met yesterday and discussed Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development's budget for the new fiscal year 2017-2018, and its final statement for the fiscal year ending 2015-2016, in addition to the State Audit Bureau and auditors reports about them. Abdul Samad stressed that the fund's internal auditing department was still inactive even after hiring a company to develop it.

He added that the committee also stressed the significance of communicating with auditing bodies and the Civil Service Commissions (CSC) to reconsider the fund's organizing regulations concerning excluding some employees from the fund's payroll and appointing them with special contracts and higher incentives, health insur-

ance, rewards and financial allowances. The committee also noted that despite the fall in the fund's revenues and the fall of investments' value by KD 166 million, investment fees paid to portfolio managers exceeded the limit to reach KD 4.5 million. The committee also noted that despite recommendations made in 2011 to reassess the fund's offices abroad in order to increase their effectiveness and have more control over them, the fund had closed down its office in Lebanon, had not activated its office in Bahrain and continued to have consultant companies in the loan-receiving countries supervise loans and grants instead of having the fund do such tasks. The committee also stressed the importance of giving more chance to newly graduating Kuwaiti engineers to join the fund's training programs.

Huge number

Minister of State for Housing Affairs, Yasser Abul said that housing is a matter of social security and a major concern for all families in Kuwait. He added that the Public Authority for Housing Welfare managed to distribute 46,000 housing units in the past three years. "This is a huge number," he underlined, pointing out that the authority currently faces three major challenges; time, meeting schedules and technical problems related to executing mega projects according to schedule and specific quality standards.

Further, Abul said that the authority would soon offer five investment opportunities according to the public-private-partnership (PPP) model for the first time in housing projects. He also noted that units in South Abdulla Al-Mubarak area would be ready for distribution as planned by July.

In addition, Abul said that the authority had distributed 550,000 units in Metlaa city until last November. He also noted that work is in progress in several residential areas in Metlaa,

South Saad Al-Abdullah and South Sabah Al-Ahmad cities in addition to some future project such as Nawaf Al-Ahmed City (52,000 units), Al-Khairan City (35,000 units) and the Silk City (52,000 units).

Responding to a question whether the Kuwait Credit Bank could afford future residential projects' costs, Abul stressed that the bank has a budget of KD 3 billion and that it could resort to the state treasury if more was needed.

Technical committee

The Municipal Council's technical committee, headed by Fahad Al-Sane, is scheduled today to discuss a request made by the defense ministry to allocate a site to build a new brigade in Jahra. The committee's meeting agenda also includes requests made by the Ministry of Electricity and Water (MEW) to allocate the routes of overhead high voltage lines connected to Al-Shaqaya main plant. In addition, the committee will discuss the Ministry of Health's (MOH) request to allocate a temporary helicopter landing site near Farwaniya hospital.

Important projects

The Ministry of Public Works (MPW) is set to sign two contracts today for two important projects: the KD 184 million Nuwaiseeb Road project, and a KD 700,000 project to build social care homes in Jahra. Minister of Public Works Abdelrahman Al-Mutawa is set to personally sign the contracts, Undersecretary Awatif Al-Ghunaim said in a press statement. Meanwhile, official sources at MPW said that the ministry had prepared an initial budget of KD 500 million to build two projects supporting the new airport project currently being built with total cost of KD 1.3 billion. The sources explained that MPW hopes to offer the two projects for public bidding within three months and that it is currently working on qualification measures for contractors to design and build a planes' hanger and a parking lot.



KUWAIT: The National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) visited senior citizens at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor's nursing homes on the occasion of Mother's Day.

FORUM TO PROVIDE PLATFORM FOR OPPORTUNITIES, EXCHANGE OF IDEAS

GCC YOUTH TO CONTRIBUTE IN RE-MAPPING TOURISM IN 15 YEARS

KUWAIT: Organizers of the first Kuwait Youth and Tourism Forum seek to transform the event into a comprehensive platform for opportunities and enhancing relations between young entrepreneurs, as well as promoting tourism as a supporter for true development.

In this regard, Nabila Al-Anjeri, head of the organizing committee and General Manager of Leaders Group for Consultancy and Development, stressed that the forum would be held in collaboration between the information ministry's tourism sector and the Leaders Group, which serves as the representative of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in Kuwait. The event takes place on the 27th and 28th of March, 2017 under the patronage of Minister of Cabinet Affairs and Acting Minister of Information Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdulla Al-Sabah.

The forum will discuss the ways of activating tourism in Kuwait, Anjeri said. She also expected that the forum would attract considerable participation



Nabila Al-Anjeri

from state departments concerned with youth, tourism, development and planning since it also coincides with selecting Kuwait as the 'Youth Capital in 2017'. Anjeri added that the forum fits with the UN's new strategy to empower the youth in sustainable development for 2030.

Further, Anjeri highlighted the emergence of the 'millennial generation', otherwise known as 'first-time travelers' or 'new generation travelers'. The term refers

to people born at the beginning of the new century and are expected to join world travelers seeking new experiences, especially after the spread of social media. "The fifth Global Summit on City Tourism was recently held with participation of 400 experts from 40 different countries, and all of them focused on the significance of the 'millennial generation', specialized emerging markets, means to build authentic cultural experiences and enrolling local communities," she added. Furthermore, she noted that participants also stressed the significance of means used today to provide 270 million young travelers with access to good genuine touristic products as well as the capability to communicate electronically on a 24/7 basis.

Moreover, Anjeri urged Kuwaiti young entrepreneurs, companies and planners working in the fields of tourism, travel and hospitality to become fully aware of changes expected in local and GCC tourism maps, according to specialized studies and international organizations'

reports. "The reports say that GCC youth who are due to become adults over the next 15 years will contribute in re-mapping travel and tourism by using modern digital and technological methods, smartphones and social media networks to run and manage their travels and bookings," Anjeri explained, noting that young people's ideas would help create new projects and job opportunities for thousands of graduates.

"If the world's youth make up the largest segment of people working in travel, tourism and hospitality, young entrepreneurs and investors will be much closer to them in terms of understanding the need for creativity in tourism techniques and methods, namely those which are suitable for youth and their thinking patterns," Anjeri indicated. "This makes young entrepreneurs highly qualified to come up with new ideas on starting and managing successful small and medium touristic projects, only if they get proper spiritual, technical and financial support."



SIDR TREE: A COMMON FEATURE IN OLD KUWAITI NEIGHBORHOODS

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti traditional houses in the old days used to have a Sidr tree (its Scientific name: Ziziphus spina-christi) placed close to the house's yard or near the building. Their fruits, commonly known as 'Kinar', used to fall inside the house, where children and adults would pick them

up and enjoy eating them. Children would also use long sticks to the ripe fruits and pick them up from the ground, then wash and eat them. Sidr is associated with the Lote-trees mentioned in the Holy Quran. It is also common in the Jordan Valley and around Jerusalem. —KUNA



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In Brief

BAHRAINI KING LAUDS AMIR

MANAMA: King of Bahrain Hamad bin Issa Al-Khalifa has commended His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his support to bilateral ties, Gulf joint action, as well as to Arab and Islamic causes. Receiving Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, Kuwaiti Ambassador to the Kingdom Sheikh Azzam Al-Sabah on Sunday, the Monarch emphasized the momentousness of continuous coordination and consultation to boost bilateral ties. Sheikh Azzam handed King Hamad a letter from His Highness the Amir on bilateral ties.—KUNA



AMIR CONGRATULATES SHEIKHA AMTHAL

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of congratulation yesterday to Chairperson of the Kuwaiti Voluntary Work Center Sheikha Amthal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, on the occasion of her being honored with an honorary order prize award. Bahrain's Corporate Social Responsibility Network honored Sheikha Amthal during a recent ceremony in the Kingdom, christening her the top female social reformer for the year 2017. The honorary award recognized Sheikha Amthal for her unbridled commitment to women's empowerment. — KUNA



KRCS DISTRIBUTES 3,000 PARCELS

IRBIL: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) distributed yesterday 3,000 food parcels on disputed Iraqis from Mosul and Hamam Al-Alil refugee camps in southern Mosul. KRCS offered food parcels to displaced Iraqis in Mosul and to Hamam Al-Alil refugee camp in southern Mosul in cooperation with local humanitarian organizations, Director of KRCS's Disasters and Emergency Department Yousef Al-Meraj said. The food aid covered newly displaced Iraqis from the right side of Mosul due to the military operations in their area. — KUNA



Photo

of the day



KUWAIT: A general view of a cloudy day in Kuwait City. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Othman Tawfiqi and Adwan Al-Adwani pose with guests during the food festival.

'TASTE OF Q8' SPONSORSHIP BIG SUCCESS FOR ABK

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) successfully concluded the sponsorship of the 'Taste of Q8' food festival for the third consecutive year, which was held at the Boulevard Salmiya Crescent from the 16th to the 18th of March, 2017. ABK gave away three ABK Emirates Visa Gold Prepaid Travel cards worth KD 100

each, during a raffle draw that was held at the event. The three-day food festival celebrated Kuwait's great culinary diversity and offered visitors the opportunity to experience many different cuisines from local restaurants, bakers and gourmet grocers, and enjoy live cooking demonstrations presented by renowned celebrity

chefs. The event also featured live entertainment and activities for kids. The bank was pleased to take part in this exciting event that aims to keep Kuwait's culture alive and support local talents, while bringing together the Kuwaiti community in the midst of an upbeat and positive ambiance.

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JAZEERA AIRWAYS HONORS MOTHERS ON THEIR SPECIAL DAY

KUWAIT: Jazeera Airways, the first private airline in Kuwait and the Middle East, welcomes all mothers traveling with Jazeera Airways to a luxurious travel experience by offering complimentary access to the Jazeera Lounge, as a token of love and appreciation. Today, all mothers can enjoy the

privileges and comfort that Jazeera Lounge offers before they embark on their respective journeys. Situated near the Jazeera gates at the Kuwait International Airport, the Jazeera Lounge provides a relaxing experience thanks to its world-class amenities and freshly prepared delicious bites and

drinks. Commenting on Jazeera Airways' special treat designed exclusively for all mothers, Dr Mohamed Barakat, VP Marketing and Product said: "Jazeera Airways is delighted to honor all mothers on their special day. As a proud Kuwaiti airline, we deeply cherish the role of mothers in our society and the extraordinary role they have in building healthy families." He continued: "This year's celebration of Mother's Day is a symbolic gesture to express our warm thanks and deepest gratitude to all mothers." Jazeera Airways' exclusive treat on Mothers' Day falls under the airline's social corporate responsibility to support those who positively contribute to society. Jazeera Airways takes this opportunity to extend their gratitude and outmost appreciation to all mothers and encourages those who wish to travel on March 21st today to avail this special opportunity.



Crime

Report

DRUGGED DRIVER CAUGHT WITH FIREARM

KUWAIT: Police arrested a man who was driving under the influence of drugs while holding a loaded AK-47 rifle, according to police. Officers had rushed to a location where several people reported in emergency calls that a man was driving while waving a mechanical weapon from his vehicle's window. Police were able to subdue the man and place him under arrest. He was taken to the police station to be identified because he was too inebriated to speak cohesively with officers. He was later transferred to Farwaniya Hospital for a medical check. The man faces charges of drug abuse, possession of an unlicensed firearm, and reckless driving.

Fugitive nabbed

In a similar case, Jahra police arrested a drugs addict after he showed resistance. They discovered that he is wanted to by authorities to serve six years in jail over a previous case. Police had ordered the man to pull his vehicle over because it had illegally tinted windows. They soon discovered that he was under the influence of drugs, so they placed him under arrest and set him to the concerned authorities.

Suspected 'extremist'

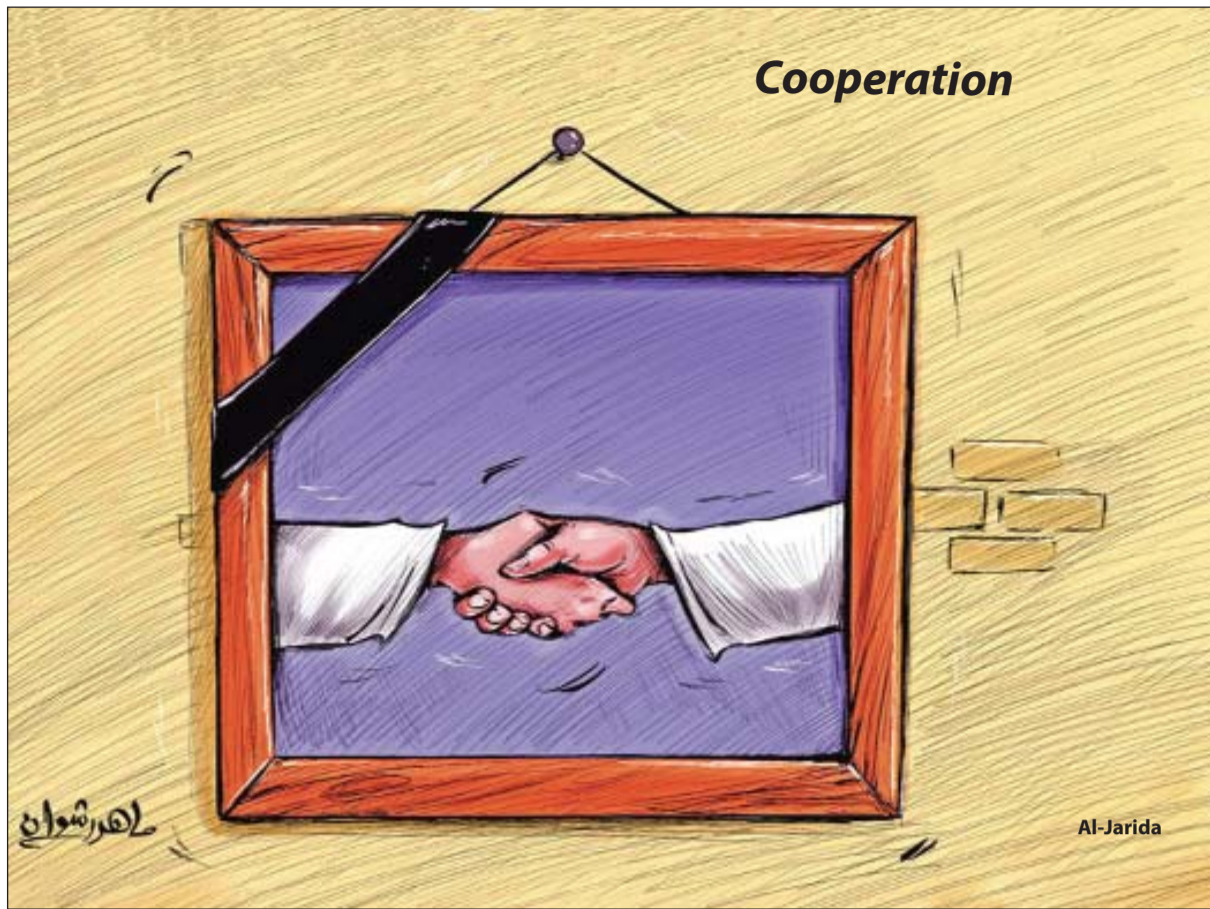
Investigations are ongoing in a case involving a man who claims that his son is an extremist, while the young man says that his father is mentally ill. Police had headed to a house in Taima after receiving an emergency call about a fight and possible arms possession. A bedoon man answered the door, and told police that he suspects that his son has joined Daesh. He claimed that the young man possessed a weapon, and often met with people he never seen before in the area. Police asked to see the young man, who came out and told police that his father has a mental disorder and often acts strangely when he is off medication. Preliminary investigations revealed that the father had done the same to his son before. The case is pending a mental evaluation test for the father.

Search for runaway thieves

Jahra prosecutor ordered an investigation to identify an arrest of four people who robbed a citizen and left behind a vehicle that was likely stolen. A Kuwaiti man had told Naeem police that he was approached while being at a co-op society's parking lot by four men, who robbed KD 160 from him at knife-point. The four ran away on foot afterwards, leaving behind a luxury vehicle that they were driving. Separately, investigations are ongoing to identify and arrest a thief who stole a purse containing two smartphones, a civil ID and credit cards from a car he broke into. The vehicle's owner told police that she came out of a beauty salon to discover that her car's window was smashed. She inspected the vehicle and found out that her purse which she had left inside was missing. Forensics personnel were sent to take fingerprints from the vehicle.

Collapse

A man was rushed to Farwaniya Hospital after he collapsed inside his Sulaibiya house following a fight he had in Salmiya. The man arrived unconscious at the hospital, and told police after regaining consciousness that unknown persons beat him up inside a Salmiya cafe. A case was filed for investigations. — *Translated from the Arabic press*



Al-Jarida

THE ECONOMIC REFORM

By Khalid Al-Tarrah

Kuwait News Agency recently carried an indirect denial by Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Anas Al-Saleh for information mentioned in my column published on March 5, 2017 and titled "False Document". The minister asserted that the economic reform document (the government's blueprint to achieve economic reform) was based on correct studies and factual numbers. From a professional standpoint, the minister was supposed to send his denial to Al-Qabas Newspaper. As for me personally, I would like to assert that I do not spread 'rumors' as the minister hinted in his statement, which seems to have been prepared hastily by the way. Not to mention that my writings are subject to professional and legal scrutiny followed by Al-Qabas.

Yet, the minister selected a method through which he can impose his statement, in order to protect himself from professional comments. This is an unknown practice that contradicts with the simplest of media rules, that is if the government was actually seeking to instill credibility in its vision to begin with!

It may be a political reason that made the minister ignore the source of the news and its writer, and instead refer to it as 'social media rumors'. The numbers mentioned in my column were quoted from an Al-Seyassa newspaper article published on February 7, 2017, quoting sources in the economic committee in the parliament. Furthermore, several MPs were quoted in the report; which also included a comment saying "the new development came when the government admitted through Al-Saleh that the documents was not based on factual studies and numbers, which opened MPs' appetite to talk about canceling the document."

I am not concerned with discussing the news item itself. I am concerned with its content, as refuting the news is the responsibility of the finance minister and the team of experts. The minister did not confirm or deny the news when it was first published, and I waited for him to release a statement. However, my column caught his attention to the news, albeit one month late, and he released a comment on the day the cabinet met after the response that my column good and positive feedback from many economic experts and those interested in the economic affairs. To explain further, the finance minister never made a statement about the reform document for over a year, despite many comments made by experts, including former deputy premier, finance minister and central bank governor Sheikh Salem Al-Abdelaziz Al-Sabah who said in an article published by Al-Rai on July 2017 that "the document lacked many issues."

Reform is a national march with a continuous dynamic nature that needs a roadmap, according to Sheikh Salem. I do not think that a statement like this is easy to comprehend for those who are not concerned with the field.

The minister's document is made of empty data and indicators, not solutions and deep treatment of economic, financial and social defects, that treat the wounds of yesterday and today! Marketing the document requires political and economic proficiency that creates real partnership with the people based on credibility and professionalism, besides the necessary to put the economic aspect ahead of financial and currency policy, as reform is indivisible. — *Translated by Kuwait Times from*

MOTHERS' GREAT ADVANTAGE

Al-Qabas

By Nafeeah Al-Zuwayed

The true meaning of parenthood is personified when two pigeons are seen alternating care for the eggs, and feeding their little ones until they are able to fly. I recently noticed two birds who chose thin metal wires that cannot be bent to build their nest. They chose soft wooden twigs to build the nest and made it in a round shape

Two days later, the female pigeon laid the eggs. When strong winds came around, the pigeon did not leave its nest, and that in order to protect its young. Then when the winds calmed down, the mother left briefly before returning while carrying food in its beak to feed them.

In order to teach her young how to fly though they are still captive to their nest, the mother kept her beak at a distance to force the young to reach for the food while they flap their wings. So it was a lesson for feeding and flying at the same time. That is true motherhood that never ends for all Almighty Allah's creation.

Sometimes the mother gives her young some self-confidence, so she flies and leaves them for minutes, in order for them to develop the courage to get out of the nest. They take a few steps outside, then return back to the nest scared.

The mother returns, so the young hide under her

A mother is a never-ending river of endless passion and giving for her young

wings to receive security and food. They stay that way for few weeks until they grow old enough to become self-dependent and fly into the empty space, completing the cycle of life by building their own nests.

Motherhood is found in all of the creations of Allah Almighty. A mother is a never-ending river of endless passion and giving for her young, and to protect them until the very last breath of her life. That is the great advantage Allah Almighty gave to every mother.

— Translated by Kuwait Times



KUWAIT: GCC traffic officials pose outside Kuwait Motoring Company's building. — Photos by Joseph Shagra



GCC TRAFFIC OFFICIALS VISIT KUWAIT MOTORING COMPANY AS PART OF THE 33RD EDITION OF THE GULF TRAFFIC WEEK

KUWAIT: As part of their long-lasting commitment to upholding their social responsibility values, Kuwait Motoring Company (KMC), the premier driving school in Kuwait, has collaborated once more with the Ministry of Interior (MOI) to take part in the 33rd edition of the Gulf Traffic Week. KMC annually participates and supports this regional initiative to raise awareness on traffic safety and responsible driving. This year, KMC hosted a tour around its premises for senior officials in MOI's General Traffic Authority, visiting Gulf delegations as well as local media.

Public and Government Relations Manager, Saqr Al-Rashoud, provided a general overview of the services provided by KMC, which adheres to highest of international standards of motoring, stating: "KMC aims to provide road safety education and driving training for all vehicle categories with highest quality standards. It also strives to improve motorists' traffic safety awareness, thus reducing traffic accidents and traffic related injuries. Traffic

safety is an important factor in achieving development in any country, and we commend the role of policemen in minimizing traffic congestions and achieving the highest levels of traffic security."

The dignitaries had the chance to witness the modern and state-of-the-art training facilities at KMC, including its theoretical education classes, as well as the vast training grounds and simulators for practical training on all sorts of vehicles. Most importantly, they managed to observe KMC's in-house MOI Traffic Department, established on premises to process police test appointments and issuing driving licenses.

During the tour, Rashoud also demonstrated the special services that Pro-Drive Academy for Motorsports provides, including all means of safe and professional training on car drifting, a sports training which takes place in a fully utilized and controlled educational facility. He also mentioned that ProDrive is the first academy in Kuwait to provide licensed and

professional training for drifting enthusiasts under the supervision of skilled trainers and according to the highest international standards, with a pre-practicing presentation on safety and security regulations and conditions.

In order to further attend to their clients' needs, KMC is now providing safe and professional training on driving Harley Davidson motorcycles for the first time in Kuwait. "Today KMC is a world-class driving training institution that incorporates modern theoretical classes and advanced practical lessons on vast training grounds, with 3 branches located across the state Kuwait - in Shuwaikh, Farwaniya and Sabahiya. KMC's Theoretical training covers traffic laws, driving behavior, traffic signs, car mechanics and first aid, while it also offers pre-license training on light and heavy vehicle (truck and buses), construction vehicles and manual car driving. Sports utility vehicle (SUV) driving and driving for special needs is also part of KMC's training services" added Rashoud.



KMC strives to reduce traffic accidents and related injuries through the provision of high quality driver training which encourages clients to adopt attitudes and behaviors focused on safety and hazard awareness. At the end of the visit, Traffic Department

officials were highly impressed by the services that KMC uniquely provides. They also expressed their gratitude and emphasized on the importance of continuing such initiatives and programs to raise awareness of traffic safety to reduce accidents and traffic fatalities.





Counting Americans: Mideast criteria on census is sensitive



WASHINGTON: FBI Director James Comey (L) and National Security Agency Director Mike Rogers testify before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence on Russian actions during the 2016 election campaign in the Longworth House Office Building. — AFP

FBI CONFIRMS RUSSIA LINKS PROBE

DENIES TRUMP'S CLAIM OF BEING WIRETAPPED UNDER OBAMA

WASHINGTON: FBI Director James Comey confirmed for the first time yesterday that the agency is investigating Russian interference in last year's presidential election and notably Moscow's possible collusion with President Donald Trump's campaign. He also rejected Trump's claim that predecessor Barack Obama wiretapped his Trump Tower in New York, saying both the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Justice Department had no evidence to support such allegations.

The high-stakes testimony in the House Intelligence Committee—the first public hearing into both controversies—came as Trump sought to steer the news focus by calling the Russia issue, which has been a cloud over his victory, “fake news.” His angry tweets added to the huge political pressure from both parties on Comey and Admiral Mike Rogers, the director of the National Security Agency. But the FBI director opened the hearing with a bombshell.

The bombshell

The FBI “is investigating the Russian gov-

ernment's efforts to interfere in the 2016 presidential election,” Comey told lawmakers in his opening statement. “And that includes investigating the nature of any links between individuals associated with the Trump campaign and the Russian government and whether there was any coordination between the campaign and Russia's efforts,” he said.

He dated that probe back to July 2016, when the government became aware that Democratic party computers and communications had been broken into by Russia-linked hackers. Comey's disclosure confirmed long-standing reports that the FBI was probing the explosive charges that Trump's stunning election victory over Hillary Clinton last November came on the back of Russian meddling.

US intelligence chiefs said in January they were convinced that Russian President Vladimir Putin was behind that effort. But they had not commented on whether they were examining links between members of Trump's campaign and Russian officials. Since then, the question of whether Trump and company

were or are somehow in cahoots with Russia has dominated the national conversation. Comey held back yesterday from providing any further details on Putin's alleged involvement. Ahead of the hearing, Trump tweeted that former intelligence chief “James Clapper and others stated that there is no evidence Potus colluded with Russia.” “This story is FAKE NEWS and everyone knows it!”

Coincidence?

Republican committee chair Devin Nunes opened the hearing by saying the panel had “seen no evidence to date that officials from any campaign conspired with Russian agents.” But Adam Schiff, the Democratic vice chair of the committee, detailed a list of alleged links and communications between the Trump team and Russia. “Is it possible that all of these events and reports are completely unrelated, and nothing more than an entirely unhappy coincidence? Yes, it is possible,” he said. “But it is also possible, maybe more than possible, that they are not coincidental, not disconnect-

ed and not unrelated, and that the Russians used the same techniques to corrupt US persons that they have employed in Europe and elsewhere.” Citing the need for secrecy and to protect investigations, Comey repeatedly declined to comment on those allegations. Moscow meanwhile has repeatedly rejected the accusation.

'No information' to support wiretap

When the hearing turned to Trump's explosive claims that Obama had wiretapped his Manhattan base of operations, Comey was categorical in his denial. “With respect to the president's tweets about alleged wiretapping directed at him by the prior administration, I have no information that supports those tweets,” Comey told a public hearing by the House Intelligence Committee.

“The Department of Justice has asked me to share with you that the answer is the same for the Department of Justice and all its components. The department has no information that supports those tweets.” It was the first time

Comey or the department commented publicly on the claim that Trump continued to repeat throughout last week, without offering any evidence. Trump on March 4 tweeted that Obama had “tapped” his phone—a charge that has consumed political debate in the US capital. The White House went so far last week as to suggest Britain's GCHQ signals intelligence agency cooperated with Obama in the alleged surveillance. The charge riled the British government and GCHQ, a close ally of US spy agencies, sharply rejected it as “utterly ridiculous.”

Rogers also rejected the charge, saying it was expressly against the “Five Eyes” agreement between the spy agencies of the US and its key allies. “I have seen nothing on the NSA side that we engaged in any such activity nor that anyone ever asked us to engage in such activity,” he told lawmakers. Several congressional panels have launched investigations into Russia's alleged election interference, including the House and Senate intelligence committees and the House and Senate judiciary committees. —AFP

BRITAIN TO LAUNCH BREXIT PROCESS ON MARCH 29

LONDON: Britain said yesterday it will begin leaving the European Union on March 29, setting an historic and uncharted course to become the first country to withdraw from the bloc by March 2019. Nine months after the stunning referendum vote for Brexit, Prime Minister Theresa May's government will finally trigger Article 50 of the EU's Lisbon Treaty next week, starting a two-year exit process.

“We are on the threshold of the most important negotiation for this country for a generation,” said Brexit minister David Davis. The European Commission said immediately that it was ready to begin negotiations, although a source in Brussels said it would take “four to six weeks” to arrange a summit to agree a common EU position. Britain is one of the oldest and largest members of the 28-nation bloc, and its departure has raised fears for the EU's future as eurosceptic movements gain support across the continent.

London has repeatedly said it wants to maintain good relations with its European allies, but major battles await, in particular over budget contributions, immigration and future trade ties. Britain has said it wants to agree its divorce and a new relationship with Europe within the two years. The deal would have to be agreed by all the EU's national and some regional parliaments. May's Downing Street office repeated yesterday that a deal is possible, although lawmakers have warned her government to prepare for failure—and for Britain to crash out of the EU with no agreement in place.

Special EU summit

The prime minister has long said she would start the Article 50 process by the end of this month. Britain's ambassador to the EU, Tim Barrow, yesterday morning informed the office of EU President Donald Tusk that it would do so on March 29, her spokesman told reporters. “We wish the talks to begin promptly, but we fully respect that the 27 (other EU nations) will want to agree their position in advance,” the spokesman said. The notification of Article 50 will take the form of a letter to Tusk, followed by a statement by May to MPs in the House of Commons.

Tusk has said he would issue draft guidelines for the negotiations within 48 hours, although these will need to be approved by EU leaders. A special summit had been penciled in for April 6 but Britain's timetable means this has now been pushed back to late April or early May, a European source told AFP on condition of anonymity. “We expect to need approximately four to six weeks to prepare and consult with the EU 27 member states,” the source said.

Britain's path will be set just days after the EU celebrates the 60th anniversary of its founding Treaty of Rome with a special summit on March 25, which May will not be attending. European Commission chief negotiator Michel Barnier will spearhead

the talks with London. “We are ready to begin negotiations,” Margaritis Schinas, the spokesman for European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker, told a briefing. The British government says the Brexit process is irreversible once Article 50 is triggered, although experts have said there is no legal ban on member states changing their minds before they have actually left the EU.

'New positive partnership'

May's preparations for Brexit were wrong-footed last week when Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announced plans to hold a new independence referendum in order to keep EU ties. The prime minister is expected to visit Scotland before triggering Article 50, as part of a tour of Britain that

began yesterday in Wales and will also take in Northern Ireland.

“The government is clear in its aims: a deal that works for every nation and region of the UK and indeed for all of Europe—a new, positive partnership between the UK and our friends and allies in the European Union,” Davis said. May's decision to withdraw Britain from Europe's single market has also provoked concern in Northern Ireland, by raising the prospect of the return of customs posts with EU member Ireland to the south. Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to stay in the EU in the June 23 referendum, while England and Wales voted to leave, resulting in a UK-wide vote of 52 percent for Brexit, and 48 percent against. —AFP



LONDON: A man balances as he walks along a wall above the River Thames backdropped by the Houses of Parliament and Elizabeth Tower containing the bell known as “Big Ben”. — AP

INDONESIA WILL CONTINUE TO SEND MAIDS ABROAD

JAKARTA: Indonesia said yesterday it would continue to send domestic helpers overseas, in an about-turn welcomed by campaigners who said it would help prevent women falling prey to human trafficking. Thousands of Indonesian women travel to places like Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and Malaysia every year to become maids, attracted by promises of higher salaries despite reports of widespread abuses and near slave-like living conditions.

Jakarta had previously said it would stop sending maids overseas from this year, on the grounds of protecting the women, sparking concerns it would push more poor Indonesians desperate for jobs into illegal migration. However a senior official at the Manpower Ministry told the Thomson Reuters Foundation that Jakarta would not go ahead with the ban but it has been in talks with countries to ensure Indonesian maids are treated in a “humane” way.

“We are not stopping Indonesians going overseas to become domestic workers but we want better protection for them,” said Soes Hindharno, director for the protection and placement of Indonesian migrant workers abroad. He said this includes preventing what he called “multi-tasking work” by Indonesian maids to reduce exploitation. “If they are housekeepers, they are housekeepers - they clean, cook and iron. If they are babysitters, they are babysitters - you can't ask a babysitter to bathe your dog.”

Currently, Indonesian women who work as maids abroad are required to stay at the home of their employer, handling tasks from cleaning to looking after children or the elderly - a rule activists say making them vulnerable to abuse. Migrant activists welcomed the decision, but said more needed to be done to combat human trafficking including ensuring women aware of their rights when leaving for work overseas. “It is a basic right to go abroad to work. If the government stops this, we will only see more human trafficking cases,” said Mulyadi, a co-founder of rights group Migrant Care, who like many Indonesian goes by one name.

Indonesia since 2015 has banned women from going to 21 Middle Eastern countries following a series of abuse cases but high-demand for maids has encouraged traffickers to find ways around the curbs. Hindharno said the Middle East ban would stay in place. Domestic helpers make up more than a third of the six million Indonesian working abroad. — Reuters

ROME MEET HOPES TO CURB MIGRANT FLOW FROM LIBYA

ROME: Interior ministers from the central Mediterranean were meeting in Rome yesterday to ramp up efforts to curb migration from Libya amid a sharp rise in the number of people attempting the perilous crossing to Europe. One year after a controversial deal with Turkey to stop migrants setting out across the Aegean Sea for Greece, the EU is trying to set up a similar accord with conflict-hit Libya,

despite fierce opposition from human rights campaigners.

Over 3,300 people were rescued from unseaworthy vessels off the North African country over the weekend, bringing the number of arrivals in Italy to nearly 20,000 so far in 2017 — a significant increase on previous years. Interior ministers from Algeria, Austria, Germany, Italy, Libya, Malta, Slovenia, Switzerland and Tunisia were taking part in the meet-

ing, along with the European Commissioner for Migration, Dimitris Avramopoulos. Italy's Interior Minister Marco Minniti said the meeting would focus on "policies of development, social intervention, border control and repatriation" and that he hoped it would lead to "an increasingly shared management of migratory flows". Libya's UN-backed unity government has requested 800 million euros (\$860 million) worth of equipment

to help patrol its coast and territorial waters, including radars, boats, helicopters and all-terrain vehicles, according to Italy's Corriere della Sera daily.

There is also talk of a Libya-based operational centre to coordinate rescues in international waters off the North African coast, relieving the burden on Rome, which has been forced to monitor and intervene well beyond its established maritime surveillance zone. Experts say

some of the equipment requested by Libya would fall foul of a UN embargo on arms imports into the country.

Critics also warn against planned repatriations of asylum seekers to a country where allegations of torture, rape and murder are rife. Around 20 migrants were killed by traffickers earlier this month on a beach in Libya after refusing to get onto a rickety boat for Europe because of bad weather at sea. — AFP



JOBAR: An opposition fighter from the Fatah Al-Rahman brigade fires a heavy machine gun in Jobar, a rebel-held district on the eastern outskirts of the Syrian capital Damascus. — AFP

STRIKES POUND EAST DAMASCUS AFTER SURPRISE REBEL ASSAULT

FIERCE BOMBING CAMPAIGN DRIVES REBELS BACK

DAMASCUS: Syrian government forces clashed with rebels and hammered opposition-held areas of east Damascus yesterday after pushing back a surprise assault in the capital. Rebels and allied jihadists, led by former Al-Qaeda affiliate Fateh Al-Sham Front, launched an attack early Sunday on government positions in east Damascus, initially scoring gains. But forces loyal to President Bashar Al-Assad drove them back by nightfall and began a fierce bombing campaign yesterday morning, a monitor said.

"There have been intense air strikes since dawn on opposition-held positions in Jobar from which the offensive was launched," said Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. He could not specify whether the raids were carried out by Syrian or allied Russian warplanes. Control of the district—which has been a battleground for more than two years and is the closest rebel position to the heart of Damascus—is divided between rebels and allied jihadists on one side, and government forces on the other.

Yesterday, regime forces were locked in fighting with rebel groups in an industrial zone between Jobar and Qabun, a besieged, opposition-held district to the north. "In their assault yesterday, rebels were able to open a road for several hours between Qabun and Jobar, but the area is now a front line and they can no longer cross between the two," Abdel Rahman said. A Syrian military source told AFP that the army had recaptured "most of the positions where rebels advanced yesterday (Sunday)". "The army

foiled the armed groups' plan to link the Jobar district with Qabun," the source said, adding that "military operations in the area are ongoing."

Rebels hit Russian embassy

The rebel assault on Sunday marked their most important incursion inside the capital in several years. After seizing several buildings in Jobar, opposition fighters advanced briefly into the neighboring Abbasid Square area—the first time in two years the opposition had broken into that district. Activity in Abbasid Square was returning to normal levels on Monday, AFP's correspondents said, as residents stood on nearby balconies surveying the damage from the latest clashes.

Inside the Abbasid Square bus station yesterday, which rebels managed to overrun for few hours the previous day, several soldiers could be seen curled up under a blanket, taking a mid-morning nap after hours of heavy fighting. Planes could still be heard above the city but many of the roads that had been sealed off by army troops the previous day were reopened.

The clashes killed at least 26 members of regime forces and 21 rebels and jihadists, Abdel Rahman said. He did not have an immediate toll for Monday morning's air strikes. State news agency SANA said Syrian government troops were targeting rebel bases around Jobar yesterday. "The military operations north of Jobar targeted the areas from which the terrorists set out, and a large number of them were killed," it said. The agency reported that opposition fighters on Sunday bombarded the Russian embassy com-

pound in the capital's Mazraa neighborhood but that there were no casualties.

New peace talks due

The Islamist Faylaq Al-Rahman rebel group and the Fateh Al-Sham Front—known as Al-Nusra Front before it renounced its ties to Al-Qaeda—have a presence in Jobar. Syria's conflict erupted in March 2011 with protests against Assad's rule but has evolved over the years into a complex civil war. More than 320,000 people have been killed and millions more have been displaced by the conflict.

Repeated peace talks over the years have failed to bring about a political solution to the conflict. Another round of negotiations is due to begin in Geneva on Thursday. In an interview with Syrian state television late Sunday, chief government negotiator Bashar Al-Jaafari accused rebels of trying to squeeze regime troops ahead of the talks. "The latest terrorist attacks in Damascus... are an attempt to apply political pressure on the Syrian government before it heads to Geneva," Jaafari said.

In recent months, the regime has sought to secure territory around the capital with renewed offensives on besieged rebel towns along with local "reconciliation" deals. The war saw a turning point when Russia intervened in September 2015 in support of the regime, allowing pro-government forces to regain significant territory they had lost to the rebels. The retaking of all of second city Aleppo late last year was a major blow to the opposition. — AFP

IS FORCE YOUNG MEN TO FIGHT IN FOR MOSUL SAY REFUGEES

MOSUL: Islamic State militants are forcing young men in western Mosul to fight for them in defense of the remaining pockets of their former stronghold against an Iraqi government assault, fleeing residents and Iraqi officers said yesterday. The forced recruitment is a sign that the hardline militants are growing more desperate as the battle for what was once the de facto capital of their self-proclaimed Islamic caliphate enters its sixth month.

Elite Federal Police and Rapid Response units yesterday resumed their cautious advance on the Al-Nuri Mosque in western Mosul's Old City. But thousands of people took advantage of the fog and rain in the early morning to flee Islamic State-controlled areas and reach the safety of government lines. The militants were using residents as human shields, hiding in houses and forcing young men to fight, several refugees said.

Ali, a former government worker, said he had hidden his sons in a basement when Islamic State fighters came looking for recruits. "It feels like the siege is ending. All they are doing now is defending," he told Reuters. "I hid my sons in the basement and told them if you want my sons you will have to kill me." Yassin, a butcher who also escaped from the west side, said Islamic State held less ground than before. "They would come to my butcher shop looking for people so people stayed away. People even stopped going to the mosque because sometimes they would come to take people from there to join the fighting," he said.

Residents who had left said Iraqi, Syrian and other foreign militants remaining in the area tried to make them stay. "A French militant beat me and threatened me to force me to stay," said one woman who gave her name as Um Tahseen. A Federal Police intelligence officer, Captain Ali al-Kinani, said the militants wanted to fill up their ranks as they had suffered heavy casualties.

Some fighters were wearing civilian clothes under their uniforms and would switch outfits to mix in with fleeing civilians, he said. "We arrested dozens who said that they were forced by Daesh to carry

arms or take a bullet in the head if they refused," Kinani said, using an Arab acronym for Islamic State. "Many families that fled the fight asked our troops to help their sons. Some young men hiding inside their houses are still waiting for our forces to secure their neighbourhoods and rescue them."

Under pressure

If the militants' behavior indicates that Islamic State is steadily being worn down, the battle for Mosul is still expected to last several more weeks. The government offensive was launched in October with support from US artillery, air strikes and advisers and the eastern side of the city on the Tigris river was secured in December.

The campaign for the western side, now in its second month, is harder as it is more densely populated, the streets are narrower and the houses closely packed together. Attention has focused on the Old City and the Al-Nuri Mosque, from where Islamic State leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi proclaimed the caliphate after his forces had seized swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria in 2014.

Baghdadi and other IS leaders have fled Mosul, whereabouts unknown, but the militants still hold several other districts of western Mosul beyond the Old City and are defending them with sniper and mortar fire and suicide car bombs. US officials estimate that about 2,000 IS fighters remain there. At the same time, IS forces in the Syrian city of Raqqa are under attack in a parallel conflict.

On Sunday, a US-led coalition air strike on an IS command centre in western Mosul killed six foreign militant commanders, including a Russian, Abdul Kareem Al-Rusi, who headed the Tareq Bin Ziyad Brigade. The number of displaced people from both sides of Mosul since the start of the offensive has reached 355,000, Iraq's immigration minister said on Monday. Some 181,000 had poured out of western Mosul since the start of the operations to retake that side a month ago, Minister Jassim Mohammed said. The United Nations refugee agency is opening new camps to handle the exodus as the present ones are overflowing. — Reuters



MOSUL: Iraqis, who were displaced from Mosul due to the ongoing fighting between Iraqi forces and Islamic State (IS) group jihadists, return to their city on March 17, 2017. — AFP

NETANYAHU SEEKING TO BOOST COMMERCIAL TIES WITH CHINA

BEIJING: Israel wants to boost cooperation with China in technology, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told China's premier Monday, as he led a large business delegation on a visit to Beijing to promote commercial ties with the Asian giant. Netanyahu said in opening remarks at a meeting with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang that Israel and China could explore "many ways of technological cooperation."

Earlier yesterday, Netanyahu told a meeting of more than 600 Israeli and Chinese businesspeople that Israel is well-positioned to help China upgrade its products, services and utilities with better technology. "I think that there is an extraordinary capacity for China to assume its rightful place, as it's doing, on the world stage," Netanyahu said.

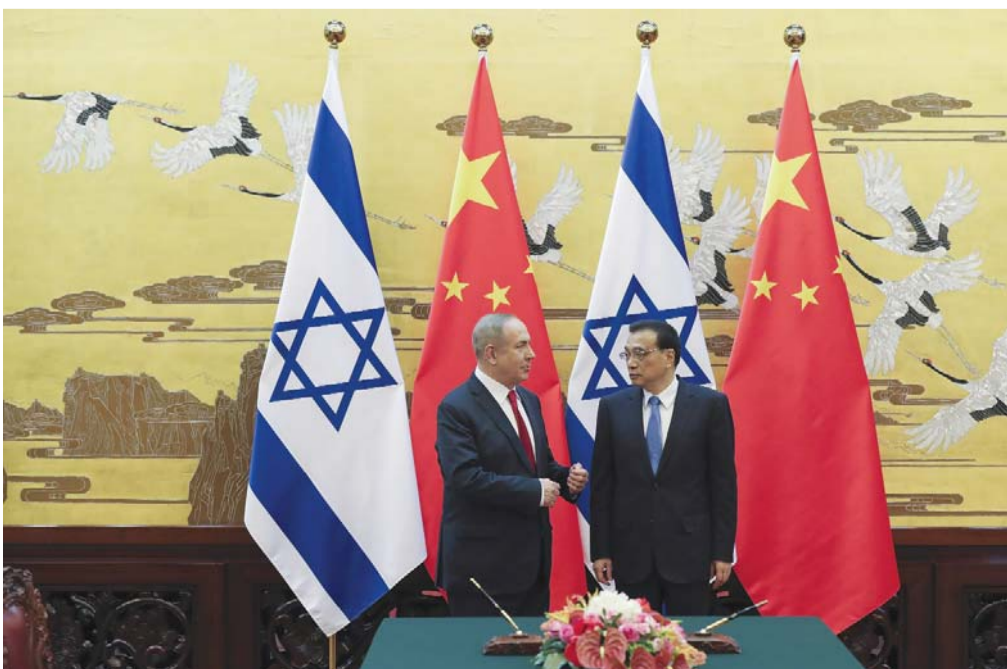
"We are your perfect junior partner for that

effort," he said, adding that the governments would sign a series of agreements. "I believe this is a marriage made in heaven." Netanyahu also met with the heads of large Chinese corporations including the conglomerate Dalian Wanda Group, e-commerce giant Alibaba Group, computer maker Lenovo Group and Baidu Inc, an internet search company.

"I told them that in today's world there are several concentrations of technology, not many; the US, Israel, and Israel is open for business with China," Netanyahu was quoted as saying in a government statement. During his visit, Netanyahu also is to meet Chinese President Xi Jinping, who will host an official banquet. Netanyahu said the countries would discuss a free trade agreement.

Netanyahu also told Li that he looked forward to discussing the region's security situation with China. "There is a great deal of convulsion in the world, including in our part of the world and I would like to have the opportunity to exchange views with you and see how we can cooperate together" for stability and peace, he said.

Along with playing a more active diplomatic role in the Middle East, Beijing has also been expanding its security presence in the region, including the building of ties with Iran and Saudi Arabia through joint military drills and port visits. China has also backed the government of President Bashar Al-Assad in the Syrian conflict. While deepening its ties with Israel, Beijing continues to maintain support for the Palestinian cause and their bid for statehood, reportedly providing the Palestinian National Authority with financial and technical help and training for Palestinian officials. — AP



BEIJING: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, left, and Chinese Premier Li Keqiang chat as they attend a signing ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. — AP

BAHRAIN CHARGES OPPN WITH 'INCITING HATRED'

DUBAI: Bahraini liberal opposition figure Ibrahim Sharif was charged yesterday with "inciting hatred" against the regime with his tweets, a human rights group said. The Britain-based Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD) said Sharif was questioned by the Gulf state's public prosecution about comments he tweeted.

Apart from voicing support for detained rights activists, Sharif questioned moves by the justice ministry to dissolve the secular, opposition National Democratic Action Society (Waed) of which he was a founding member, the group said.

"What remains of the decor of the democratic state?" Sharif asked in a tweet. Amnesty International condemned the charge against Sharif, who it said had been "in and out of prison as a prisoner of conscience" over the past six

years, and called for it to be dropped. "Once again Ibrahim Sharif is being unjustly punished simply for exercising his right to freedom of expression. The charge against him is ludicrous and must be dropped immediately," the rights group said.

"The Bahraini authorities have repeatedly sought to harass and intimidate anyone who dares to speak out about human rights violations in Bahrain," said Lynn Maalouf, a deputy director at Amnesty's office in Beirut.

Sharif, a Sunni who supported Shiite-led protests in a failed 2011 uprising in the Sunni-ruled kingdom, was released from jail in July 2016 after having served a year, also on a charge of inciting hatred against the regime. He served a four-year jail term after the protests were crushed before being released under a royal amnesty in June 2015. — AFP

CAMBODIA CRACKDOWN CAST 'DARK SHADOW': ASIAN MPs

BANGKOK: An ongoing crackdown against opposition politicians and activists in Cambodia has cast a "dark shadow" ahead of upcoming elections and is part of a wider authoritarian "disease" infecting the region, Southeast Asian politicians warned yesterday. The damning assessment comes as Cambodia plans to hold nationwide polls next year in what some have warned could be the country's last chance of seeing genuine democracy take root.

Cambodia has been ruled by strongman

premier Hun Sen for more than three decades. His reign has brought stability and growth but been criticized as corrupt and autocratic. The country's once fractured opposition took many by surprise in 2013 when it united to win 55 seats in parliament, an unprecedented move that rattled Hun Sen, a man unused to losing at the ballot box.

At a press conference in Bangkok on Monday, regional lawmakers said Hun Sen's administration has been hitting back ahead of the 2018 polls with measures to cripple the

opposition's ability to contest his party. ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights, a group made up of former and serving Southeast Asian lawmakers, said Hun Sen has "created a climate of fear, which casts a dark shadow over all of Cambodian society" adding that there was "an ongoing assault on parliamentary democracy".

Recent examples they cited included multiple opposition parliamentarians either jailed or facing court proceedings; recent legislation making it easier to dissolve opposi-

tion parties; physical attacks on lawmakers by members of the security forces and the ongoing detention of rights workers. "Cambodians are facing grave threats to their fragile democratic institutions," Filipino lawmaker Tomasito Villarin told reporters in Bangkok, adding that court cases or the threat of legal action was used "like a Damocles sword" to stifle opponents.

Charles Santiago, a serving lawmaker in Malaysia, said attacks on the political opposition in Cambodia were part of "a new disease

sweeping across Southeast Asia". Examples he cited included recent sedition charges brought against lawmakers in Malaysia and the arrest of a prominent senator and government critic in the Philippines. Former Thai lawmaker Kraisak Choonhavan said his own country had seen a similar descent into autocracy since the military's 2014 coup. "We are being buried alive under authoritarian laws against democracy which each day are piling up higher and higher," he told reporters. — AFP

CHINA WARNS US OVER ARMS SALES TO TAIWAN

BEIJING: China yesterday reiterated its firm opposition to US arms sales to Taiwan, amid reports that Donald Trump's administration is preparing a large shipment of advanced weaponry for the self-ruling island. "China firmly opposes US arms sales to Taiwan, this is consistent and clear-cut," foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told a regular press briefing. "We hope the US side fully recognizes the high sensitivity and serious harmfulness of its sales to Taiwan."

She called on Washington to abide by the One-China policy and "cease Taiwan arms sales" in order to preserve Sino-US relations and peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. The comments, which came one day after US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson ended a visit to Beijing, followed reports in US media that Trump's government was preparing a large-scale arms package for Taiwan.

China sees Taiwan as part of its territory awaiting reunification, by force if necessary.

The United States is the democratically-ruled island's most powerful ally and its main arms supplier, even though the two sides do not have official diplomatic ties after Washington switched recognition to Beijing in 1979. There have been concerns Taiwan will become a bargaining chip between the US and China since Trump angered Beijing with a protocol-busting telephone conversation with the island's President Tsai Ing-wen following his election victory.

Trump and China's President Xi Jinping subsequently smoothed over the dispute in a phone call in which the US leader reiterated Washington's adherence to the One China policy, which nominally acknowledges Beijing's claim without recognizing it. Taiwan unveiled a major defense report last week and confirmed publicly for the first time that it was capable of launching missiles at China. — AFP



NAYPYIDAW: Philippines' President Rodrigo Duterte (front R) is accompanied by his Myanmar counterpart Htin Kyaw as they inspect the honor guard during a welcome ceremony. — AFP

PHILIPPINES' DUTERTE CALLS EUROPEAN CRITICS 'CRAZIES'

DUTERTE: 'WHY DON'T YOU MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS?'

NAYPYIDAW: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has described European lawmakers as "crazies" in a salty-tongued rebuttal of criticism of his deadly drug war, while vowing again that all traffickers will be killed. Duterte fired his broadside in a late-night speech Sunday in Myanmar after the European Parliament issued a resolution last week condemning "the high number of extrajudicial killings" in his war on drugs. "I don't get these crazies. Why are you trying to impose on us? Why don't you mind your own business," said Duterte, who frequently uses swear words and other abusive language against his critics.

Since taking office in the middle of last year Duterte has overseen a ruthless campaign to eradicate illegal drugs which he says are threatening to turn the Philippines into a narco-state. Police have reported killing more than 2,500 people, while rights groups say there have been more than 5,000 other deaths linked to the drug war. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have said Duterte may be overseeing crimes against humanity, with police allegedly running anonymous death squads.

Duterte has insisted he has not asked his security forces to break the law, although on

other occasions he has called for millions of addicts to be killed and vowed to pardon police officers found guilty of murder. At the speech to a gathering of the Filipino community in Myanmar's capital Naypyidaw, Duterte warned that many more people would be killed in his drugs crackdown. "More people will die. I said I will not stop. I will continue until the last drug lord in the Philippines is killed and the pushers (are) out of the streets," he said.

Reacting to criticism that the operation targeted the poor, Duterte said he must "destroy" small-time street peddlers as well as the big-time drug lords. In its resolution, the European lawmakers also called on the UN Human Rights Council to launch a probe into Duterte's drug war, and expressed "deep alarm" at his plans to bring back the death penalty.

'Culture clash'

Duterte insisted foreign critics did not understand the Philippines. To illustrate his theory on the clash of cultures, Duterte referred to a recent Time magazine cover article on gender and sexuality and compared it with what he insisted was blanket Filipino opposition to

same-sex marriage. "That's their culture. It does not apply to us. We are Catholics and there is the civil code which says that you can only marry a woman for me (and) for a woman to marry a man," he said. "You stay where God assigned you. Do not mix us all up."

Duterte insisted he would not be cowed by warnings from foreigners that he may face prosecution over his drug war. He boasted about calling then-US president Barack Obama a "son of a whore" last year in response to criticism of the killings, as he repeated his unsubstantiated allegation that the US Central Intelligence Agency was plotting to kill him.

"They miscalculated me. They thought they would scare me with a jail threat and then they would put Obama in front of me. I told them, 'What is it to you?'" Duterte said. "Now I am even famous because I called their leaders sons of whores, you are all sons of whores." Duterte was set to meet Myanmar's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi on Monday afternoon, before leaving high tea with the army's commander-in-chief, Min Aung Hlaing. His visit coincided with the 60th anniversary of ties between the two countries. Duterte will head to Thailand yesterday evening. — AFP

RUSSIA TAKES SWIPE AT US MISSILE DEFENSE IN KOREA

TOKYO: Russia yesterday criticized the deployment of a US anti-missile system aimed at North Korea, saying it poses "serious risks" to the region. The US this month began installing the THAAD anti-missile system in South Korea in response to the North's intensifying ballistic missile development. Allies Washington and Seoul say it is for purely defensive purposes. China fears it could undermine its own nuclear deterrent and has lashed out, imposing measures seen as economic retaliation on South Korea. Russia, meanwhile, took advantage of diplomatic and defense talks with US ally Japan to criticize the development.

"We drew attention to the serious risks posed by the deployment of elements of the American global anti-missile system in the Asia-Pacific region," Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told a press conference, saying Moscow raised the issue in the talks. "If this is meant to counter threats coming from North Korea, then the deployment of this system and accumulating armaments in the region is a disproportionate reply," he added, apparently referring to THAAD.

Russia last year also expressed worries over plans for the deployment in South Korea. Lavrov's comments came after so-called two-plus talks between the foreign and defense ministers of Russia and Japan. They also followed a high-profile visit to the region by US Secretary of State Rex

Tillerson, who warned that American military action against the North was an option "on the table." North Korea did come in for criticism at the Russia-Japan meeting for its nuclear and missile development.

"We shared the view that we will strongly urge North Korea to exercise self-restraint over further provocative actions and follow UN Security Council resolutions," said Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida. North Korea is banned by the international community from pursuing nuclear and missile programs but has defiantly ploughed ahead. It staged its two latest nuclear tests last year and recently fired off missiles which it described as practice for an attack on US bases in Japan.

Japan and Russia also tried to further bridge differences over a long-standing territorial dispute dating from World War II but achieved no major breakthroughs. The Soviet Union seized four islands off Japan's northern coast in 1945 in the closing days of the war and the dispute has prevented a peace treaty to formally end the conflict. The foreign and defense ministers' meeting, the first since late 2013, followed a December summit between Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Russian President Vladimir Putin that focused on the territorial row. Kishida announced that Abe will visit Russia in late April to continue their discussions on efforts to finally conclude a peace treaty ending the war. — AFP



HANOI: South Korea's Foreign Minister Yun Byung-Se (L) shakes hands with his Vietnamese counterpart Pham Binh Minh (R) at the Government Guest House. — AFP

NEW ZEALAND EXPELS US DIPLOMAT AFTER POLICE INVESTIGATION STYMIED

WELLINGTON: A US diplomat has been expelled from New Zealand after Washington refused to waive diplomatic immunity so police investigating a serious crime could question him, officials said yesterday. Details of the alleged crime have not been revealed but local media reported the diplomat left the South Pacific nation last week suffering a broken nose and black eye.

Prime Minister Bill English labeled the US knockback on immunity regrettable and said he expected American authorities to carry out their own investigation. "We expect all diplomats here to obey our law and if it's broken we'd expect our police to investigate," English told reporters. "We regret that they didn't give us a waiver on immunity but they didn't and now it's in the hands of their authorities."

Earlier, Foreign Affairs Minister Murray McCully said he was "disappointed" at the US refusal and in response had asked for the man at the centre of the police investigation to be withdrawn from New Zealand. He said Wellington's ambassador in Washington had raised the issue with US officials. Police said they were called to an incident in Lower Hutt, on Wellington's outskirts, in the early hours of March 12, which "involved an individual from the US embassy in Wellington".

By the time they arrived the person had left the scene and no arrests were made. Attempts to further investigate hit a diplomatic brick wall, however police said they still regarded the case as active. McCully said foreign affairs officials relayed a police request to waive immunity but their US counterparts refused. Local media named the diplomat as Colin White and said he left Wellington with his wife and children.

TVNZ, which broke the story, reported that White was a technical attaché who had been working closely with New Zealand's intelligence service, the GCSB. A spokeswoman for the US embassy said they were "communicating with New Zealand authorities" on the issue. "As a matter of policy, we do not comment on the

specifics of matters under investigation," she said in a statement. "We take seriously any suggestion that our staff have fallen short of the high standards of conduct expected of US government personnel."

McCully said the US had stated it always fully investigated all allegations involving its diplomatic staff. Diplomatic immunity, formalized in the 1961 Vienna Convention, means foreign

envoys are protected from local law enforcement in the country to which they are posted. The most recent known case of it being invoked in New Zealand was in 2014, when Malaysian military attaché Mohammed Rizalman bin Ismail was accused of indecent assault. It was eventually revoked and Rizalman was sentenced to nine months' home detention after being found guilty in a Wellington court. — AFP

THAI OPPOSITION 'RED SHIRT' SAYS PLOT TO KILL PM A SETUP

BANGKOK: An exiled "red shirt" opponent of Thailand's junta accused police of trying to set him up after they said they had found a cache of weapons and uncovered a plot to kill the prime minister. The government said it would seek Wuthipong Kochathamakun's extradition from neighboring Laos and pledged to stop anything which could cause unrest in Thailand, where the opposition has been largely silenced since a 2014 coup.

"They're trying to force terrorism charges on me," Wuthipong said in an interview posted on YouTube. "This is a very poorly done setup." The police drew a link from their discovery not only to the red shirts supporters of ousted populist leader Thaksin Shinawatra, but also to an influential Buddhist temple that is at odds with authorities. They did not give details of the alleged plot to kill junta leader Prayuth Chan-Ocha but said they had discovered the weapons at a house belonging to Wuthipong, who fled Thailand at the time of the coup.

Critics accuse the government of using security threats to justify the army's con-

tinued grip on power. "I don't believe he has the kind of military caliber to intend to harm the prime minister," said Jatuporn Prompan, a leader of the red shirt movement, known as the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship. The government played down any risk to Prayuth's life, but said that it would take action against any threat to stability as it tries to bring about political reconciliation before eventual elections.

"Whatever causes unrest, we will put it out," Defense Minister Prawit Wongsuwan said. The junta seized power in the name of ending political turmoil and says its measures against dissidents are to preserve stability. Elections which had been initially promised for 2015 are not widely expected to happen before well into next year. In accusing the red shirt follower over the weapons, police also said there had been a plan to potentially use the arms against security forces at the Dhammakaya temple, where they were searching for the former abbot on money laundering charges. — Reuters



SEOUL: Members of South Korea's Agency for KIA Recovery and Identification check the remains of Chinese soldiers, who fought during the Korean War, during ceremonial rites to place the remains at a temporary military ossuary. The remains of 28 Chinese soldiers killed during the 1950-53 Korean War will return home from South Korea on March 22 for permanent burial. — AFP

BREXIT: THE END OF LOVELESS MARRIAGE

LONDON: Britain's relationship with the European Union was always an awkward marriage of convenience rather than a case of love at first sight. And after 44 years-during which trade ties always took precedence for Britain over closer integration-London has said it will file for divorce next week Anand Menon, a professor of European politics at King's College London university, said the relationship was always "transactional" and therefore the break-up is "pretty logical".

"It's been a utilitarian relationship since 1973 and the emphasis was always on the economic dimension, not on the political one," said Pauline Schnapper, professor of contemporary British history at the Sorbonne University in Paris. "The sentimental dimension is near-inexistent," she said. The path towards today's European Union began after World War II as the shattered continent tried to rebuild and deepen integration as a way of bolstering the peace. The project did not immediately appeal to Britain. "I think we didn't feel vulnerable enough to join, quite simply," Menon said.

Britain preferred to focus on its special relationship with the United States and the remains of its empire. London nevertheless supported the push for closer integration on the European continent: wartime prime minister Winston Churchill called for the creation of a "United States of Europe" in his 1946 Zurich speech. But in the early 1960s, Britain's fortunes changed for the worse. Its economic growth started lagging behind that of France and Germany, making the European single market on its doorstep seem an appealing option.

Britain said on Monday it would begin the Brexit process on March 29 with a formal notification by letter to EU President Donald Tusk. Joining the European fray in the first place was not an easy task. In 1961, France's then-president, Charles de Gaulle, vetoed Britain's first application, seeing it as a "Trojan horse" for the United States and doubting Britain's European spirit. Another French veto followed in 1967 and the UK was only final-

ly welcomed into the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973.

Unfortunately for Britain, the first oil crisis struck that same year and so the much-hoped-for economic boost failed to materialize. Nevertheless, 67 percent of the British people voted to remain in the EEC in a 1975 referendum. "The fact that we joined late is one of the reasons there are suspicions because obviously there is a sense that we joined a club that others had set up to suit themselves," Menon said. Britain and the EEC soon locked horns and London began opting out of the major attempts to step up European integration.

In 1979, London refused to participate in the European monetary system, defending its national and fiscal sovereignty. Six years later, it refused to ratify the Schengen Agreement-abolishing internal border checks-and in 1993, it opted out of the European single currency. Britain's anti-federalist approach was spelled out by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher during a 1988 speech at the College of Europe in Bruges. In it, she rejected the idea of a "European super-state exercising a new dominance from Brussels".

In the 1990s, Britain's defiance towards Brussels accelerated further with the creation of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), which campaigned for the country's exit from the EU. The opposition party's successes, particularly in the 2014 European Parliament elections when it topped the polls, pushed the government to harden its rhetoric.

The euro-zone crisis, large-scale immigration from the EU and the refugee crisis of the past few years stoked the discontent, pushing Prime Minister David Cameron to call the June 2016 referendum. In the end, 52 percent of voters opted for Brexit. Neither side is likely to end up the happier after the divorce, said John Springford, director of research at the Centre for European Reform in London. "I am not convinced that Britain leaving the EU will help Britain or help the EU," he said. — AFP

BILL GATES AGAIN WORLD'S RICHEST MAN; TRUMP SLIPS

NEW YORK: Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates once again topped the Forbes magazine list of the world's richest billionaires, while US President Donald Trump slipped more than 200 spots, the magazine said yesterday. Gates, whose wealth is estimated at \$86 billion, led the list for the fourth straight year. He was followed by Berkshire Hathaway chief Warren Buffett among the top 10 billionaires, a group heavily dominated by Americans, many of whom work in the technology sector. Buffett's wealth was estimated at \$75.6 billion.

Others in the top 10 included Amazon founder Jeff Bezos at number three, Facebook creator Mark Zuckerberg at number five and Oracle co-founder Larry Ellison at number seven. The global billionaire population jumped 13 percent from last year to 2,043, the biggest annual increase in the 31 years since the magazine began compiling the list, Forbes said. The US led countries with the most billionaires with 565, a product of the swelling value of the American stock market since Trump's November 2016 election. China

was second with 319 billionaires, and Germany was third with 114.

Trump himself slipped 220 spots on the list to number 544 with an estimated \$3.5 billion. Forbes attributed Trump's drop to sluggishness in the Manhattan real estate market which is responsible for a disproportionate amount of his wealth. "Forty percent of Donald Trump's fortune is tied up in Trump Tower and eight buildings within one mile of it," Forbes said. "Lately, the neighborhood has been struggling (relatively speaking)."

Among others in the Forbes top 10, Amancio Ortega of Spanish apparel chain Zara was fourth, Mexican telecom tycoon Carlos Slim was sixth, the Koch brothers, Charles and David, were eighth and ninth and former New York City mayor and Bloomberg News founder Michael Bloomberg was 10th. This year it took at least \$3.7 billion in wealth to make it onto the list, but only in a tie for 501th place, a group that included Hollywood director Steven Spielberg. — AFP

KUWAITI LAWYER SEEKS BAN ON EXPAT DRIVERS

Continued from Page 1

In another case, Ahmad Jabr Al-Shemmari yesterday withdrew a lawsuit he had submitted to challenge the government decision to revoke his citizenship. Shemmari, the owner of the pro-opposition Alyoum television and Alam Al-Youm newspaper, had won rulings in his favor

from the lower and appeals court and the government challenged the last ruling at the Court of Cassation, the country's Supreme Court. But before the Cassation Court could give its decisive ruling on the issue, MPs said they had obtained a promise from the Amir that the government will re-instate the citizenship to all those who got their nationality revoked in mid-2014.

'BEAUTY AND THE BEAST' PULLED..

Continued from Page 1

Both Cinescape (Kuwait National Cinema Company) and Grand Cinemas halted ticket purchases. Cinescape offered refunds for the film to those who had already bought tickets. "A huge production like Disney movies are known to draw a great deal of attention in Kuwait from both censors and film viewers," explained Sheikh Duaij.

"Today, we are submitting Beauty and the Beast [for approval] after second amendments. The movie is not banned from Kuwait," he told Kuwait Times. Sheikh Duaij noted that it was not uncommon for the ministry censors to ask for a second cut of scenes from movies, even after they had been released. An official from the Grand Cinemas said that Beauty and the Beast was still showing on their screens until last night.

"We continued rolling the movie as normal because people have already bought the tickets. However, we

will stop selling tickets until we receive the second package of the film," he explained, referring the second censored version. The Ministry of Information did not respond immediately to requests for comment. It is not clear when or if the second censored version of the film will be approved for release in Kuwait.

In some predominantly Muslim countries, same-sex relations can lead to lashings, imprisonment and fines. In a few, it carries the death penalty. Those in support of the ban on the film in Kuwait launched hashtags calling for "respect" and urging the cinema company to protect children by blocking the movie. The film was given a PG-13 rating in Kuwait. Disney officials did not immediately respond to a request of comment. Similar concerns over the film's brief scene prompted a drive-in theater in the US state of Alabama to cancel showings. Censors in Malaysia required the scene be edited, but Disney pulled the film from release there.

INDIA TRAFFICKERS WIDEN THEIR NETS

Continued from Page 1

Of an estimated six million Indian migrants in the six Gulf states of Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Oman, domestic workers are among the most exploited, campaigners say.

"Housemaids are treated like cattle here. This woman didn't even know where she was when I asked her loca-

tion. She kept crying to be saved. India should ban sending housemaids to the Gulf," Srinivas said. In the woman's hometown of Dholka, officials are dealing with what they said is their first case of human trafficking. "We have information that there could be more women who have been trafficked to the Gulf nations. This is a new development for us," said Rituraj Desai, deputy in the Dholka district office. — Reuters

Kuwait Times

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Focus

FROM REFERENDUM TO BREXIT - KEY MOMENTS

LONDON: From the shock vote to leave the European Union to the formal start of the departure process next week, here are some key moments on the path to Brexit:

Britons vote for Brexit

On June 23, 2016, 17.4 million Britons voted to end their 43-year-old membership of the European Union—a proportion of 52 percent to 48 percent. A breakdown of the results shows England and Wales voted to leave, while Scotland and Northern Ireland opted to remain.

Sterling falls

The result took markets by surprise, although they soon recovered. The blow to sterling lasted longer—since the referendum, the pound has lost between 15 and 16 percent of its value against the dollar and the euro.

Change of government

On June 24, Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron, who called the referendum and led the campaign to stay in, announced his resignation. He said he would stay on until a successor was found, sparking a leadership race that in the end proved remarkably swift. Brexit campaigner Boris Johnson withdrew at the last minute and Theresa May, Cameron's interior minister for six years, was crowned leader on July 11.

Brexiters take over

On July 13, May became prime minister, appointing three leading eurosceptics to senior posts in her government and promising to implement Brexit. Johnson became foreign secretary, Liam Fox became international trade secretary and David Davis was put in charge of a new Brexit ministry.

Brexit means Brexit

On October 2, May said that Britain will trigger Article 50 of the EU's Lisbon treaty, which sets out a two-year process of leaving the bloc, before the end of March 2017.

Court challenge

On November 3, the High Court in London ruled that the government must obtain parliamentary approval to begin the Brexit process. The Daily Mail tabloid condemned the judges as "Enemies of the People" and May appealed. On January 24, 2017, the Supreme Court upheld the ruling.

Clean break

On January 17, May gave a major speech setting out her strategy for Brexit. She had previously promised to cut migration from the EU and now acknowledged this would mean Britain leaving Europe's single market. She warned she was willing to walk away from the negotiations with Brussels, saying: "No deal for Britain is better than a bad deal for Britain."

Trump endorsement

On January 27, May became the first foreign leader to visit newly elected US President Donald Trump at the White House. He called Britain's decision to leave the EU a "wonderful thing" and hailed the "special relationship" between the two countries.

Parliament backs Brexit

On March 13, Britain's parliament gave final approval to a bill empowering May to trigger Article 50. The House of Lords had passed amendments to guarantee the status of European nationals living in Britain and to give parliament a final vote on the final deal. But these were overturned by the House of Commons and the bill passed unamended. Receiving formal royal assent from Queen Elizabeth II on March 16.

Scottish nationalism

On March 13, Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said she would press ahead with plans for an independence referendum before Britain leaves the EU. She said her proposals for Scotland to be allowed to stay in the European single market had been met with "a brick wall of intransigence" from the government. May responded with an impassioned defence of Britain's "precious" union and by accusing Sturgeon of "tunnel vision" on independence. May said "now is not the time" to be talking about another referendum, less than three years after the last one in which Scotland voted to stay in Britain.

Article 50

On Monday, the government said it would trigger Article 50 on March 29 in the form of a letter to EU President Donald Tusk. "We are on the threshold of the most important negotiation for this country for a generation," Brexit minister David Davis said. The European Commission responded saying: "We are ready to begin negotiations". — AFP

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TRUMP'S COMPLICATED RELATIONSHIP WITH THE TRUTH

STEPHANO

G20 GIVES MNUCHIN SPACE TO DEFINE TRUMP TRADE AGENDA

By David Lawder

Wary of their first official encounter with US President Donald Trump's blustery trade agenda, the world's top finance officials were relieved to find new Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin polite and business-like over the weekend. But they yielded ground to the newcomer's push for the Group of 20 major economies to abandon a decade-old pledge to resist protectionism and to delete communique language on financing the fight against climate change. According to G20 officials who interacted with Mnuchin at the meeting in the spa and casino town of Baden-Baden, Germany, many opted not to challenge Mnuchin on protectionism language.

Instead they chose to give some space to him and Trump's new administration to refine their trade views in the hopes for moderation by the time Germany hosts a G20 leader's summit in July. Five weeks into his new job, the former Goldman Sachs and commercial banker is currently the only Senate-confirmed Trump appointee working at Treasury. And the Trump administration has not yet decided on the specific

policies it will use to make good on campaign pledges to shrink US trade deficits and grow American manufacturing jobs.

Options under consideration range from more aggressive anti-dumping enforcement efforts to renegotiating trade deals and enacting a proposed border tax levied on imports. During his campaign, Trump threatened unilateral tariffs on Mexican and Chinese goods and said he would quit the North American Free Trade agreement unless it is renegotiated to his liking. "We have a new administration in Washington which still has to define precisely its narrative, especially in the context of what was said in the campaign," said Pierre Moscovici, European Commission Economic Affairs Minister. "I think Mnuchin is an articulate, constructive and pragmatic man," Moscovici said. "More work needs to be done to find common ground. It was not ready here. It is not a total surprise."

First impressions

Japanese Finance Minister Taro Aso, who tangled with Mnuchin's predecessor, Jack Lew, last year over dollar-yen exchange rate volatility, said he was impressed with

Mnuchin's understanding of economics and financial markets. "That's why I think we can do good business together," Aso told reporters. In the G20 plenary sessions, Mnuchin took to the floor only once, reading from a prepared statement, according to a G20 official, while counterparts from China and France argued forcefully in favor of keeping the anti-protectionism pledge. While Mnuchin concentrated on making good first impressions with his G20 counterparts, US negotiators behind the scenes insisted that they could no longer accept previous language vowing "to resist all forms of protectionism."

This was replaced with a watered-down pledge to "strengthen the contribution of trade to our economies" - language viewed by some participants as preserving US flexibility on trade policy. German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schauble, who met with Mnuchin in Berlin before the Baden Baden meeting, said consensus could not be reached on the meaning of protectionism. He suggested at a news conference that Mnuchin may not have had a clear mandate to negotiate on trade issues. Asked about this, Mnuchin said he knows Trump's desires on trade and negotiat-

ed them from Baden Baden, adding: "the new language makes sense."

Ritualistic phrase

The deletion of a "ritualistic phrase" in the G20's core language could over time diminish U.S. influence, said Eswar Prasad, a former International Monetary Fund official and trade policy professor at Cornell University. "The US may have won this battle by forcefully imposing its will on the rest of the G20, but the outcome represents a step backward in US global leadership on issues such as the promotion of free trade and tackling climate change," said Prasad.

But the Baden Baden meeting established Mnuchin as a pragmatic operator in the Trump administration's drive for a more level playing field on trade, said Domenico Lombardi, another former IMF official now with the Centre for International Governance Innovation, a Canadian think-tank. "It'd be in the interest of Germany and Europe to establish a strong, bilateral relationship with the new Treasury secretary rather than questioning his authority," Lombardi said. "The alternative for them would be to negotiate directly with Trump and that would be worse." — Reuters

TRAVEL BAN 'A DEEP WOUND' FOR IRANIAN AMERICANS

By Veronique Dupont

As President Donald Trump battles to reinstate his controversial revised travel ban, one overlooked effect has been the havoc wreaked on legal Americans with family abroad. Across the United States, citizens not directly targeted by plans to halt entries from six majority-Muslim nations are nevertheless finding their lives disrupted and families torn apart. Iranian-American Madhis Keshavarz, whose father died on February 16 with relatives unable to visit him in his US hospital bed, is one such victim of the uncertainty.

"They stole from my father the chance to say goodbye to the ones he loved the most," the Los Angeles resident said, tears rolling down her cheeks. Trump has said a travel ban is needed to preserve US national security and keep out extremists. His first effort, in January, banned travelers from seven majority-Muslim countries and all refugees but was blocked by a court in Washington state on the grounds that it violated the constitution's prohibition of religious discrimination.

That block was upheld on appeal, and the administration said it would revise the ban to better adhere to the law. It aims to close US borders to nationals of Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen for 90 days, and all refugees for at least 120 days. Iraq was on the original ban but removed in the revision. But the new executive order has run into the same problems in Hawaii and Maryland. In the confusion over the initial executive order, Keshavarz's uncle, a German citizen who has visited the US some 30 times, found himself unable to get a visa to attend his brother's death bed, despite having his papers in order.

Denied a goodbye

"My father was an organ donor. Some American is now walking around breathing because of him, and he was denied the basic right to say goodbye to the ones he loved the most," said Keshavarz, a media strategist. One of her close friends, a Briton who has dual Iranian nationality but has not been there in more than a decade, encountered similar problems when she decided to come to the US to support her grieving friend.

As a British national she didn't need a visa but sought advice anyway from US consular officials in London. "They said to her you need a visa. They took her British passport and kept it to review it. She had to wait to get her passport back, so missed her flight," Keshavarz said. Other members of her family have also seen their lives disrupted. "My young cousin who is engaged to be married hasn't been able to see his fiancée since the end of last year," Keshavarz said. "She's been waiting for a visa to come and it's on hold. Her status has been floating with no indication of it changing, despite a number of calls to all sorts of people, so all the planning of the wedding is suspended." She acknowledges that some of this bureaucracy already existed under the previous administration but adds that at least people knew the procedure, whereas "now embassies have no idea." Some 400,000 people of Iranian origin, often with

dual citizenship, live in and around Los Angeles, among more than one million in total in the US.

Leaders in technology

"I've always had tons and tons of problems. We never had it easy, even before Trump," said Madhi Rahimi, 31, who works in a Silicon Valley IT research company. "It was always difficult to get the visas. It was always single entry so for many friends and me it meant not going home. That one time I went home it took me four months to come back to the US." Only his mother and younger brother have been able to visit in a decade spent in San Francisco, he says, and their applications took nine months to be approved. Arash Saedinia, a 43-year-old Iranian American who teaches English literature, talks anxiously of a period of intense

worry for his entire community. "Green-card holders are now reluctant to leave the country for a short trip to Mexico, to visit family or friends, to take a job overseas," the LA resident said.

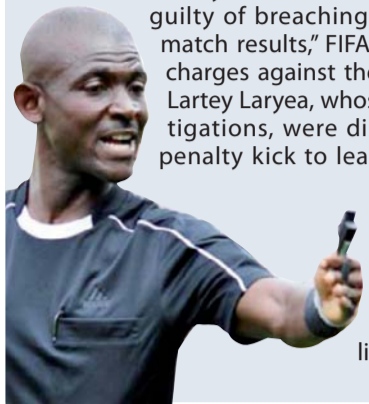
A list released at the end of 2015 by Persian Tech Entrepreneurs, a group of young Iranian Americans active in technology, showed that many members of the community had reached the top ranks of some of the most powerful players in Silicon Valley. Yet they are still "demonized," says Keshavarz, even though many were forced to flee their homeland in the first place because of Iran's CIA-backed 1953 coup. "Whatever you do you are not viewed as being an American, not treated like one, and it's tiresome," she said. "It's a very deep wound to have consistently to prove yourself and be deemed worthy of a citizenship." — AFP



LOS ANGELES: Madhis Keshavarz shows a photo of her father Massoud Keshavarz at her home in Los Angeles. As US President Donald Trump battles to reinstate his revised travel ban, one overlooked effect has been the havoc wreaked on legal Americans with family abroad. — AFP

FIFA BANS REFEREE FOR LIFE OVER DISPUTED PENALTY

GENEVA: FIFA has banned for life the referee who awarded a disputed penalty for South Africa against Senegal in a World Cup qualifying match. Referee Joseph Lamptey of Ghana gave a penalty for a non-existent handball against Senegal defender Kalidou Koulibaly. Replays clearly showed the ball struck Koulibaly's knee and then dropped to the ground. Lamptey was found guilty of breaching the rule relating to "unlawfully influencing match results," FIFA said yesterday. His assistant was cleared. "All charges against the Ghanaian match official David Lionheart Nii Lartey Laryea, whose behavior had also been the subject of investigations, were dismissed," FIFA said. South Africa scored the penalty kick to lead 1-0 in the 42nd minute in Polokwane last November. The home team went on to beat Senegal 2-1 and is now in second place in the four-team group after two matches. Senegal is third, with only the group winner advancing to play in Russia. FIFA declined to give more details of why its disciplinary panel imposed a life ban on the referee. —AP



UKAD ALARMED BY DRUG USE IN BRITISH AMATEUR SPORT

LONDON: Drug use in amateur sport in Britain is 'fast becoming a crisis', UK Anti-Doping (UKAD) said yesterday in response to a BBC poll that revealed widespread use of performance enhancing substances at grassroot levels. Some 35 percent of the 1,025 adult men and women members of amateur sports clubs, teams and gyms who were polled said they personally knew someone who had doped, and eight percent had taken steroids. Half felt the use of performance enhancing drugs (PEDs) was widespread among those who played competitive sport and 49 percent thought drugs were easily available. The online poll was carried out by ComRes between Jan 27-31, 2017. "The figures as regards the prevalence of performance-enhancing substances at an amateur level are incredibly alarming," UKAD chief Nicole Sapstead told the BBC. "I don't think any sport can say that they don't have a problem at an amateur level." Sapstead said UKAD needed greater powers and extra cash from individual sports governing bodies to "address what is fast becoming a crisis for sport". — Reuters

GALTHIE TO REPLACE FORD AS TOULON COACH

PARIS: Former France captain Fabien Galthie will take over as coach of rugby giants Toulon with Englishman Mike Ford leaving at the end of the season, the Top 14 side said yesterday. The 48-year-old Galthie will "take the reins of the entire sports sector" assisted by Fabrice Landreau and Marc Dal Maso, the club confirmed minutes after announcing Ford's departure. Ford, 51, was brought in to replace Diego Dominguez in October after the former three-time European champions endured a poor start to the season. Toulon-French champions in 2014 — are stuck in a fierce battle to make the end-of-season play-offs. Galthie, without a club since leaving his coaching role at Montpellier in December 2014, and Landreau, sacked by Grenoble before the start of the season, have signed two-year deals. The duo guided Stade Francais to the French title in 2007. "Fabien Galthie will proceed to set up a technical staff of his choice," Toulon said in a statement. Galthie, a former France international scrum-half, also led Montpellier to a Top 14 runner-up spot in 2011. —AFP



SHOOTING TOURNAMENT CONCLUDES

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Shooting tournament of the Public Authority for sports concluded Sunday evening at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex. The tournament which was organized by Kuwait Shooting Sport in skeet, trap, double trap, 10m air rifle and pistol, and 50m rifle was attended by President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Eng Duaij Khalaf Al-Otaibi, Secretary General Obaid Al-Osaimi and KSSC board member Eng. Hussam Al-Roumi, along with Colonel Ghannam Salem and Lt. Colonel Salaf Al-Huraji from the National Guard.

Results of the tournament are as follows

Double Trap Men: Ahmad Al-Afasi, Mishal Al-Sanad, Hamad Al-Afasi	Trap Men: Talal Al-Rashidi, Abdelrahman Al-Faihan, Tami Al-Rashidi	Skeet Men: Mansour Al-Rashidi, Abdelaziz Al-Faihan, Nasser Al-Daihani	Skeet Women: Sheikha Al-Rashidi, Afrah Mohammad, Eman Al-Shamma	Trap Women: Sarah Al-Hawal, Rasha Al-Fares, Asmaa Al-Qatami	50m Rifle Women Beginners: Shamma Al-Rashidi, Fajer Al-Dubaib	10m Pistol Women Beginners: Yasmeen Al-Tamimi, Al-Kawthar Nasser, Amira Awadh	10m Rifle Men Beginners: Eid Al-Mulaifi	10m Pistol Men Beginners: Abdelaziz Al-Sasheer, Nasser Al-Enezi, Nasser Al-Thafeeri.
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GOLF

TIGER 'TRYING EVERYTHING' TO COMPETE AT MASTERS

NEW YORK: Tiger Woods still feels he has a chance to compete for a fifth Masters triumph in two weeks but his back remains an issue, the golfer said yesterday. The 14-time major champion has not played since withdrawing from last month's Dubai Desert Classic with ongoing back spasms. Woods is promoting a new book about his first triumph at Augusta in 1997 and when asked on television's Good Morning America show if he would compete at the National this year he said, "God, I hope so. I'm trying. I'm trying everything I can do to be able to get back and play. I love that event. It has meant so much to me in my life." Woods said while his spirit is willing, his body remains an issue when it comes to being able to train well enough to prepare for the rigors of four rounds at a major event, something he has done only twice since the 2013 PGA Championship. "I know that the mind is sharp. I just need to get the body willing to do it," Woods said. "That's the hard part is getting the prep time in." Woods became the first black golfer to win a major and the youngest champion in Masters history at age 21 with the landmark victory in what was then an Augusta National course record. The tale is the subject of his new book: "The 1997 Masters: My Story." Woods, 41, has won the Masters four times but could miss the tournament for the third time in four years. "It has so much history and meaning to me that I'd

love to get back," Woods said. **PRACTICING BUT NO ROUNDS** Woods told USA Today he would attend the Champions Dinner at Augusta National in two weeks at Augusta National even if he does not tee off with the field two days later. "I do have a chance," Woods told the newspaper. "I'm working on my game. I just need to get to a point where I feel like I'm good enough and I'm healthy enough to do it. "I've been practicing. I haven't been playing (rounds)... It's building, but I still have a little ways to go." Woods missed the 2014 Masters with a back injury and missed all of the 2015-16 season following back surgery. He made his comeback last December after a 15-month hiatus at the Hero World Challenge, then missed the cut at Torrey Pines in January before pulling out at Dubai after an opening 77. Woods, who has not won a major title since the 2008 US Open, has not made the cut in a major since the 2015 Masters, where he finished 17th. Two weeks ago, Woods said he would be unable to play in last week's Arnold Palmer Invitational "due to ongoing rest and rehabilitation on my back" and said then he had no timetable for his return but treatments were "going well." Woods, second on the all-time major wins list to the 18 of Jack Nicklaus, has won 79 career PGA titles, three shy of Sam Snead's all-time record. — AFP



ORLANDO: Marc Leishman, of Australia, poses with his family, while holding the championship trophy after winning the Arnold Palmer Invitational golf tournament in Orlando, Fla., Sunday. With Leishman are sons, Harvey, 5, left, and Oliver, 3, and wife, Audrey. —AP

LEISHMAN WINS ARNOLD PALMER INVITATIONAL BY ONE STROKE

FLORIDA: Australian Marc Leishman sank a monster eagle putt at the par-five 16th and stormed to a one-stroke victory at the Arnold Palmer Invitational in Florida on Sunday. With a finish that would have earned the approval of the late tournament host, Leishman sank a 50-footer dead centre and then made clutch up-and-down pars at the final two holes to secure the win at Bay Hill. The 33-year-old carded 69 to finish on 11-under-par 277 for the tournament, clinching his second PGA Tour victory and an invitation to the April 6-9 U.S. Masters. Overnight leaders Charley Hoffman and Kevin Kisner, who both hit 73s, finished tied for second on 10-under. Rory McIlroy, who will move up from third to second in the world rankings behind Dustin Johnson, needed a birdie at the last to draw level with Leishman but three-putted to finish two strokes behind after carding a 69. "I holed some good putts on the last few holes. They all went in the middle of the hole, which is nice," Leishman said after a celebratory hug with his wife Audrey and their two young boys. "Obviously the putter was there with me all week. The putter has been amazing this year. It's been really close and I just haven't played quite like how I wanted to on Sundays but today was the day." Leishman blew away a strong field to win the Nedbank Challenge by six strokes on the European Tour in South Africa 15 months ago but this was his first PGA Tour victory since his maiden triumph at Hartford in 2012. And it was Leishman's first victory in the US since his wife nearly died of toxic shock two

years ago. She is now healthy again and pregnant with their third child. Leishman also took time to pay his respects to Palmer, who died in September at the age of 87. "Mr Palmer was an awesome guy who I was lucky enough to meet a few times at this tournament," he said. "Another reason why it's so special this week, this is the first time I've won a tournament with my family here. It all came together. Leishman, the third Australian to win at Bay Hill after Rod Pampling in 2006 and Jason Day last year, credited a new driver with his improved form. "I've been playing well all year," he said. "It's really been a game changer. It's funny, this game is a lot easier out of the fairway." — Reuters

TOKYO 2020 GOLF VENUE VOTES TO ADMIT WOMEN MEMBERS

TOKYO: The club scheduled to hold the 2020 Tokyo Olympics golf events voted to admit women as full members yesterday, scrapping an all-male policy that had been heavily criticised and put its hosting rights in jeopardy. The private Kasumigaseki Country Club took the decision to change its bylaws at an extraordinary board meeting after being told last month that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) would find another venue if the policy remained unaltered. The Saitama prefecture venue is scheduled to host both men's and women's tournaments in July and August 2020 but rules forbidding women from both playing on Sundays or becoming full members had been roundly condemned, leading to yesterday's vote. "We are pleased to learn that the Kasumigaseki Country Club voted today... to amend the club's membership policy in keeping with the spirit of the Olympic Charter," Tokyo Games chief Yoshiro

Mori said in a statement. "On behalf of the Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee, I'd like to extend my gratitude to the members of the club for their understanding and cooperation. "I also would like to express my admiration for the club's endeavour to come to an agreement in such a short period of time." The club was closed due to a national holiday on Monday, meaning no one was available for comment when contacted by Reuters. IOC vice president John Coates had last month said that organisers would seek an alternative venue if the club could not achieve gender equality and Olympic chief Thomas Bach reiterated the governing body's stance last week. "Kasumigaseki Country Club is an outstanding venue with excellent courses, and we are proud it will be hosting world's top-tier golfers from all over the world for the Olympics Games," Mori added of the decision. — Reuters



Anna Nordqvist, of Sweden, holds the trophy after winning The Bank of Hope Founders Cup LPGA golf tournament Sunday, March 19, 2017, in Phoenix. —(AP Photo/Rick Scuteri)

SQUASH

ELSHORBAGY TARGETS BRITISH OPEN HAT-TRICK

KINGSTON UPON HULL: World number one Mohamed Elshorbagy, who headed Egypt's historic clean sweep of all four finalists at last year's British Open, is aiming for a different kind of achievement at the 2017 tournament which starts today. The 27-year-old Bristol-based Alexandrian will complete a hat-trick of titles at the world's oldest event if he triumphs again, which would be the best unbeaten British Open sequence by a male player for two decades. The last man to win this tournament three times in a row was Jansher Khan, the leg-

endary six-time champion from Pakistan. While Elshorbagy may find it hard to equal Jansher, it would nevertheless be an outstanding achievement to win a trio of titles in the faster, more prosperous, and much more unpredictable modern game. Elshorbagy's results have been modest this year by his exceptional standards, and include a loss to his younger brother Marwan in his last tournament, at Chicago three weeks ago.

This may however be a misleading sign. That is because Elshorbagy's concern is to avoid arriving in Hull in a simi-

lar state of near exhaustion to that with which he struggled last year. He has competed less and embarked on better balanced preparations at Millfield school with the help of British Open legend Jonah Barrington. "I am at my most fragile when I've had too many matches," Elshorbagy explained.

He abandoned his hustling, energetic style quite often at last year's British Open, relying instead on mental strength and spoiling tactical varieties.

The wisdom of more careful preparations is emphasised by the boulder-

strewn path which has been placed before Elshorbagy.

He begins against Fares Dessouky, a gifted young fellow Alexandrian who got to the Canary Wharf final in London ten days ago and reached a career-high world number 11.

Trying to cope with this start may feel formidably similar to facing a front-line player amidst the inevitable uncertainties of opening day conditions.

And the doubtful reward for survival might be another encounter with Daryl Selby, the former British national cham-

panion who beat Elshorbagy at the St George's Hill tournament in London in December. He could then face a quarter-final with another dangerous young compatriot, Ali Farag, who upset him in front of the Giza Pyramids in September, and perhaps a semi-final with Nick Matthew, the three-time former British Open champion from England.

His marginally good news is that the continued rise of Karim Gawad, the surprise world champion, has earned the number two seeding and ensured the two cannot meet before the final. —AFP

WENGER WANTS TO STAY ON AT ARSENAL: REPORTS

LONDON: Beleaguered Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger has decided to stay at the club, according to British media reports yesterday.

The Daily Telegraph and Daily Mirror said Wenger will inform Arsenal's board he wants to extend his contract, which expires at the end of the season. West Bromwich Albion manager Tony Pulis also said Wenger told him he intended to stay on after Arsenal's 3-1 defeat at The Hawthorns on Saturday. "I'll be surprised if he goes," Pulis told reporters after Saturday's game, as revealed in Monday's newspapers.

Asked why he thought Wenger would stay, Pulis replied: "Because he told me." Wenger, 67, has come under fire from fans after Arsenal were thrashed by Bayern Munich in the Champions League and slipped out of the Premier League's top four. Supporters renewed calls for him to step down during and after the defeat at West Brom, with some holding up "WENGER OUT" banners. Speaking after the game, Wenger said he had made up his mind about his future and would make his intentions public "very soon".

NEW CONTRACT

Arsenal have not commented on the reports on Wenger's future. But the club have denied a claim in Monday's edition of German daily Bild that they have approached Borussia Dortmund coach

Thomas Tuchel as a possible Wenger replacement. "That's not true," an Arsenal spokesman told Germany's Sky Sports News. Wenger, Arsenal's manager since 1996, is believed to have been offered a new two-year contract. Arsenal's support is split over Wenger, who won seven trophies in his first nine seasons as manager but has won only two FA Cups in the 12 years since. Rival groups of Arsenal supporters paid for planes trailing banners that were both critical and supportive of him to fly over the stadium during the game against West Brom.

One banner read "NO CONTRACT #WENGER OUT", the other: "IN ARSENE WE TRUST #RESPECTAW".

The defeat at West Brom was Arsenal's fourth in five league games and left them in sixth place in the Premier League table, six points below the Champions League places with two games in hand.

They recently lost 10-2 on aggregate to Bayern in the Champions League, going out in the round of 16 for the seventh season running. Wenger said his future at Arsenal was not contingent on the club securing a place in next season's Champions League.

"My decision will not necessarily be linked with that because I've done the top four 20 times. It's more. It's not that," he said. "I take a bigger perspective than that. It's not the last result that will decide what I will do." — AFP



LONDON: West Ham's Andre Ayew celebrates after scoring during the English Premier League soccer match between West Ham and Leicester City at London Stadium in London. — AP

SOCCER

RESURGENT MAHREZ HELPS LEICESTER WIN AGAIN

PARIS: African Footballer of the Year Riyad Mahrez opened the scoring as a Leicester City revival continued at the weekend with a 3-2 English Premier League win at West Ham.

A return to form by the Algeria winger has coincided with the 'Foxes' winning four consecutive matches in all competitions since Italian manager Claudio Ranieri was controversially sacked. Gabonese Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, who preceded Mahrez as African Footballer of the Year, remained the leading German Bundesliga scorer after his goal gave Borussia Dortmund a 1-0 win over Ingolstadt.

ENGLAND

RIYAD MAHREZ (Leicester)

The Algeria winger gave a strong display in Leicester's 3-2 victory at West Ham. Having struggled for much of the season, he looks back to his best since Ranieri's sacking. Mahrez enjoyed a stroke of luck to open the scoring in the fifth minute when his cross evaded Hammers goalkeeper Darren Randolph and crept into the net.

ANDRE AWEY (West Ham)

The Ghana striker scored his fifth club goal of the season, but couldn't prevent West Ham suffering more misery at their London Stadium against Leicester. With West Ham trailing 3-1, Awey headed in after Andy Carroll won the ball at the back post from a corner to reduce the deficit in the 63rd minute. But the Hammers couldn't find an equaliser with Awey guilty of firing over from one of hosts' best opportunities.

IDRISSA GUEYE (Everton)

The Senegal midfielder was involved in a crucial flashpoint in his side's 4-0 win over Hull at Goodison Park. Ronald Koeman's team had scored once in a tense encounter when Gueye was caught by an aggressive challenge from Hull midfielder Tom Huddlestone. Although Hull felt the tackle was fair, the offence was deemed worthy of a straight red card and Everton went on to make the most of their numerical advantage.

RUDY GESTEDE (Middlesbrough)

The Benin striker notched his first Premier League goal for Middlesbrough, but Manchester United ran out 3-1 winners at the Riverside Stadium. Gestede had only one goal in the FA Cup since joined Middlesbrough from Aston Villa in January and he ended that barren run with a cool close-range finish after Chris Smalling failed to clear in the 77th minute.

SPAIN

KEVIN-PRINCE BOATENG (Las Palmas)

Ghanaian Boateng was central to Las Palmas' 1-0 win over Villarreal. The former AC Milan man powered home a header for the only goal and his eighth of the season after just 10 minutes. Boateng was pulled down by Victor Ruiz when clear on goal nine minutes later, provoking a red card for the Villarreal defender.

LACINA TRAORE (Sporting Gijon)

Traore gave Sporting's chances of beating the drop a huge boost as his equaliser sparked a three-goal burst in seven minutes to beat Granada 3-1. The Ivory Coast striker tapped

home his second goal in Spanish football from close range as Sporting leapfrogged Granada to move within five points of safety.

ITALY

MOHAMED SALAH (Roma)

With Edin Dzeko on the bench for the visit of Sassuolo, Salah provided Roma's biggest attacking threat and almost had the opener on two minutes when he hit the side-netting. After Leandro Paredes levelled Gregoire Defrel's ninth-minute strike for the visitors, Egyptian Salah put Roma into the lead in first-half injury time when he rushed in to poke home a loose ball after Andrea Consigli had spilled Stephan El Shaarawy's shot in the six-yard box. Roma finished 3-1 winners.

AFRIYIE ACQUAH (Torino)

For a few second-half minutes Ghanaian midfielder Acquah gave Torino fans hope of a win over Inter Milan when he beat Samir Handanovic with a superb strike. The 25-year-old's maiden Serie A goal of the season, and fifth in Italy's top flight, will be remembered, although it didn't win the game for Sinisa Mihajlovic's men. Italy winger Antonio Candreva levelled for Inter only a few minutes later to grab a share of the points.

GERMANY

PIERRE-EMERICK AUBAMEYANG (Borussia Dortmund)

The Gabon hot-shot scored his ninth goal in his last five games in Borussia Dortmund's 1-0 win at home to relegation-threatened Ingolstadt. Aubameyang remains the league's top scorer with 23 league goals, ahead of Cologne's Anthony Modeste, who has 22, while Bayern Munich's Robert Lewandowski—last season's Bundesliga hot-shot with 30—has netted 21 times.

SALOMON KALOU (Hertha Berlin)

The Ivory Coast veteran lasted just 30 minutes of Hertha's 4-2 defeat at Cologne after his thigh injury, which he picked up in training last week, flared up. The 31-year-old was left limping after a challenge from Cologne defender Pawel Olkowski.

NABIL BENTALEB (Schalke 04)

The Algeria midfielder squandered a golden chance to score a late second goal for Schalke when he came off the bench for their 1-0 win at Mainz. The ex-Tottenham Hotspur player got behind the defence and went one-on-one with Mainz goalkeeper Jonas Loessl, but mistimed his shot, which was saved. —AFP

ALLI HAS X-FACTOR FOR POCHETTINO

LONDON: Mauricio Pochettino says he is constantly surprised by Dele Alli after the Tottenham midfielder helped fill the gap left by the injured Harry Kane.

Kane, the club's leading scorer, has been ruled out for six weeks after picking up an ankle injury, forcing Pochettino to rejig his team's attack. The Tottenham manager selected South Korea forward Son Heung-Min to replace Kane against Southampton, but it was Christian Eriksen and Alli who provided the goals that secured a 2-1 victory and extended the club's current home run to 10 successive league wins.

Alli scored for a fourth successive game with a first half penalty awarded after he had been upended by Steven Davis to take his season's tally to 17 goals.

And Pochettino insists the England international once again demonstrated his ability to fill in in different areas of the pitch. "Dele Alli always can surprise and you can't guess with him," Pochettino said.

"He has an unbelievable personality and character and it is all possible with him. He is a player who likes to run into the box, he is very often very clever into the box. In the box he looks like a striker because he is more than clever, he has made his mark. Outside the box playing like a midfielder. I saw him at 17-years-old playing at Milton Keynes as a holding midfielder against Manchester United. Always he can surprise me, maybe one day he can play like a goalkeeper or a full-back or a centre-back."

GREAT OPPORTUNITY

Pochettino was also pleased with Son's display in the centre-forward role after opting

for the 24-year-old ahead of Vincent Janssen. "I think it was good. He had some chances to score, great movement, he connected with dele and Chris and I am very pleased with his performance," he said.

"It was a great opportunity to win and you will always miss your main striker. We must do what we can while he is injured and it was important to us to get that feeling, win the game, score goals.

"I think it keeps our position in the table with a very important three points.

"Our home form is fantastic. I think the team deserved all the prizes because we have been playing very well.

"It's always difficult to play and keep your level in every game, but we have to be pleased to keep our position, get three points and our performance was good.

"The victory keeps us in a very good position in the table." James Ward-Prowse's second half goal gave Southampton hope of a point, but they were unable to find an equaliser and defeat came at the added cost of an injury to striker Manolo Gabbiadini that will prevent the player joining up with Italy next week.

Southampton manager Claude Puel said: "It is a groin injury we will see. I hope it is not bad. For his national team it is not possible to go. Shane Long was ready and can play. It was a good game. There was quality on the pitch. "It was a strange game. In the first half, without a lot of pressure, we lost two goals. It was difficult to accept the second goal. "The second half was better and also interesting because we recovered well.

We did not find a clinical edge to finish the situation." — AFP



WEST BROMWICH: Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger, right, stands on the touchline. — AP

PIQUE BLASTS SUPPORTERS FOR BOOING ANDRE GOMES

BARCELONA: Barcelona defender Gerard Pique has urged supporters to stop booing midfielder Andre Gomes, who scored his first goal for the Catalans in Sunday's 4-2 win over Valencia after 36 appearances.

The Portuguese player bore the brunt of the criticism for the team's 4-0 thrashing by Paris St Germain in the Champions League last-16 first leg and was loudly booed in the team's next game against Leganes when he was substituted off.

He was dropped from the starting lineup for the second leg against PSG but came on as a substitute in the historic 6-1 turnaround which saw Barca reach the quarter-finals. Gomes was greeted with more whistles when he came on in the 74th minute against Valencia on Sunday but 15 minutes later sealed victory by turning Neymar's cross in from close range, although he chose not to celebrate the strike against his former club. "I'm in total disagreement with the people who boo players, they'd be better off staying at home," Pique told reporters after the game on Sunday.

"It's intolerable and I think treating any

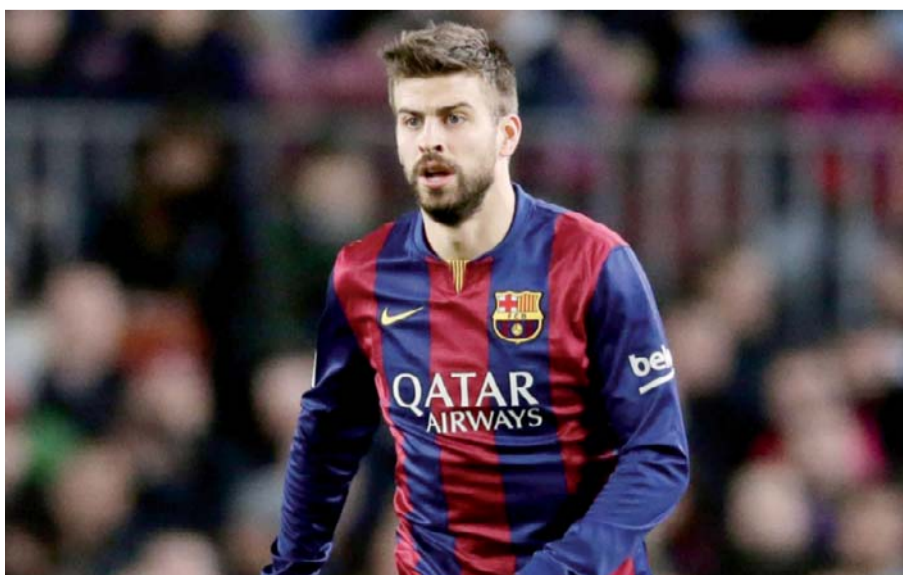
player like that before they come on the pitch doesn't help anyone. People need to take a good look at themselves.

"It's one thing if someone plays badly and then the people whistle to show their discontent but quite another to whistle before they come on because it kills their confidence."

Gomes was a surprise summer signing from Valencia for 35 million euros (\$37.6 million) plus add-ons and has struggled to adapt to the Spanish champions, often looking out of place in the team's midfield and out of sync with the rest of the team.

Luis Enrique has persisted with Gomes despite the continued criticism and at one spell in the season preferred the him to Ivan Rakitic, although the Croatian has since won his place in the team back at Gomes' expense. "I'm so pleased he scored, it was the happiest moment of the game," said the coach.

"I already know how good he is, he's huge, he's strong and has great talent. He's going to be a very important player to Barcelona's future." — Reuters



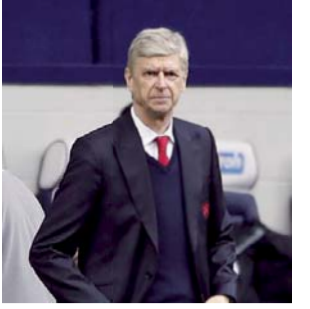
Gerard Pique

Sports

Leishman wins Arnold Palmer Invitational by one stroke



Wenger wants to stay on at Arsenal: Reports



TUESDAY, MARCH 21, 2017

GAZA COACH INTRODUCES BASEBALL TO PALESTINIANS

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INDIAN WELLS: Roger Federer of Switzerland along with his BNP Paribas Open trophy poses for photographers after defeating Stan Wawrinka of Switzerland during the men's final of the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden on Sunday in Indian Wells, California. —AFP

FEDERER DEFEATS WAWRINKA TO CLAIM INDIAN WELLS TITLE

INDIAN WELLS: Forget the comeback talk. Roger Federer is back. He defeated Stan Wawrinka 6-4, 7-5 to win a record-tying fifth BNP Paribas Open title in an all-Swiss final Sunday to go with his record 18th Grand Slam title at the Australian Open in January after missing most of last year with various injuries.

"For me, the dream run continues," he said. Federer kept reminding everyone during the ATP Masters 1000 event that he was "on the comeback" and, wanting to see how he felt, hadn't planned beyond the first three months of year. He might want to think bigger now.

"This was not part of the plan, to win Australia and Indian Wells. The goal was to be top 8 by after Wimbledon, so I'm there much, much faster," he said. "I will make the plan for the remainder of the season, especially for the clay, after Miami, and then see also what the goals are because the goals are clearly changing after this dream start." Federer tied

the tourney record of Novak Djokovic, who lost in the fourth round, while winning his 90th career title, keeping him third behind Jimmy Connors and Ivan Lendl on the all-time list in the Open era.

At 35 years and seven months, Federer became the oldest champion in the desert tournament's history, surpassing Connors, who was 31 years and five months when he won in 1981.

"It's an absolute huge start to the year for me," he said. "Last year didn't win any titles. The change is dramatic and it feels great." His twin daughters cheered and jumped up and down in a box above the court when Federer put away a high forehand volley while keeping Wawrinka pinned deep behind the baseline on match point. Federer dropped serve just once in five matches, losing the first game of the second set against No. 3 seed Wawrinka. He saved one break point against Rafael Nadal in the fourth round, and never lost set in the tournament. Seeded ninth,

Federer advanced to the semifinals via walkover when Nick Kyrgios withdrew.

'PLAYING BEAUTIFUL'

"The way he's playing is just so beautiful," Wawrinka said. "Everything looks perfect. He's moving amazingly well. He has amazing touch. He's doing everything you can do on the tennis court." In an all-Russian women's final, Elena Vesnina defeated Svetlana Kuznetsova 6-7 (6), 7-5, 6-4. She and Federer earned \$1,175,505 each. Federer will move up four spots to No. 6 in the ATP world rankings on Monday. He hit 23 winners, including 16 off his backhand in the 80-minute match. Wawrinka had 17 winners and 21 unforced errors in front of the announced crowd of 17,382 that didn't fill the stadium. Federer improved to 20-3 against Wawrinka, including 15-0 on hard courts. Wawrinka's wins have all been on clay. "He's the best player ever, so we all used to lose against him,"

Wawrinka said. Vesnina had never advanced beyond the third round in singles and just last year she lost in the first round of qualifying, although she has won three doubles titles at the tournament. She beat No. 2 seed Angelique Kerber and No. 12 Venus Williams on her way to the biggest final of her career at age 30.

FIFTH-OLDEST WOMAN

Kuznetsova is 0-3 in finals here, also finishing runner-up in 2007 and 2008. At age 31, Kuznetsova was the fifth-oldest women to reach the final. But the two-time major champion struggled playing with the lead as the No. 8 seed in front of hundreds of empty seats. "I didn't feel good today because she was very aggressive and I was a little bit out of my game," Kuznetsova said. "I couldn't figure out a lot the wind and stuff like that." Kuznetsova led 4-2 in the third before 14th-seeded Vesnina broke her twice in sweeping the final four games of the

match. Kuznetsova served one of her nine aces to lead 4-1 in the second, prompting Vesnina to bring out her coach-father Sergej Vesnin for a chat. It worked. Vesnina reeled off four straight games to lead 5-4. Her forehand error led to Kuznetsova's break in the 10th game that tied it 5-all. But Vesnina broke back and served out the set 7-5. "She had so many break points on my serve," Vesnina said. "She was 30-love up couple of times on her serves, and I always keep coming back."

Kuznetsova had luck on her side early, winning the first set on a net cord in the tiebreaker. She gave the traditional wave acknowledging her good fortune to Vesnina, who had blown leads of 2-0 and 4-2. Vesnina had 46 winners and 49 unforced errors. She successfully gambled at the net, winning 24 of 32 points during the three-hour match.

Vesnina earned her third career singles title and will move up two spots to a career-high No. 13 in the world rankings yesterday. — AP

MESSI NETS 40TH, 41ST GOALS THIS SEASON IN BARCELONA WIN

BARCELONA: Lionel Messi scored his 40th and 41st goals in all competitions this season to lead Barcelona to a 4-2 victory over 10-man Valencia in the Spanish league on Sunday.

Back in Camp Nou for the first time since its 6-1 victory over Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League, Barcelona got another outstanding performance from Messi, Neymar and Luis Suarez to keep its domestic title defense alive. Barcelona remained two points behind leader Real Madrid, which has a game in hand.

"We had to remain patient, fight back and increase the pace of the match," Barcelona coach Luis Enrique said. "We created a huge number of scoring opportunities." Messi and his strike partners led Barcelona back after Valencia's Eliquim Mangala headed in from a corner in the 29th minute. Neymar, who missed last round's loss at Deportivo La Coruna with a left-leg injury, set up the 35th-minute equalizer by quickly taking a throw-in that left Suarez alone to fire inside the far post.

Mangala had already been booked for fouling Messi when Suarez deftly let a pass by Messi run past as he spun around the Valencia defender. Left with the choice between a likely goal or a second yellow card, Mangala chose to pull Suarez down and was promptly sent off. Messi drilled the resulting penalty kick down the center to put the Catalan club ahead in the 45th.

But Valencia caught the hosts off-guard seconds later with a quick attack from the restart, which was finished by former Barcelona player Munir El Haddadi for 2-2. With an extra player and its three strikers in fine form, Barcelona was only denied a larger winning margin by goalkeeper Diego Alves.

But the Brazilian couldn't keep out Messi's right-footed strike inside his near post in the 53rd. Messi's goals took his league-leading tally to 25 in as many rounds. Neymar also continued his excellent level of play from the PSG rout. That had earned Barcelona a spot in the Champions League quarterfinals as the only team to ever overcome a 4-0 first-leg loss in the tournament.

Neymar had already hit the bar from a free kick before he launched a solo run for more than half the field. The run ended with Neymar's assist for Andre Gomes with a minute left to round off the win over Valencia.

ATLETICO MADRID 3, SEVILLA 1

Eliminated from Europe, Sevilla's challenge for the league title appears almost over following a 3-1 loss at Atletico Madrid. Jorge Sampaoli's side fell eight points off Madrid's pace after a third round without a victory.

The defeat at Atletico came five days after Sevilla failed to protect a 2-1 first-leg advantage and was eliminated from the

Champions League Round of 16 after losing 2-0 at Leicester. "After you have a very difficult loss and you play against one of the best teams in Spain, you are vulnerable, and we paid for it today," Sampaoli said. "We have to pull ourselves together for the last 10 rounds and find the path we were on." Atletico closed to within two points of Sevilla after Antoine Griezmann steered it to a third straight victory.

The France forward first crossed the ball for Diego Godin to head home in the 36th minute before Griezmann scored from a free kick taken well outside the area in the 61st. The goal was Griezmann's fifth in a four-round scoring run and took his tally to 14 in the competition and 22 overall this season.

Jorge "Koke" Resurreccion put the result beyond doubt in the 77th before Sevilla got a consolation goal from Joaquin Correa.

DEPORTIVO LA CORUNA 0, CELTA VIGO 1

Iago Aspas scored late as Celta Vigo won a regional derby at Deportivo La Coruna.

AT THE BOTTOM

Malaga's 0-0 draw at Leganes left both sides on the brink of the relegation zone. Sporting Gijon scored three goals in an eight-minute span to beat Granada 3-1 and climb to within five points of Leganes. Granada remained in second-to-last place. — AP



BARCELONA: FC Barcelona's Lionel Messi, center, celebrates after scoring a goal during the Spanish La Liga soccer match between FC Barcelona and Valencia at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona, Spain, Sunday. — AP

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BOURSA KUWAIT PARTNERS WITH PACI TO RAISE SECURITY



HANNOVER: German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visit the booth of German telecommunications giant Deutsche Telekom as they tour the CeBIT technology fair in Hanover, central Germany yesterday. The Digital Business fair CeBIT in Hanover with Japan as partner country runs from March 20 until March 24. — AFP

UK GIANT VODAFONE TO MERGE WITH INDIA'S IDEA
MERGER TO CREATE INDIA'S BIGGEST TELECOM FIRM

MUMBAI: British mobile phone giant Vodafone will merge its Indian unit with Idea Cellular to create India's largest telecoms operator, the firms said yesterday, as they combine to fight a price war sparked by the country's richest man.

The confirmation ended months of speculation that the two operators were ready to sign a deal to help fend off the Mukesh Ambani-backed Reliance Jio, whose recent arrival has shaken up India's ultra-competitive mobile network market. "Vodafone Group Plc and Idea Cellular today announced that they have reached an agreement to combine their operations in India," they said in a statement to the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE).

"The combined company would become the leading communications provider in India with almost 400 million customers, 35 percent customer market share and 41 percent revenue market share," the statement added. Jio launched in September with an audacious free service for the rest of 2016, followed by vastly cheaper data plans and free voice calls for life, forcing rivals to dramatically slash their tariffs.

It also left competitors scrambling to match the deep pockets of Jio, which is backed by

India's hugely wealthy energy-to-chemicals conglomerate Reliance Industries, and caused a rush towards consolidation in the multi-billion-dollar sector.

The combined Vodafone-Idea company will overtake Bharti Airtel as India's largest network provider. Shares in Idea initially soared following the announcement but then tanked to close down more than nine percent, with reports saying investors were worried the deal undervalued Idea. Vodafone will hold 45.1 percent of the merged entity after it transfers a 4.9 percent stake to Idea backers for 39 billion rupees (\$579 million) in cash. Idea will hold 26 percent in the combined company and the merger will take up to two years to complete. The agreement excludes Vodafone's 42 percent stake in Indus Towers.

Market consolidation

The merged firm will be worth \$23.2 billion, based on the combined enterprise value of \$12.4 billion for Vodafone India and \$10.8 billion for Idea Cellular, according to Bloomberg News. The companies will nominate three directors each, the statement said. Global brokerage firm CLSA has estimated that the tie-up would command a revenue market share of 43

percent by the start of the 2019-20 financial year, ahead of Airtel on 33 percent. Jio would have 13 percent. Indian telecoms analyst

Baburajan Kizhakedath said the two companies would make savings by merging but would come under pressure to reduce tariffs.



MUMBAI: Vodafone Group CEO Vittorio Colao (right) answers a question as Aditya Birla Group chairman, Kumar Mangalam Birla looks on during a press conference in Mumbai yesterday. — AP

"The merged entity will not be able to withstand pressure from Jio because both Vodafone and Idea Cellular are not seen as aggressive as Jio and Bharti Airtel," he told AFP.

The announcement is the latest move towards consolidation as telecom companies in India scramble to shore up their status or cut their losses and run in the face of Jio's price war. Norwegian multinational Telenor announced last month that it was selling up to Airtel, saying the amount of money needed to be competitive in the multi-billion-dollar sector would not offer an acceptable 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.

Reliance Communications (Rel Comm) — owned by Ambani's younger brother Anil Ambani-purchased Russian conglomerate Sistema's Indian telecoms business, branded MTS, last year and is in talks with Tata Teleservices to join forces.

There were a dozen telecoms companies battling for Indian customers in 2010 but industry watchers say they expect that soon there will be only four ventures. — AFP

GOOGLE APOLOGIZES OVER YOUTUBE CONTENT FIASCO

SAN FRANCISCO: Google apologized yesterday for allowing ads to appear alongside offensive videos on YouTube as more high-profile firms such as Mark's & Spencer and HSBC pulled advertising for British markets from Google sites. The British government has suspended its advertising on YouTube after some public sector ads appeared next to videos carrying homophobic and anti-semitic messages, prompting a flood of major companies to follow suit.

Britain is the largest market for Alphabet Inc's Google outside the United States, generating \$7.8 billion mainly from advertising in 2016, or nearly 9 percent of the U.S. giant's global revenue.

"I would like to apologize to our partners and advertisers who might have been affected by their ads appearing on controversial content," Google EMEA President Matt Brittin said at the annual Advertising Week Europe event in London. Besides well-known British brands pulling the plug, some of the world's biggest advertising companies responsible for placing vast amounts of marketing material for clients, said they were reviewing how they worked with Google.

The boycott is the latest clash between advertising companies and the internet giants that have built up dominant positions in digital advertising by offering not only huge audiences but also the ability to apply their user data to

make ads more targeted and relevant. For big advertising groups such as WPP, internet firms are both a client and a competitor, while traditional media groups such as newspapers and general online news publishers are having to compete with them for online dollars.

Hostile industry

"Google faces a hostile industry of media owners in Europe ... and we expect they will be all too happy to highlight future brand safety failings," said Brian Wieser, a senior analyst at Pivotal Research Group. "Overall, we think that the problems which have come to light will have global repercussions as UK marketers potentially adapt their UK policies to other markets and as marketers around the world become more aware of the problem," he said.

WPP, the world's largest advertising firm, said yesterday it was talking to clients and media partners such as Google, Facebook and Snapchat to find ways to prevent brands from being tarnished.

"We have always said Google, Facebook and others are media companies and have the same responsibilities as any other media company. They cannot masquerade as technology companies, particularly when they place advertisements," said Martin Sorrell, the founder and head

of the British firm. Publicis, the world's third largest advertising firm, said in a statement yesterday that it was clear Google had fallen short of meeting advertising standards and that the French company was reviewing its relationship with Google. Google said on Friday it worked hard to remove ads appearing on pages or videos with hate speech, gory or offensive content but with 400 hours of video uploaded to YouTube every minute it did not always get it right.

Brittin said Google had made a commitment to doing better and would simplify advertiser controls, add safer defaults and increase investment to enforce its ad policies faster.

A spokeswoman for Google UK said it would look again at the way it defines incendiary commentary and hate speech to raise the bar on videos and sites allowed for advertising.

On Friday, Google executives were called in to face questions from the advertising industry and Britain over the issue. Representatives for retailers Marks & Spencer, Sainsbury's and Argos, British banks HSBC and RBS, McDonald's, the UK branch of advertising group Havas and the BBC told Reuters their firms had stopped ads. A source at Lloyds Banking said the lender had pulled the plug as well. Others such as Vodafone, Barclays and Tesco were reviewing policies, their representatives said. — Reuters

GERMANY'S ECONOMIC ADVISERS REJECT CRITICISM OF CA SURPLUS

BERLIN: The German government's panel of economic advisers yesterday rejected international criticism of the country's large current account surplus and called US President Donald Trump's protectionist stance a threat to the global economy.

Trump's trade adviser Peter Navarro has accused Germany of exploiting a weak euro to gain a trade advantage and called for bilateral discussions to reduce the \$65 billion US trade deficit with Germany which he described as "one of the most difficult" issues. Chancellor Angela Merkel has rejected such criticism, saying her government was not in charge of the euro but the European Central Bank. During talks with Trump in Washington, Merkel also pointed to high investments by German companies in the United States.

The European Commission and the International Monetary Fund have also urged Germany to take advantage of record-low borrowing costs and increase investment as a measure to reduce the country's large trade and current account surpluses. In 2016, the German trade surplus hit a fresh record at 253 billion euros. The wider current account surplus, which measures the flow of goods, services and investments into and out of a country, rose to an all-time high of 266 billion euros.

"The German current account surplus is high, but this does not signal a macroeconomic imbalance," Christoph Schmidt, head

of the panel of 'wise men' said, adding that demands such as increasing public investment were misleading. The advisers said that the surplus was only pushed up by temporary factors such as the ECB's loose monetary policy and the sharp drop in oil prices. The government should seek to make Germany a more attractive investment location for the private sector which would help to reduce the current account surplus, Schmidt said. "The protectionist measures demanded by President Trump pose a threat to the international trading system and a risk to the global economy," the panel of economic advisers said. The 'wise men' reiterated that they viewed the European Central Bank's monetary policy as "too expansionary" in light of the economic development in the euro zone, adding that the resulting risks for financial stability were rising further. "The ECB should therefore start winding down the bond-buying program as soon as possible," the advisers said.

The panel of economic advisers said they expected German inflation to surpass the ECB's price stability target of just under 2 percent for the eurozone as a whole this year by jumping to 2.2 percent from 0.5 percent in 2016. "The upswing of the German economy continues," they said, adding growth was helped by the robust labor market, a slightly positive outlook for the global economy, higher state spending and the ECB's "still extremely" expansionary monetary policy. — Reuters



KUWAIT: Tijaria Real Estate Chairman Abdulfattah Marafi addresses the meeting. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



AL-TIJARIA REAL ESTATE TO DEVELOP TIJARIA TOWER IN BAHRAIN COMPANY TO DISTRIBUTE 5% DIVIDENDS TO SHAREHOLDERS

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Al-Tijaria Real Estate Company (K.S.C.P) held its ordinary general assembly meeting for the fiscal 2016 that ended on 31 December 2016 yesterday at the Symphony Style Hotel, which was attended by 77.06 percent of the shareholders.

Chairman Abdulfattah Marafi announced that Tijaria would sign a contract for developing Tijaria Tower in Bahrain worth 25 million

Bahraini dinar in 10 days. "The Tijaria Tower in Bahrain will be a landmark tower and top-end residential tower. The company already owns Dilmunia project in Bahrain which is being developed in cooperation with the Muntazahat Company with a value of \$ 45 million," he pointed out.

"Al-Tijaria has strengthened its position as a leading real estate company and has become a part of the development upsurge in Kuwait. We promised to maintain our strategy and

develop for a better future with more achievements with innovative real estate solutions to meet customers' expectations through providing high-quality residential and commercial projects. This will gradually increase the operations of the company in the next few years," added Marafi.

The general assembly agreed on distributing five percent dividends to the shareholders for the fiscal year 2016. "The company achieved net profits of KD 15.2 million with a

profit per share of 8.67 fils. The returns on equity reached 5.4 percent and consolidated profit reached 3.3 percent of the total assets, while the return on capital reached 8.55 percent," he stated.

Company's financial results for 2016 showed that the shareholders' equity growth by 2.1 percent and Company's assets growth by 5.9 percent comparing with the results for the same period in 2015. "The Company registered great improvement in its activities of

which the real estate income was the most important. The total operational income from the properties and the hotel reached KD 24.8 million for the year 2016 with an increase of 23.1 percent comparing to 2015," he explained.

"Al-Tijaria is continuing in expanding according to its strategic plan that was set in order to achieve strong financial results," concluded Marafi. The general assembly approved all resolutions at the meeting.



WARBA BANK CELEBRATES LISTING OF ITS SUKUK IN NASDAQ DUBAI

KUWAIT: Shaheen Al-Ghanem, Chief Executive of Warba Bank, the best investment bank in Kuwait as well as the best corporate advisory, yesterday rang the market-opening bell to celebrate the listing on Nasdaq Dubai of a \$250 million Perpetual Tier 1 Basel III compliant Capital Sukuk.

Warba Bank's \$250 million Sukuk comprises Perpetual Tier 1 Mudaraba Capital Certificates, non-callable before 14 March 2022, with the initial coupon set at 6.50 percent. The Sukuk listed on Nasdaq Dubai on March 15, 2017.

The bell-ringing ceremony took place in the presence of Shaheen Hamad Al-Ghanim/ Warba CEO, Essa Kazim, Governor of Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC), Secretary General of Dubai Islamic Economy Development Centre (DIEDC), and Chairman of Dubai Financial Market (DFM) and senior representatives of Warba Bank, as well as Abdul Wahed Al-Fahim, Chairman of Nasdaq Dubai and Hamed Ali, Chief Executive of Nasdaq Dubai.

The Sukuk instrument will further strengthen Warba Bank's capital base and support the bank's continued growth and development as well as its commitment to

Islamic finance. Established in 2010, Warba Bank is expanding its activities in the full range of banking and investment services in Kuwait in compliance with Sharia'a principles. The bank's activities have long ago earned the investors' trust in observance of the bank high-end performance and its keen commitment to provide its investors with top-notch investment's tools that would grant them a steady growing income.

Moreover, Warba relies on its 5 years new strategy going through 2021 which focuses on transforming the bank to be an Islamic Corporate and Investment Banking Champion with a lean digitally enabled Retail business, through supporting the corporate sector with unparalleled investment's services paving the way for a new developed era in Islamic banking.

Shaheen Al-Ghanem, Chief Executive of Warba Bank, said: "The success of our Sukuk in attracting investors from Kuwait, the MENA region and beyond reflects the confidence of the market in Warba Bank's strategy for growth and development across all our business areas including investment, treasury, corporate banking and

retail banking. We anticipate a great success out of listing Warba sukuk on Nasdaq Dubai's which is first class listing environment, including its close links with regional and global investors as well as its international regulatory standards, provides important support for this capital-raising initiative."

Warba bank has achieved a tremendous success in covering the underwriting of its sukuk. A one week marketing campaign succeeded in attracting investor interest worth approximately \$1.3 billion from Kuwait, Dubai, Hong Kong, Singapore and London attaining an oversubscription of more than 5 times the sukuk issuance size. The matter that reflects the bank's solidarity, and the overall national economy stability in general considering that this issuance is considered to be one of the most successful issuances in the market.

Warba sukuk underwriting has been achieved as the following: 27 percent in Kuwait, 43 percent in the markets of the Middle East and North Africa, 22 percent in the USA and Europe and 8 percent in Asia. The next step is to list the Sukuk in the Irish stock exchange.

SOARING HOUSE PRICES LOCK AUSTRALIA'S HOMELESS OUT

SYDNEY: Homelessness is on the rise in Australia, experts warn, with a growing number of people failing to benefit from the nation's stellar economy as it readies to mark a record 26 years without a recession. The unprecedented economic expansion-fuelled by a massive mining investment boom-has boosted house prices and lined the pockets of many citizens.

But it has also led to the country's biggest cities, Sydney and Melbourne, being ranked second and 10th on a list of the world's least affordable housing. The soaring prices have placed further pressure on those already struggling to afford a roof over their heads, with a public outcry on housing affordability sparking action by federal and state governments to fund more social and inexpensive residential projects. "Australia is a wealthy country and so it shouldn't have the levels of homelessness that it does have," Homelessness New South Wales (NSW) chief Katherine McKernan told AFP.

"If you compare it to London and New York, the numbers of people seeking homelessness support are comparatively higher. We think that homelessness is increasing in Sydney and Melbourne due to the lack of affordable housing." Australia's agency for health and welfare statistics AIHW said demand for homelessness services reached a record high of 279,000 people in 2015-16, led by those affected by domestic and family violence, a 33 percent jump from 2011-12 when the data was first collected.

More than 100,000 people were reported homeless in the 2011 national census, with welfare groups expecting the most recent survey held last year to show an increase. Rough sleepers are more visible in cities, with Melbourne's Herald Sun describing a homeless camp outside a major train station during the Australian Open tennis Grand Slam in January as a "grand slum".

In downtown Sydney, Lenz Priestley has set up a "safe space" for the homeless, offering 24/7 access to free food just metres from the Reserve Bank of Australia, shiny office towers and the NSW state parliament. "People have the basic human right to feel safe," Priestley said. "I think the support services (in Sydney) aren't even in the library when it comes to rough-sleeper safety."

Among those resting on piles of bedding spread across colourful crates is 20-year-old Nina Wilson, who helps Priestley run the Martin Place site. "I am now in transitional housing as I'm nearly six months pregnant and this is sort of my way of giving back because I know what it's like to be homeless... I can't just watch these guys have nothing," Wilson said.

Salvatore Magenta, 64, said he has been living on the streets since 2000 as he grapples with growing health problems. "I slept in a car for about 15 years, I didn't let no one know what I was doing with my life," Magenta said. "I will need housing soon, or someone will find me dead on the streets." —AFP

EXCHANGE RATES

AL-MUZAINI EXCHANGE CO.

ASIAN COUNTRIES	
Japanese Yen	2.715
Indian Rupees	4.672
Pakistani Rupees	2.916
Srilankan Rupees	2.011
Nepali Rupees	2.920
Singapore Dollar	219.080
Hongkong Dollar	39.405
Bangladesh Taka	3.814
Philippine Peso	6.099
Thai Baht	8.760

GCC COUNTRIES	
Saudi Riyal	81.641
Qatari Riyal	84.087
Omani Riyal	795.080
Bahraini Dinar	812.940
UAE Dirham	83.354

ARAB COUNTRIES	
Egyptian Pound - Cash	20.050
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	16.789
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.229
Tunisian Dinar	135.980
Jordanian Dinar	431.010
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	2.040
Syrian Lira	2.182
Morocco Dirham	31.029

EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES	
US Dollar Transfer	305.950
Euro	331.960
Sterling Pound	381.520
Canadian dollar	230.300
Turkish lira	84.930

Swiss Franc	308.570
Australian Dollar	238.640
US Dollar Buying	304.750

GOLD

20 Gram	251.710
10 Gram	128.770
5 Gram	65.230

DOLLARCO EXCHANGE CO. LTD

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 Pecho	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

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
	Europe	
British Pound	0.372232	0.382232
Czech Korune	0.004182	0.016182
Danish Krone	0.040248	0.045248
Euro	0.322837	0.331837
Norwegian Krone	0.031992	0.037192
Romanian Leu	0.084736	0.084736
Slovakia	0.009162	0.019162
Swedish Krona	0.030720	0.035720
Swiss Franc	0.300121	0.311121
Turkish Lira	0.078468	0.088768

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
	Australasia	
Australian Dollar	0.227224	0.239224
New Zealand Dollar	0.207932	0.217432

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
	America	
Canadian Dollar	0.223519	0.232519
Georgina Lari	0.138094	0.138094
US Dollars	0.301650	0.306050
US Dollars Miint	0.302150	0.306050
Asia		
Bangladesh Taka	0.003496	0.004080
Chinese Yuan	0.042903	0.046403
Hong Kong Dollar	0.037336	0.040086
Indian Rupee	0.002691	0.004788

Indonesian Rupiah	0.000018	0.000024
Japanese Yen	0.002631	0.002811
Kenyan Shilling	0.003056	0.003055
Korean Won	0.000260	0.000275
Malaysian Ringgit	0.065330	0.071330
Nepalese Rupee	0.002960	0.003130
Pakistan Rupee	0.002668	0.002958
Philippine Peso	0.006000	0.006300
Sierra Leone	0.000038	0.000044
Singapore Dollar	0.212504	0.222507
South African Rand	0.018062	0.026562
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001656	0.002326
Taiwan	0.009788	0.009968
Thai Baht	0.008439	0.008989

Arab		
Bahraini Dinar	0.804437	0.812937
Egyptian Pound	0.011655	0.020908
Iranian Riyal	0.000085	0.000086
Iraqi Dinar	0.000197	0.000257
Jordanian Dinar	0.425578	0.434578
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000152	0.000252
Moroccan Dirhams	0.020111	0.044111
Nigerian Naira	0.000396	0.001031
Omani Riyal	0.787735	0.793415
Qatar Riyal	0.083170	0.084620
Saudi Riyal	0.080447	0.081747
Syrian Pound	0.001297	0.001517
Tunisian Dinar	0.130578	0.138578
Turkish Lira	0.078468	0.088768
UAE Dirhams	0.081820	0.083520
Yemeni Riyal	0.000994	0.001074

Chart 1: Awarded projects (KDbillion)

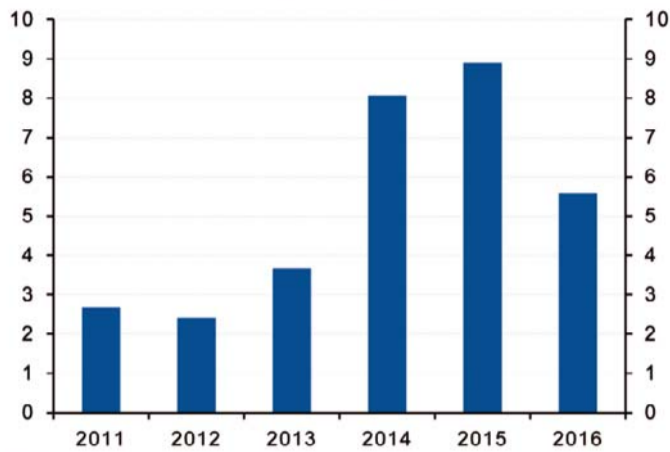


Chart 2: Awarded projects by sector (KDbillion)

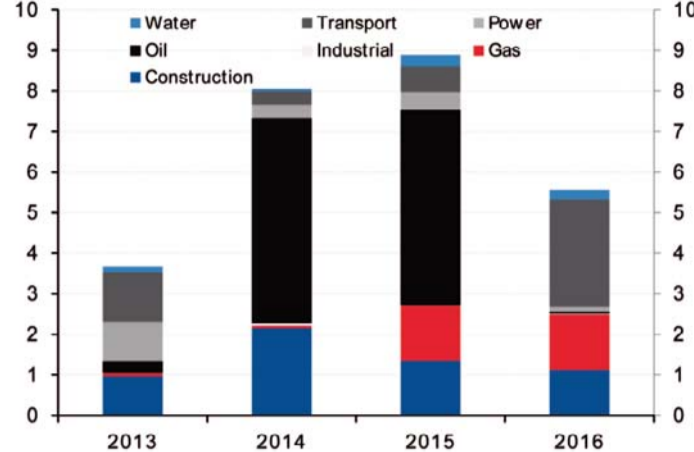


Table 1: Largest projects awarded in 2016 (contract value, KWD billion)

Project	Sector	Value
MPW – Airport Expansion: New Passenger Building II	Transport	1.3
KNPC – LNG Import and Regasification Terminal	Gas	0.9
KOC – Jurassic Non-Associated Phase 2 [3 contracts]	Gas	0.4
KU – Sabah Al Salem Uni. Admin and Academic Bldgs [2 contracts]	Construction	0.3
PAHW – South Al-Mutlaa City: Major Infrastructure Works	Transport	0.3
MPW – New Maternity Hospital	Construction	0.2
KHAC – Expat Hospitals	Construction	0.2
MPW – Northern Regional Road	Transport	0.2

Source: MEED Projects

Source: MEED Projects

Source: MEED Projects

KUWAIT TO FOCUS ON POWER, TRANSPORT PROJECTS IN 2017

NBK ECONOMIC REPORT

Kuwait's project activity in 2016 remained relatively healthy, though it eased somewhat from exceptionally strong years in 2014 and 2015. Awards in 2016 continued to exceed levels seen before 2014, when the projects pipeline had witnessed significant delays due to administrative and technical challenges. Major awards during the year included the new airport terminal as well as the gas import terminal and regasification facility.

Public-private partnerships witness delays

Despite the healthy level of activity, 2016 did face some delay in its pipeline of PPP projects which have not moved as quickly following the awarding of the first in 2013. Kuwait established a public-private partnership (PPP) law and a PPP governing body in 2008. Based on the experience and difficulties faced in the award of the first PPP project, the Al-Zour North Phase 1, the law was amended in 2014. As a result, the Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects (KAPP) became the official PPP governing body. KAPP had expected to move ahead with several PPP projects in 2016 but delays kept the projects from being awarded. According to KAPP authorities, there are four major PPP projects worth a total of KD 1.9 billion under evaluation. The projects are the second phase of Al-Zour North independent water and power project (IWPP), a school development program (the first PPP of its kind in the region), a solid waste project, and the development of highway rest houses.

The PPP model is critical for the success of Kuwait's development plan, with these projects accounting for around 20 percent of the KD 30 billion in projects under the plan. Proposed PPP project-shelp alleviate pressure on fiscal expenditure and encourage international and domestic private investors to participate in viable opportunities found in Kuwait.

Transport, gas, and construction led 2016 projects

Projects in the transport, gas, and construction industries dominated 2016 awards. They included a new passenger terminal at Kuwait International Airport, and roadwork-related infrastructure for new townships. A natural gas regasification plant and import terminal was also approved during the year, as was the second phase of Kuwait's first non-associated gas production program. Meanwhile, the construction of two hospitals and parts of the new Kuwait University campus are underway. These projects will address the major develop-

ment needs of the country, especially those related to building energy and housing capacities, and providing healthcare and education services.

Infrastructure activity picked up in 2016

Transport-related projects more than quadrupled in 2016 compared to 2015 in terms of the total value of contracts awarded. Since 2006, Kuwait's Ministry of Public Works (MPW) has awarded KD 7.5 billion worth of projects. Of those, KD 5.3 billion are still underway, and more than KD 2.7 billion were awarded in 2016 alone. The largest contract value awarded in 2016 is a KD 1.3 billion sub-project within the Kuwait airport expansion project. The new passenger building is the second largest project ever awarded in Kuwait since 1995.

The Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) is committed to building townships to address the growing need for housing in Kuwait and the decongestion of Kuwait's main residential and metropolitan areas. In 2016, a number of infrastructure contracts for these townships were awarded. PAHW awarded the first of four sub-projects for South Al-Mutlaa City. This parent project will have a capacity of 30,000 plots to be distributed, as well as amenities like parks, public service buildings, supermarkets, and other facilities. The first contract for major infrastructure works was awarded in June 2016 for KD 296 million, and is expected to be completed in September 2020.

Gas projects to expand capacity

In the first quarter of 2016, there was a surge in awarded gas projects. The second largest project awarded in 2016 was Kuwait National Petroleum Company's (KNPC) liquefied natural gas (LNG) import terminal and regasification facility, located in Al-Zour, with a contract value of KD 908 million. The facility will supply the necessary fuel to power plants during peak electricity demand. Another phase is planned for this project with the same capacity, and is expected to be up for bidding in the coming year. These projects are integral to the expansion of power and water capacity in Kuwait as well as the move to cleaner fuel options.

In January 2016, Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) awarded several contracts related to oil and gas, worth a total of KD 497 million, KD 372 million of which was for the Jurassic non-associated oil and gas reserves expansion project. Contractors Spetco International and Schlumberger will conduct engi-

neering, procurement, and construction (EPC) work on the three stages that make up the second phase. The project will produce gas from the northern fields and improve efficiency in oil and gas production.

Construction

Kuwait University awarded two contracts worth a total of KD 341 million for the construction of administration and academic support buildings in its new Shdadiyah campus. Construction for the Sabah Al-Salem University parent project, as a whole, is expected to be completed in March 2020. In the planning phase are the medical campus and the College of Architecture and Computer Science.

The Ministry of Public Works awarded a KD 226.3 million contract for the new maternity hospital, part of the development plan goals of expanding healthcare facilities. The new hospital will provide 600 beds and will be located in the Sabah Medical Area.

Separately, Kuwait Health Assurance Company (KHAC) signed two contracts, a combined value of KD 165 million with the China Metallurgical Group Corporation to build two hospitals that will be located in the Ahmadi and Jahra areas. KHAC is a PPP company established in 2014 responsible for providing healthcare services to the expatriate community in Kuwait.

2017 focus

The first half of 2017 is expected to be very active in project awards, especially PPP projects. According to MEED Projects, more than KD 6.2 billion worth of contracts will be in the bidding phase for the first two quarters. With the aim of shifting the energy mix used in the power and water sectors, the government is looking to award gas-based power and water plants. Kuwait's second largest IWPP, Al Zour North 2 power and water desalination plant, is up for bidding in the first quarter at net project value of KD 806 million (two contracts). Al Zour North 3 and 4 will be gas-based as well and are expected to be awarded over the following two years.

Also in the first quarter, KAPP expects to award wastewater and solid waste management projects at Umm al-Hayman and Kabd, respectively; the projects are expected to be worth a combined KD 775 million (two contracts). The second quarter is expected to witness the awarding of a second major infrastructure works contract worth KD 992 million for South Al-Mutlaa City.

كيبكو
KIPCO
شركة مشاريع الكويت (القابضة)
Kuwait Projects Company (Holding)



CONDOLENCES

The Management and Staff of
Kuwait Projects Company (Holding)

wish to offer their heartfelt condolences to

Mr. Patrick Declan Sawey

(Group Treasurer)

on the sad demise of his

Mother

May her soul rest in peace and may

God grant comfort and strength to the

bereaved family members

IMF DELAYS UKRAINE LOAN IN RESPONSE TO TRADE BLOCK

WASHINGTON: The International Monetary Fund will not approve a new \$1 billion loan payment for Ukraine yesterday as scheduled, due to "recent developments" in the country, the IMF confirmed.

In Kiev, Ukraine President Petro Poroshenko slammed as "absolutely irresponsible" the trade blockade imposed on the Russian-backed rebel eastern regions by the country's politicians, which led to the delayed loan installment for the cash-strapped nation. "The IMF Executive Board meeting on Ukraine scheduled for yesterday, March 20 has been postponed to allow staff time to assess the implications of recent developments for the program," the fund said in a statement.

"Staff expect to announce a new date soon." The IMF in early March agreed on the review of the oft-delayed, \$17.5 billion loan program first agreed in 2015, but the country will have to wait longer to get the next installment, which requires board approval.

The loan has seen delays due to the government's failure to implement reforms, but now has been impacted by last week's decision by the former Soviet nation to halt trade with pro-Moscow insurgents that it has been battling since 2014.

Poroshenko said he will hold a meeting yesterday with his prime minister, finance minister and central bank chief "in order to correct the results caused by an absolutely irresponsible behavior of Ukrainian state-mongers." He said "the aftermath of the blockade," caused the loan delay. "We must unite our efforts to receive the tranche in the nearest time."

The pro-Western leadership in Kiev took the drastic step after rebels seized dozens of Ukrainian-owned businesses on their territory in response to a trade blockade by nationalist protesters. Kiev also slapped sanctions on the Ukrainian subsidiaries of five Russian banks including state-run giants Sberbank and VTB in part over Moscow's decision to officially recognize identity documents issued by the rebels. —AFP

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EUROPEAN MARKETS SLIDE ON G20 DISAGREEMENT

LONDON: World stock markets fell yesterday after G20 finance ministers failed to renew an anti-protectionist pledge...

ously missing from the final communique from the meeting of finance ministers from the G20 group of developed and emerging nations...

'More aggressive' Citi analyst Ebrahim Rahbari argued in a note to clients that rising protectionism posed a key risk to the world economy...

ment announced it would begin the two-year procedure to exit the European Union on March 29. Share prices remained broadly stable...

Swiss francs. Legal sources told AFP yesterday that UBS will go on trial in France for establishing a wide-ranging tax fraud scheme worth nearly 10 billion euros...

Daily Kuwait Stock Exchange Report. Monday 20 March 2017. Index, Change, Closing, Last Closing, High, Low. Price index, Weighted Index, KXS 15. Trades, Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change.



TOKYO: People walk by an electronic stock board of a securities firm in Tokyo yesterday.—AP

National Bank of Kuwait Financial Markets Daily Report. Global Stock Indices, MENA Stock Indices, Global Currencies Exchange Rate, MENA Currencies Exchange Rate, Global Interest Rates, Global Bond Yields, Commodities.

For more information, call Global Investment House on 1 80 42 42. www.globalinv.net

Chairman's message

KFH ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETING FOR FINANCIAL YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2016



KUWAIT: Mazin Saad Al-Nahedh (from left), Hamad Al-Marzouk and Sayed Mohammed Al-Tabtabai.

— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Praise be to Allah the Almighty, and Peace and Blessings be upon our Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), his family and companions.

Dear esteemed shareholders, Assalamu Alaikum Warahmatu Allah Wabarakatuh...

On behalf of myself, my fellow colleagues and members of the Board of Directors of Kuwait Finance House ("KFH" / the "Bank"), I would like to present to you KFH Group Annual Report for the year 2016.

Considering the unprecedented economic, oil and geopolitical developments which have prevailed worldwide, year 2016 may be considered as the year of challenges for the region in general and the banking sector in particular. These challenges were reflected clearly on capital market performances, subdued local and global economic growth drives, lack of confidence in the European Economy especially after Brexit and the sluggish growth in China. These factors have led to an increase in raw material prices and continued tightening of Federal monetary policy.

Despite the economic challenges, with a clear commitment to our valued customers

and stakeholders, KFH has attained a remarkable and well balanced performance during 2016, through its prudent and flexible business model and efficient risk management methods. KFH Group has maintained the distinguished leading position of its operations locally, regionally and internationally, thus enhancing shareholders profit to reach KD 165.2 million i.e. an increase of 13.3% y-o-y in 2016. Also, we have achieved remarkable and tangible progress on the rate of return on shareholders' equity.

Group's main financial indicators continued their ascending trend including increase in profitability and enhancement of capital adequacy ratio to reach 17.88 percent, well above the required 15 percent. We have also observed and adhered to Basel regulations on fixed liquidity ratios, which has enabled us to face market challenges, and future potential regulatory requirements.

Our well balanced performance is attributed to the positive group synergy, professional and efficient execution of our integrated strategy, proper well bonded relations and

coordination among all parties whether at head office or in various countries where the group operates including Turkey, Bahrain, Malaysia, Germany, Saudi Arabia and others. This remarkable performance is achieved through a set of successful strategic initiatives which were the cornerstone in reinforcing and supporting governance and banking services at the group level.

We have implemented a set of policies and procedures during the year to improve efficiency of daily communications, ensure smooth inflow of information at the group level, provide new and innovative solutions to customers and offer several investment funds inside and outside Kuwait. Also, we have managed to offer a Sukuk Fund with variable US\$ returns as well as a real estate fund in USA.

Financing Income increased in 2016 to reach KD 718 million. By the grace of Allah, we have achieved net shareholders profit of KD 165.2 million while earnings per share reached fil. 32.01. Total assets approximated to KD 16.5 billion. KFH customers' deposits reached KD 10.7 billion. Meanwhile, total operating expenses declined for the second consecutive year by KD 35.5 million i.e. 11 percent, (KD 31.5 million or 8 percent in 2015 compared to 2014). These figures reflect the robust financial position that KFH is occupying which led the group to achieve the results even during the hard times encountered by local and global economy. KFH Group endeavoured to preserve KFH assets and achieve best financial results.

Asset management

With regards to asset management by the Grace of Allah, KFH Group has managed to strengthen returns on investments following extensive 3-years efforts through KFH Capital Company, restructuring of investments and improvement of assets quality, thus improving capital adequacy ratios. All these activities are in line with our strategy to focus on and develop core banking business.

While we are committed to achieve remarkable and rewarding long term returns for shareholders, the board proposes to the general assembly to distribute cash dividends by 17 percent, bonus shares by 10 percent and distribute profit on investment deposits and saving accounts.

Market share

We have successfully managed to lead the Islamic bank's market share by financing major projects in Kuwait including participation in the Kuwait Government Debt Program of KD 700 Million. We have also financed the clean fuel project for Kuwait National Petroleum Company which is the largest banking syndication transaction in the history of Kuwait where KFH contributed KD 275 million of the total KD 490 million.

Kuwait Finance House - Turkey has successfully issued the largest Ijara Sukuk transaction to the private sector in Turkish market amounting TL 300 Million. Other Sukuks were also issued to enhance and support its capital position amounting to a US\$ 350 Million (Second Tier) for a 10-year term with 7.9 percent returns.

KFH - Bahrain has financed several projects,



Hamad Abdulmohsen Al-Marzouq

namely Bahrain Marasi project amounting \$3 Billion in addition to Deerat Al-Oyoun project, value of which exceeded \$730 million which aimed to build more than 3 thousand residential units in Bahrain. We have also completed construction of Wadi Al-Sail Mall which is the first development project among 3 other projects initiated by a group subsidiary.

KFH group received, during the year, highly distinguished banking awards namely, the Best Islamic Financial Institution in the Gulf and Best Islamic Project Finance Provider from Global Finance Magazine. KFH has also won several other remarkable and significant awards from Islamic Finance News (IFN) both as the "Best Islamic Bank in Kuwait" as well as "Best Global Islamic Bank" for the year 2016, as part of Global Islamic Finance Awards (GIFA) and Best SME Customer Service Award by Banker Middle East in addition to several other awards received during the year in appreciation of its multiple activities and services.

Local society activities

We have, during 2016, expanded our programs to participate in local society activities. In this respect, KFH has paid KD 7.5 million to Zakat House in recognition of the importance of projects that would serve society and accentuate the humane side of our business. Our focus covers other projects and activities aiming to achieve social growth and development at the educational and health sectors, provide environmental care and support youth initia-

tives and other vital sectors. In recognition of the importance of technology and innovation, we have developed and upgraded IT infrastructure, expanded banking solutions by using modern technology introduced new digital banking services to customers along with other direct services provided through our extensive branch network covering 480 branches. In addition to ATMs network spread worldwide. This comes as part of customer centric, service oriented innovative program.

On the banking innovation and development aspects, KFH group has enhanced its accomplishments by implementing several initiatives, such as, the launch of its website (kfh.com) which comprises several modifications and characteristics to appear as a new brand. KFH innovation centre has also participated in reinforcing innovation and development at the group level by launching employees' competition which has resulted in adopting several new ideas and products. The best ten innovative ideas received from various staff members including our subsidiaries operating in Kuwait, Turkey, Malaysia and Bahrain were honoured.

KFH enhanced its effective communication channels with society through its social media where followers exceeded 600 Thousand Followers. KFH's social media has efficiently promoted customer service and banking products awareness, round the clock, in a unique and modern touch to cope up with the new-gen life style requirements.

We would like to avail this opportunity to convey our sincere gratitude and appreciation to our shareholders and customers for their continuous and valuable support. We are confident by the grace of Allah that we will continue to achieve rewarding returns for our shareholders and depositors.

Also, I would like to avail this opportunity to convey sincere gratitude and appreciation to all our employees at the group levels, as well as, the members of the honourable Fatwa & Sharia Supervisory Board for their distinguished and outstanding efforts in accrediting our functions and activities.

Finally, I would like to convey our sincere thanks, gratitude and appreciation to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may Allah safeguard, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may Allah safeguard, and His Highness The Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, may Allah safeguard. Our thanks and appreciation are also extended to Dr Mohammed Al-Hashel, Central Bank of Kuwait Governor and all regulatory authorities for their ongoing support to the banking sector in the State of Kuwait.

May Allah grant us Success.

Hamad Abdulmohsen Al-Marzouq
Chairman

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

KUWAIT: 2016 KFH Group achieved net profit attributable to shareholders of the bank of KD 165.2 million in 2016 compared to KD million in 2015 i.e. an increase by 13.3 percent. Meanwhile, earnings per share reached fil. 32.01 i.e. a growth by 13.2 percent compared to 2015 (Fil. 28.27). Financing income increased to approximate KD 718 million i.e. an increase by 3.3 percent compared to KD 695 Million in 2015, thus reflecting KFH policy which targets the development and growth of sustainable profit by focusing on banking activities.

In continuation of KFH cost optimization policy which aims to enhance profit and improve financial performance indicators, total operating expenses for the group declined for the second consecutive year to reach KD 295 million in 2016 compared to KD 330.5 million in 2015 i.e. a decline by KD 35.5 million or 11 percent (decline by KD 31.5 million or 8 percent in 2015 compared to 2014). As a result, net operating income reached KD 365 million i.e. a growth ratio by 8.2 percent compared to last year, excluding investment income which are of a non-recurring nature. Provisions and impairments charged to the consolidated statement of income declined to reach KD 157.2 million during 2016 compared to KD 183.6 million in 2015 i.e. a decline by 14 percent.

Consolidated Financial Position 2016

Total consolidated assets approximated KD 16.5 Billion as at the end of 2016 while financing receivables approximated KD 8.2 billion. The group maintained a robust liquidity

position where cash and balances with banks and financial institutions, and short term murabaha reached KD 4.4 billion. KFH Kuwait non-performing financing ratio declined to 1.67 percent at the end of 2016 compared to 1.98 percent in 2015. Group non-performing financing ratio declined to 2.58 percent compared to 3.03 percent in 2015. Depositors' accounts reached KD 10.7 Billion while total due to banks and financial institutions reached KD 2.9 Billion as at the end of 2016.

Equity attributable to the shareholders of the Bank

Shareholders' equity increased to reach KD 1.810 Billion i.e. an increase by 1.8 percent compared to KD 1.779 Billion as at the end of 2015. Capital adequacy ratio calculated as per Basel III regulations reached 17.88 percent as at the end of the year, thus exceeding the 15 percent ratio determined by CBK.

Proposed dividends

The board proposed the distribution of cash dividends by 17 percent as at the year ended 31st December 2016 (17 percent in 2015) and the issuance of bonus shares by 10 percent (10 percent in 2015) of paid up capital subject to ordinary general assembly approval and finalization of legal procedures.

Directors remuneration reached KD 772 Thousand (KD 610 Thousand in 2015) which is considered within the limit permissible as per local regulations and subject to ordinary general assembly approval.

Chief Executive Officer's Statement and Management Discussion**KFH MAINTAINS STABILITY, GROWTH: AL-NAHEDH**

KUWAIT: KFH-Group CEO, Mazin Saad Al-Nahedh said: In continuation of its remarkable success, KFH has maintained stability and achieved growth during 2016 despite the challenges encountered during the year. The bank achieved a growth rate of 13.3 percent amounting KD 165.2 million in net profit attributable to shareholders of the bank during 2016 and a growth by 8.2 percent in net operating income compared to preceding year (less non-recurring investment income).

These results have incarnated the success of the policies and plans adopted by KFH and applied by the executive management to establish certain pillars and foundations that would achieve growing ratios of sustainable revenues for KFH Group dependent on sustainable operational performance.

Our achieved goal is an inseparable part of a chain of activities focused on banking business, quality service, technology, customer and employee satisfaction, enhancement and encouragement of innovation and creativity, optimized spending, sound management of risk and governance, expansion of market share. While observing flexibility of organizational structure, enhancement of cooperation and coordination among subsidiary banks, setting a permanent mechanism to ensure smooth inflow of information and unification of procedures, continued structuring of investments given best market fundamentals and build national human resources to lead and bear responsibility.

Goals achieved

We achieved set goals successfully despite the challenges prevailing in the general operational environment in the local market and the markets where KFH subsidiary banks operate abroad. KFH culture is currently focused on products diversification and customer service concurrently through cross-selling which considers customer as an integrated entity and ensures an adequate management of the joint relationship. Professional values and principles are developed, without impacting performance trend, by simplifying service and product provision procedures. Similar activities are consolidated

under a single hub to achieve simplicity of procedures and quality control in a parallel effort that would mitigate human involvement in certain cases and increase it in some other cases.

Significant and outstanding integrity was achieved among the various group's functions, such as, financial control, audit, IT, risk department, and human resources, that contributed remarkably to management's cost optimization plan successfully. Total operating expenses declined for the second consecutive year by KD 35.5 Million or 11 percent (KD 31.5 Million or 8 percent in 2015 compared to 2014). In addition, 61 percent of KFH Group net profit was realized through entities in Kuwait while the contribution of subsidiaries abroad approximated 39 percent. Remarkable success achieved is underpinned by easing procedures, cancellation of recurring operations, strengthening relations among group subsidiaries and benefiting from their experience in the development, re-drafting, and review of procedures to accelerate task completion process.

Growth in high quality assets, stability of deposits base, expansion of group network and launching of new innovative products were all highly significant factors in achieving a highly distinguished performance this year. On the aspect of focusing on banking business, operational revenues resulting from banking activities represent the main part of the financial statements. We continued to introduce high quality banking products and services to enhance our market share and encounter competition. This was achieved via two angles, the first covering the increase in the number of branches which has reached 65 branches in Kuwait and 481 branches worldwide. We have also developed ATM systems to be a vital instrument for branches to mitigate work pressure. ATM systems were replaced by highly sophisticated and developed systems of Al-Shamel System which provides, in addition to the traditional functions, other services including cash deposit service and retail and corporate cheque deposit. New security programs and applications were launched to protect customer's transactions and instant bank cards issuance system was implement-

ed at the group level. Needless to say that KFH is the first bank in Kuwait to offer Super-Premium Debit Cards in the State of Kuwait and issued two distinguished cards, Visa Debit Infinite and Visa Signature, to the new high network tiers of (Elite) and (Pioneers) customers.

High network customers

KFH launched new products and services including the "Winner" account to attract a new tier of payroll customers. Also reclassified high network tier customers into (Elite) and (Pioneers) with the introduction of new incentives and advantages for each category by highly specialized relationship managers. New tiers target customers with medium credit. We have also added to the Gold account the facility to trade and open accounts online through KFH website. To align with the needs of the customer, we have introduced Zakat payment service through ATM machines to save their time and effort.

KFH lays great emphasis on customer care, thus aiming to maintain and preserve customer trust. In this respect, we have increased banking services provided to Premium customers and offered them a set of investment funds, such as, variable US dollar Sukuk Fund as well as the Real Estate Fund in USA.

Retail banking services and Private Banking services recorded outstanding results beyond all expectations. These achievements were the result of the implementation of certain initiatives, thus aiming to focus on customers in various group sectors, enhance customers' satisfaction, conduct researches and studies to obtain opinions, listen to their suggestions and record their complaints through complaints unit.

To enhance IT channels and to foster modern technology as one of the means to provide customer service, mitigate costs, achieve speed and security, KFH has developed telephone banking services, enhanced its technical and human capabilities and transformed it into a marketing tool. We have also developed KFH website as a marketing and introductory hub for KFH group, comprising a set of modern and newly developed free technical services which our customer may benefit from

through our website at any time and place. To this end, KFH launched the (PUSH) service for customer banking services and (MY Salary Link) service to inquire about salaries in addition to the operation of a new automated treasury system at the group level and the operation of an integrated automated system to manage customer relations and reiterate KFH emphasis on this aspect.

Direct sale function

To enhance direct sale function role as a hub to increase sales, KFH is in the process of implementing a wide spread program to enhance the capabilities of KFH sales team through the recruitment of employees who are able to develop the group's ambitious plans. On the retail finance side, KFH has developed highly distinguished products for individuals to fulfill their needs of construction finance. KFH provides several products and multiple solutions in cooperation with accredited suppliers. We have continued to add unique and high quality services to customers in the Kuwait market by providing new offers of educational and medical finance services in cooperation with highly reputable and distinguished educational and medical organizations in a way that would contribute to the enhancement of cost optimization and movement of economic wheel. Furthermore, KFH has developed new products in the fields of vehicle finance during the year including finance, operational and leasing finance for various types of vehicles through our showrooms spread all over Kuwait.

Corporate finance portfolio achieved growth by 17.5 percent with a total value KD 293 million as the portfolio value was KD 1.673 billion in 2015 increased to KD 1.966 billion in 2016.

In continuation of our customer care, KFH has launched in 2016 "I Care" program which acts as an extension of the initiative (We Care) launched in the past. This initiative lays responsibility on employees' shoulders to provide the best services internally and externally. To this end KFH has honored more than 100 employees in this program which will continue its activity and momentum during 2017.

BOURSA KUWAIT PARTNERS WITH PACI TO RAISE SECURITY

THE NEW SERVICE OFFERS THE LATEST ELECTRONIC SIGNATURE FEATURE

KUWAIT: Reinforcing the credibility of disclosed information, Boursa Kuwait announced today its partnership with the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI), to offer the latest Electronic Signature feature, which acts as an authentication system for the information provided by listed companies on the Company Information Portal (CIP). The partnership was announced during a press conference held at the Boursa Kuwait premises, yesterday, where both parties signed the partnership agreement to make it official.

Commenting on this new system, Boursa Kuwait Vice Chairman and CEO, Khaled AbdulRazzaq Al-Khaled said: "When we initially launched the CIP, our main objective was to capitalize on the importance of providing stakeholders with a credible, transparent and accessible information platform. Building on that, it was equally significant that we maintained a secure and authenticated gateway for that information, hence our partnership with PACI to offer the Electronic Authentication Gateway for Civil ID's verification".

Al-Khaled added: "We chose PACI as our partner to provide secured identity authentication as they are one of the few ISO 27001 certified organizations in Kuwait. The fact that PACI is the sole authority in Kuwait that issues the National Civil IDs for all legal residents, along with its secured authentication process, gives it the unique qualification that Boursa Kuwait needed to implement CIP authentication".

Boursa Kuwait designed and launched CIP with the aim of providing a credible and up to date information platform for all listed companies, which can be used as a reference site by all stakeholders.

The Portal requires listed companies to upload news regarding disclosure announcements, their profile page and their financial statements with full authority to make regular updates.

"Boursa Kuwait seeks partnerships that add value to its long terms vision and strategy, and supports its day to day operational objectives. We thank PACI for their cooperation and we look forward to a productive and longstanding partnership that is mutu-



KUWAIT: Khaled AbdulRazzaq Al-Khaled, Boursa Kuwait Vice Chairman and CEO and Musaed Al-Asousi - Director General at PACI, signing the agreement at Boursa Kuwait headquarter.

ally beneficial", Al-Khaled added. The Electronic Signature system, provided by PACI, requires the authorized representatives from listed companies in Boursa Kuwait to

visit PACI's offices to activate the electronic signature. Therefore, it is crucial that the companies update their information at PACI.

Musaed Al-Asousi - Director General at PACI, said: "This partnership between the Public Authority for Civil Information and Boursa Kuwait is a strategic move to enrich the cooperation between the public and private sectors in the field of electronic connectivity. The agreement aims to develop the quality of services by facilitating efficient procedures to ease the process for the users. I am pleased to emphasize that the Authority stands ready to cooperate with Boursa Kuwait to provide the required services, in accordance with the agreement concluded between the two entities".

Al-Asousi highlighted PACI's commitment and efforts towards the private and public sectors by streamlining the process and providing better security and authentication that benefits both sectors, which should result in increased public confidence on the authenticity of information provided by Boursa Kuwait.

For its part, PACI shall have a permanent presence at Boursa Kuwait. PACI office shall act as the legal and authorized service provider of the Electronic Authentication Gateway for Civil ID's verification.

AGILITY EXPANDS LOGISTICS FOOTPRINT IN SINGAPORE

SINGAPORE: Agility, a leading global logistics provider, acquired a two-story warehouse close to Changi International Airport, giving it more than 600,000 square feet of warehouse space in total in Singapore.

The newly acquired 177,000-square-foot warehouse is located in an area with access to an array of logistics services and two major expressways. Agility has operated in Singapore for more than 40 years and employs more than 400 people there. It owns four other warehouses in Singapore.

With an expanded footprint, Agility will be offering more services: automated quality inspections; a container-management e-system; a large-scale recycling program for packing materials; and enhanced warehouse management systems with regional data back-up and business-continuity features.

Mykell Lee, Agility CEO Singapore, said the company's decision to invest \$525.5 million in the warehouse is a sign of its long-term commitment and belief in Singapore as one of the world's foremost transportation and shipping hubs. He said the acquisition gives Agility more capacity to add to its value-added service offering, which includes testing, assembly, configuring, labelling and packing.

"We aren't just storing goods within four walls. In an expensive market like Singapore,

customers want service innovation," Lee said. "We are offering them technology-driven solutions to optimize their supply chains across the region. We have strong infrastructure and well-trained people to help execute that vision."

Lee said Agility customers want help managing vendors, spare parts and raw materials. In addition, Agility provides tracking and visibility systems that allow customers to keep up with increasingly rapid inventory turns and complex supply chains. "For our fashion and retail customers, for example, we're also the ones tagging goods with price and security labels, managing reverse logistics, promotions, and warehouse and atrium sales," Lee said.

Agility's acquisition comes as Singapore is expanding and upgrading port and airport infrastructure as part of its strategic plan to strengthen its position as a global logistics powerhouse and emerging leader in fast-growing Asian e-commerce.

While historically a B2B provider in Singapore, Agility has recently partnered with a number of customers to help expand their supply chains from brick-and-mortar stores to e-commerce home delivery. "The market is moving and creating new opportunities. We are uniquely positioned to grow with our customers in this space."



RENAULT AL-BABTAIN'S ATTRACTIVE OFFER ON RENAULT DOKKER VAN

KUWAIT: Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al-Babtain Company; (AABC), the authorized dealer of Renault vehicles in the State of Kuwait is still offering its customers an attractive offer on the Renault Dokker Van, the most robust and reliable light commercial vehicle available in its segment.

You can lease the Renault Dokker van for 99 KD monthly without any down payment, or purchase it for 2,999 Kuwaiti Dinars only. The offer includes a 5 year warranty or 200,000 km, free registration and 3rd party insurance upon the purchase of the Renault Dokker Van. Aimed towards small business owners, the Renault Dokker van is a modern and an efficient transportation solution with an innate sense of practicality and versatility. It offers a 1.6L engine and the best load volume in its category with a carrying payload of 750 KG assisted with sliding doors and two asymmetrical rear doors, a loading capacity of 3.3m³ and a loading length of 1.9m; swiftly meeting the challenges of transport and delivery.

The Renault Dokker van is known to evolve with time. Its economic engine, low CO2 emissions and respect for both environment and customers' budget make it a truly model employee. The body design and proportions reflect generous interior space and a range of accessories to match the different needs of drivers. The Renault Dokker proved its continuous support to its partners in the business environment. You can use this chance and buy the Dokker from Renault Al-Babtain store in Al-Rai.



GULF BANK ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF AL-DANAH DAILY DRAWS

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank held its Al-Danah daily draws on 19 March 2017 announcing the names of its winners for the week of 12 March - 16 March 2017. The Al-Danah daily draws include draws each and every working day for two prizes of KD 1,000 per winner.

The winners are:

(Sunday 12/3): Sheikha/Hanaa Bader Al-Sabah, Tareq Abdulla Hassan Naser
(Monday 13/3): Abdulmalik Rashid Al-Duaij, Hneita Yaser Jali Al-Shreifi



(Tuesday 14/3): Yula Fozi Qutob, Khuloud Bader Mutlaq Dhaher
(Wednesday 15/3): Mobarak Ayed Mohammad Al-Hajiry, Ali Mansour Ali Al-Qattan
(Thursday 16/3): Yousef Khan Ali Baqery Jam Yousef Ali, Mohammed Saleh Khalil Al-Temimi

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah 2017 draw lineup includes daily draws (2 winners per working day and each receive KD1000). Al-Danah's 1st Quarterly draw for the prize of KD200,000 will be held on 30 March, the 2nd quarterly draw for the prize of KD250,000 will be held on 29 June and the 3rd quarterly draw for the prize of

KD500,000 will be held on 28 September. The final Al-Danah draw for KD1 million will be held on 11 January, 2018 whereby the Al-Danah millionaire will be announced.

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

- 1) Kuwait's single biggest yearly cash prize of KD 1 million
- 2) Kuwait's biggest quarterly cash prizes, up to KD500,000
- 3) Two winners of KD1,000 every working day
- 4) The most chances to win
- 5) Only bank that transfers your chances to win from year to year

Only Al-Danah makes millionaires. Al-Danah also offers a number of unique services including: the Al-Danah deposit only ATM card which helps account holders deposit their money at their convenience; as well as the Al Danah calculator to help customers calculate their chances of becoming an Al-Danah winner.

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is open to Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. Customers who open an account and/ or deposit more will enter the draw within two days. To take part in the Al-Danah 2017 upcoming quarterly and yearly draws, customers must have an Al-Danah account containing at least KD 200; customers can visit one of Gulf Bank's 56 branches, for assistance and guidance.

TBILISI MARKS AIR ARABIA JORDAN'S 7TH DESTINATION

AMMAN: Air Arabia Jordan, the Kingdom's leading low-cost carrier (LCC), announced yesterday the launch of a new route to Tbilisi from Amman, becoming the first regular flight to directly link Jordan with Georgia.

Tbilisi caters to travellers who are eager to discover the crossroads between Europe and

Tbilisi International Airport at 07:15 local time. The return flight will leave Tbilisi at 8:05 am reaching Amman at 10 pm local time.

"Tbilisi serves a wider, more culturally-enthusiastic market in the Levant region. This service will introduce a new market to Jordan, and will support the Kingdom's economic and tourism growth", said Adel Al-Ali, Group Chief Executive Officer of Air Arabia. "We are proud to announce this service for our Jordan-based passengers and confident that they will enjoy our value for money and award-winning service".

Filled with rich history, architecture and culture, Georgia's capital stretches in a narrow strip on both banks of the Kura. Through its cobblestoned pathways, old town Tbilisi hosts an array of ornate art in its original architecture and structures which reflect the city's past influenced by both Persian and Russian rule. The modern city harmoniously combines antique and contemporary features among the vast nature with its winding streets that run around the mountain ridges.

Air Arabia Jordan started operations in 2015 and currently operates from Amman's Queen Alia International Airport serving various destinations across the Middle East and North Africa.



Asia. The launch of this service will amplify the number of tourists in Jordan, and contribute to strengthening the trade and bilateral relations between both nations. The bi-weekly flight is scheduled to start operation on April 6, 2017 every Monday and Thursday departing Amman International Airport at 3.35 am, and arriving at the Shota Rustaveli

ASAR ACTS AS KUWAIT LEGAL COUNSEL TO MANAGERS FOR EQUATE SUKUK

KUWAIT: ASAR - Al-Ruwayeh & Partners (ASAR), Kuwait's leading and most prominent corporate law firm, and one of the region's top tier law firms, is pleased to have acted as Kuwait law counsel to Citigroup Global Markets Limited, HSBC Bank plc, J.P. Morgan Securities plc, KFH Capital Investment Company K.S.C.C., MUFG Securities EMEA plc, Mizuho International plc, National Bank of Abu Dhabi P.J.S.C., SMBC Nikko Capital Markets Limited, Watani Investment Co K.S.C.C. (NBK Capital) (collectively, the managers) in relation to establishment of EQUATE Sukuk SPC Limited's (EQUATE SPC) \$2 billion Trust Certificate (Sukuk) issuance Program and its inaugural \$500 million Sukuk issuance thereunder. EQUATE SPC is a wholly owned subsidiary of EQUATE Petrochemical Co. K.S.C.C. (together with The Kuwait Olefins Company K.S.C.C.) (the EQUATE Group). This following the EQUATE Group's first rule (\$2.25 billion) 144A/ Reg S dual-series bond international debt capital markets offering in November 2016 - in respect to which ASAR also acted on behalf of the managers under that offering.

The Trust Certificates (Sukuk) have an Ijarah and Murabahah structure. The 7 year senior unsecured Sukuk were priced competitively at 100 per cent of the issue price with a profit rate of 175 basis points over the 7 year mid-swap rate, returning a yield-to-maturity of 3.944 per cent. The Sukuk issuance (which was over-subscribed by a factor of 7.4 and with a global order book exceeding \$3.7 billion) was well received by global investors (both Islamic and conventional) The issuance proceeds will be used to refinance EQUATE Group's existing debt.

Rob Little - Counsel at ASAR noted that: "We are delighted to have been involved with both of the inaugural conventional and Sukuk issuances of the EQUATE Group. ASAR has a long and established history of acting as Kuwait law counsel in high quality debt capital market transactions, and both of the recent issuances of the EQUATE Group is no exception. We have previously noted that while global and GCC markets remain under some pressure, we believe that similar transactions are key to the overall stability of steady economic growth.

We are particularly proud in having successfully repre-



Rob Little and John Cunha

sented the Managers in both issuances of the Equate Group."

John Cunha - Partner at ASAR noted that: "We are delighted to have acted on behalf of the Managers in both of the inaugural conventional and Sukuk issuances of the EQUATE Group. Both of these issuances are a testament to the strength and depth of local and regional financial capital markets in a challenging environment. The successful conclusion of both of these issuances is the result of the hard work of the EQUATE Group and the Managers."

With dedicated offices in Kuwait and Bahrain coupled with its associated offices and relationships, ASAR provides clients

across an extensive range of industry sectors with comprehensive legal advice and support for their business activities in Kuwait, Bahrain, across the GCC and beyond.

The firm has been consistently rated as the leading corporate and commercial law firm in Kuwait by reputable legal guides such as the International Financial Law Review (IFLR), Chambers Global Guide, and the Legal 500. In 2016, ASAR was awarded with the IFLR National Law Firm of the Year Award; an award which ASAR has been delighted to receive for the 8th consecutive year.

ASAR lawyers have also received multiple awards under different categories in the Fourth Edition of 'Best Lawyers' in Kuwait.

AND THE WORLD'S HAPPIEST COUNTRY IS... NORWAY



ARCTIC CIRCLE: This file photo shows a private fishing cabin at a fjord near Svolvær, in Lofoten archipelago, Arctic Circle. —AFP

NEW YORK: A chilly climate isn't keeping Norway from basking in the glow of being named the world's happiest country yesterday. It surged from fourth place in last year's UN assessment all the way to the top spot, according to the World Happiness Report 2017. Other top countries on the list included Nordic neighbors Denmark and Iceland, as well as nearby Switzerland. "All of the top four countries rank highly on all the main factors found to support happiness: caring, freedom, generosity, honesty, health, income and good governance," the summary explained.

Rounding out the top 10 were Finland, in fifth place, the Netherlands (6), Canada (7), New Zealand (8), and Australia and Sweden tied for 9th. The entire top 10 were affluent, developed nations, although money is not the only ingredient for happiness, the report said. In fact, among the wealthier countries the differences in happiness levels had a lot to do with "differ-

ences in mental health, physical health and personal relationships: the biggest single source of misery is mental illness," the report said.

"Income differences matter more in poorer countries, but even their mental illness is a major source of misery," it added. Another major country, China, has made major economic strides in recent years. But its people are not happier than 25 years ago, the report found. China ranked 79th in the study of 155 countries. The United States meanwhile slipped to the number 14 spot due to less social support and greater corruption—the very factors explaining why Nordic countries fare better on the happiness scale. Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg welcomed the report as "a nice validation yesterday morning." "For many years, Norway has been behind Denmark in this ranking. 'I've made a point of it in many dinner speeches in the Nordics. Now I must find something new!'" she said in a message on Facebook in Norwegian.

"But even if we top this statistic now we continue to prioritize mental health care, to improve follow-up of children and young people because many are still struggling." The World Happiness Report 2017 was released by the United Nations on the International Day of Happiness. It is the fifth such report since the first was published in 2012. "Since then we have come a long way. Happiness is increasingly considered the proper measure of social progress and the goal of public policy," the report said. While the 10 countries at the top remained the same as in a 2016 update, those in the bottom 10, which had the lowest life evaluations, showed greater variation. The Central African Republic, which returned to the surveyed group, came in dead last at 155, with Burundi and Tanzania doing only slightly better. Among the 20 largest losers, five were in the Middle East and North Africa and five were in sub-Saharan Africa. —AFP

CAMBODIA SUSPENDS HUMAN BREAST MILK EXPORTS TO US

PHNOM PENH: Cambodia has temporarily stopped an American company from exporting locally-pumped human breast milk, AFP has learned, after reports highlighted how some of the country's poorest women were supplementing their income through the trade. Utah-based company Ambrosia Labs claims to be the first of its kind to export human breast milk sourced overseas into the United States for mothers who want to supplement their babies'

diets or cannot supply enough of their own milk. The milk is collected in Cambodia, frozen and shipped to the States where it is pasteurized and sold by the company for \$20 each 5 oz (147 ml) pack. But yesterday Cambodia's customs department confirmed it had halted exports. "We have asked them (the company) to contact the Ministry of Health because the product comes from a human organ, so it needs permission from the Ministry of Health

but they did not get it yet," Kun Nhem, General Director of Customs and Excise, told AFP.

He said government officials were planning to meet soon to "determine a policy about the product because it is a bit sensitive". AFP visited the offices of Ambrosia Labs last week in Stung Meanchey, a poor suburb in the capital Phnom Penh. The office, which uses the name Khun Meada, was shuttered. Local women who sold their milk said they had been

told business operations had been suspended but they did not know why. Chea Sam, a 30-year-old mother, said she had been selling her breast milk for the last three months following the birth of her son.

"I got my milk pumped six days per week and I earned between 30,000 to 40,000 riel (\$7.5-\$10) a day based on the quantity of our breast milk," she told AFP. "I am poor, and selling breast milk helped me a lot," she added. "We all cried when the company informed us about the suspension. We want it to be in business," she added, saying they knew of at least 20 other mothers who made money through their milk. Cambodia remains one of Asia's poorest nations, with an average annual income per person of \$1,160. Ambrosia Labs did not respond to requests for comment.

But in an interview with a Cambodia-based reporter published on Vice.com last week, co-founder Bronzson Woods defended the business. He said he hit upon the idea while working in the country as a Mormon missionary and that his company encouraged local women to continue breastfeeding and provide a steady income. In a video uploaded to a YouTube account using the name Khun Meada, a western man identifying himself as the father of Bronzson Woods asked Cambodia to allow a resumption of exports. "I'm confident that as the government here understands the good that this is doing that they will be on board," he said, adding the company had previously been allowed to export milk on six previous occasions. Cambodia's Ministry of Health did not respond to requests for comment. —AFP



PHNOM PENH: This photo shows a man riding a motorbike past the offices of Ambrosia Labs in the Stung Meanchey neighborhood of Phnom Penh. —AFP



CLAXTON, Georgia: Dr. Kyle Parks sits in his office outside Evans Memorial Hospital in Claxton. —AP

ALREADY IN PERIL, RURAL HOSPITALS UNSURE ON HEALTH CARE BILL

CLAXTON, Georgia: Talmadge Yarbrough had just sat down at his desk and opened a box of pecans when he let out a gasp that could have been his last breath. He'd gone into cardiac arrest in his office, a co-worker called 911, and an ambulance drove him two miles to the small hospital that serves this rural community in southeast Georgia. "I would have never lasted to get to Savannah or Statesboro," Yarbrough said of the biggest cities near Claxton - each 30 to 60 miles away. "I firmly believe if that hospital wasn't here, I wouldn't be here."

But like Yarbrough, the 10-bed Evans Memorial Hospital has fought to survive. That story is reflected nationwide - rural hospitals have long struggled, with patients who are older, suffer from chronic illnesses, and face few insurance options, if they're insured at all. Most rural hospitals have a higher-than-normal percentage of Medicaid patients; expected cuts to the federal program for low-income residents will affect facilities everywhere, but experts and administrators are particularly worried about rural areas. Still more rural patients are on Medicare, for those 65 and older, but both programs' reimbursements are lower than the cost of care.

Uninsured patients

Now, as Republicans in Washington put forward long-anticipated plans to get rid of President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act, rural hospitals and communities are watching the debate closely. But if they didn't fare too well under the ACA, many question whether they'd be better off under the plan backed by President Donald Trump. At Evans Memorial, many blue-collar workers are unable to afford insurance but are too well-off for Medicaid, said chief financial officer John Wiggins. Such uninsured patients are perhaps the No. 1 problem for rural hospitals: Evans Memorial has been saddled with \$3 million or more in unpaid medical bills in recent years.

But the hospital can't and won't turn away the uninsured - federal law prohibits it in emergencies. Recently, Dr. Kyle Parks performed an urgent gallbladder operation on an uninsured woman. "It is what we've always done - we take care of people, payer or no payer," Parks said. "But we're fighting a struggle to keep our little hospital open." Evans Memorial, which opened in 1968, has managed to keep operating by seeking new revenue - for example, a new wing for dementia patients scheduled to open soon. But the hospital was in the red for four years before finding itself \$50,000 in the black this year.

"We do not have fear of the doors closing, but we remember those days and we never get comfortable," said Nikki NeSmith, the CEO who doubles as chief nursing officer, in part to cut costs. "I don't think we'll be in that comfortable position anytime soon." Meantime, other rural hospitals have shuttered - 80 since 2010, mostly in the South and Midwest, according to the North Carolina Rural Health Research Program. A wave of closures also hit in the 1980s and early '90s

with changes in Medicare reimbursement, though Congress eventually increased that.

Under an expansion

At Evans Memorial, about half the patients are covered by Medicare; 10 percent are on Medicaid. An uneven, state-by-state expansion of Medicaid has been a problem there and elsewhere. Georgia's among 19 states that didn't expand the program under the ACA. It's never been a popular proposal in rural Georgia, where Trump saw his strongest support in the state. But Evans CFO Wiggins said many of his uninsured patients would have qualified under an expansion.

The ACA was intended to slash the number of uninsured patients seeking care they could never afford at hospitals. It succeeded in rural areas, where overall the rate of uninsured people fell by 8 percent since full implementation of the law in 2014, said Brock Slabach, of the National Rural Health Association. But it fell more in urban areas, in part because of the dearth of choices in the exchanges set up under the ACA. Thirty to 40 percent of rural communities have only one company from which to pick.

Snap Lewis has been selling property and casualty insurance in Claxton for nearly four decades, and he said even he couldn't find affordable coverage after the ACA was implemented. He took a part-time job driving a school bus, with health benefits. He wakes up at 4:45 am for his morning route, then heads to his insurance office at 8. He's back on a bus at 2 pm for his after-school route, and then sells insurance for another hour or so. "I thought it was a very good plan," Lewis said, "if you can stand the hours."

Private insurance

But not all rural residents can - and many can't find jobs with insurance at all. At Evans Memorial, 10 percent of patients are uninsured. Beyond the insurance, Medicare and Medicaid problems, rural hospitals face death by a thousand paper cuts: a nationwide trend toward outpatient care, trouble recruiting staff, industry consolidation, low-patient volume, and a preference by private-insurance clients for newer hospitals. When rural hospitals are forced to close, the effects reverberate, a 2016 Kaiser Family Foundation study shows. Such hospitals are often the community's largest employer, leading to job losses. Doctors and others leave the area. Closures also make it hard to attract outside employers or investors who want quick access to emergency rooms.

And for many rural health care workers, the GOP's new plan isn't calming nerves. At Evans Memorial, administrators say they haven't heard much in the proposal that sounds beneficial - besides perhaps the chance to allow Americans to shop for insurance across state lines. But officials recognize the tough task legislators have. "I wouldn't want to be in a position where I needed to say, 'Here's what we need to do to fix it,'" said Parks, the hospital's surgeon. "Because I honestly don't know what that would be." —AP

MINIMUM-WAGE HIKES COULD DEEPEN SHORTAGE OF HEALTH AIDES

'THESE SHOULD NOT BE LOW-WAGE JOBS'

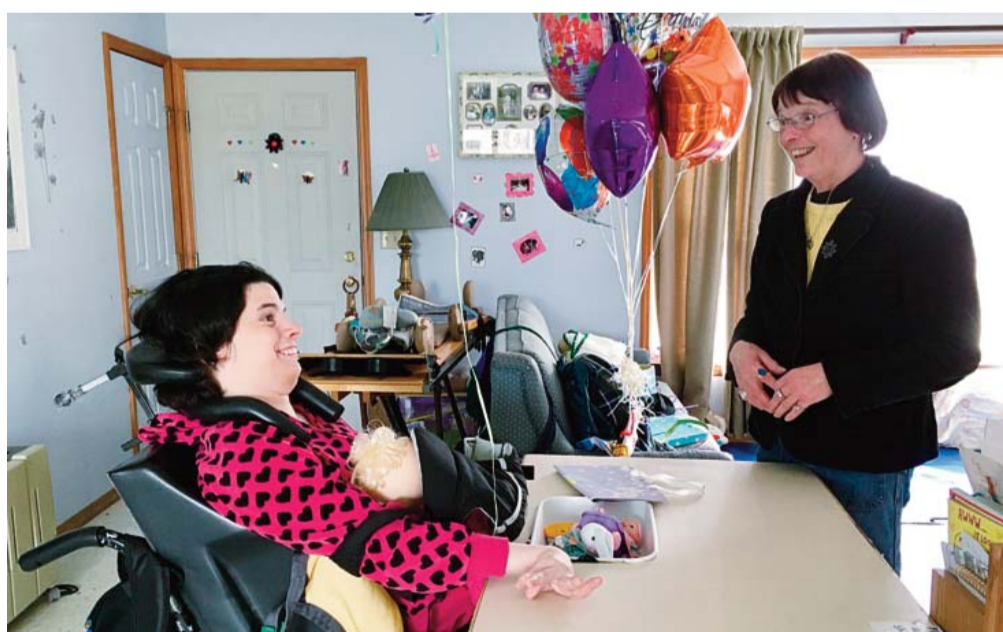
WEST CHAZY, New York: Only 17 snowy miles from the Canadian border, Katie Bushey's most basic needs are met by traveling health aides who come into her home to change her diapers, track her seizures, spoon-feed her fettuccine Alfredo and load her wheelchair into the shower. But that's only if someone shows up. Bushey, 32, who lost her vocal and motor skills shortly after birth, is one of more than 180,000 Medicaid patients in New York who are authorized to receive long-term, in-home care, the most in the state's history. But there are increasingly too few aides to go around, especially in remote, rural areas.

When there aren't enough aides for Bushey - over a recent two-day stretch there were workers for only four of the 26 hours of care for which she is authorized - her mother must stay home from her job at an elementary school, forgoing a day's wages and scraping her savings to pay the bills. It's a national problem advocates say could get worse in New York because of a phased-in, \$15-an-hour minimum wage that will be statewide by 2021, pushing notoriously poorly paid health aides into other jobs, in retail or fast food, that don't involve hours of training and the pressure of keeping someone else alive. "These should not be low-wage jobs," said Bruce Darling, executive director at the Center for Disability Rights. "We're paying someone who gives you a burger the same as the person who operates your relative's ventilator or feeding tubes."

Nonprofit research

There are currently 2.2 million home health aides and personal care aides in the US, with another 630,000 needed by 2024 as the Baby Boomer generation ages, according to the nonprofit research and consulting group PHI. New York state employs about 326,000 home health workers but is predicted to need another 125,000 by 2024. For now, home health aides in New York state earn an average of about \$11 an hour, though wages are lower in upstate regions. Advocates say the system needs a complete overhaul that focuses on higher pay, worker retention and finding methods of compensation beyond what is provided through Medicaid.

Democratic Gov. Andrew Cuomo has committed nearly \$6 billion in funding for home health care reimbursements in coming years as the agencies transition to the \$15 minimum wage. The state's health depart-



WEST CHAZY, New York: In this file photo, Stephanie Bushey, right, uses sign language and eye movements to communicate with her daughter, Katie, at their home in West Chazy. —AP

ment has said it is developing an initiative to attract, recruit and retain home health workers. New York lawmakers have held hearings on the issue, and both the Senate and Assembly have so far included language in their budgets that would review and restructure how the state transfers Medicaid dollars to the providers, agencies and workers with the aim of providing workers and hours where they are needed most.

Other states are grappling with how to address the dwindling workforce as their minimum wages climb. In Maine, legislation in 2015 attempted to make personal care worker wages more competitive with specific reimbursements for worker compensation. But a popular initiative will raise the minimum wage to \$12 by 2020, minimizing those differences. In Arizona, minimum wage increases have been accompanied by increased reimbursement rates, and in Washington state, workers negotiated a \$15 wage for some home-care workers for when the state mini-

mum increases to \$13.50 in 2020. New York advocates say a higher state minimum wage won't attract any extra workers in rural regions such as Clinton County, where Bushey lives.

Special breed

A single agency, North Country Home Services, hires and trains about 300 home health aides and personal care aides for about 1,000 people throughout a mountainous region the size of Connecticut. In any given week, the agency says, it leaves 400 hours of state-authorized care unfilled due to staffing shortages. The aides who continue despite the wages are a special breed, said Erica Stranahan, of Plattsburgh, who has worked as a home health aide with North Country for nine years and earns about \$12 an hour. Stranahan said several of her co-workers have recently left homecare for less-intensive professions that will soon have similar wages. —AP



SYDNEY: This file photo shows male crocodile "Rex", five meters in length and estimated to be 30-40 years old, thrashing in the water while holding a chicken in his mouth at Sydney Wildlife World. —AFP

CROC TAKES FISHERMAN IN AUSTRALIA

SYDNEY: A fisherman whose body was pulled from the water yesterday was likely killed by a large crocodile, police said, after his empty dinghy and speargun were found in northern Australia. The 35-year-old was fishing alone off Innisfail, south of Cairns in Queensland state, and was reported missing on Sunday evening when the boat and floating speargun, which was pierced through a fish, were discovered. An aerial and water search was launched with a body retrieved yesterday morning.

"Initial investigations suggest the man may have been taken by a crocodile," Queensland police said, adding that they believe it was a four-meter (13-foot) beast. "Wildlife officers from the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection are targeting the crocodile for removal." The Cairns Post reported an aggressive crocodile, thought to be the same one, attacked a police boat late Sunday in what Inspector Rhy

Newton said was indicative of behavior when the reptile has killed recently or is protecting a food source. It was the second blow in a month to the local spearfishing community after a man recently had his leg ripped off by a shark at nearby Hinchinbrook Island, the newspaper said.

The latest tragedy came only a day after a teenager escaped the jaws of a crocodile by punching it in the head during a late night swim in a river close to Innisfail. The 18-year-old suffered extensive injuries to his left arm after being dared to jump in by his friends. Australia is home to freshwater and saltwater crocodiles with the more feared "salties" growing up to seven meters long. Saltwater crocodile numbers have exploded since they were declared a protected species in 1971, with recent attacks reigniting debate about controlling them. They kill an average of two people each year in Australia. —AFP

BEE'AH'S EXPANSION CONTINUES WITH THREE FEDEX FACILITIES

THE COLLECTION OF RECYCLABLES INCREASED BY 44% IN SIX MONTHS

DUBAI, UAE: Bee'ah, the Middle East's leading and award-winning environmental management company, signed a contract with FedEx UAE. Bee'ah has collected several tonnes of waste and recyclables in six months from the multinational courier delivery service provider. FedEx, an environmentally conscious corporation, awarded Bee'ah the contract for three of its facilities due to their expertise in providing sustainable solutions and waste management strategies in the United Arab Emirates. This contract was signed by Khaled Al-Huraimel, Group CEO of Bee'ah, and David Ross, FedEx's Regional President in MEISA.

Packaging companies like FedEx are well-known in the industry for the relatively large amount of waste they produce in a short time frame. All indicators reveal that Bee'ah has helped FedEx improve and maintain waste collection and recyclable efficiency within their facilities. The collection of FedEx's waste and recyclables increased by 44% in the past six months. The scope of Bee'ah's contract included state-of-the-art waste collection, transportation and recovery.

Fahad Shehail, Chief Development Officer, Bee'ah, said: "Providing the highest level of waste collection and recycling services is central to our expansion strategy. The expertise of our operations around the UAE has made Bee'ah the ideal partner for



international companies seeking a profitable and sustainable future. We have improved the environmental standards of FedEx's operations through the implementation of recycling and integrated waste management systems and integrated services. These green practices set a great example for the entire packaging industry within the UAE." Bee'ah has provided general

waste collection services for three FedEx facilities located in the UAE, including: FedEx Metroplex, next to Dubai Airport Terminal 2; FedEx Al-Quoz Industrial Area 1; and FedEx Garhoud, Al-Garhoud. As a company with massive courier delivery operations, FedEx requires considerable storage of recyclable waste such as plastics and cardboard.

Bee'ah has accelerated the use of environmentally preferable practices within corporations to reduce the environmental impact of traditional waste disposal processes. Through collaboration, Bee'ah aims to implement the best international standards for waste management operations as well as support the UAE economy with sustainable solutions.

CLOAKED IN RAGS AND DUST, SOMALIS FLEE LOOMING FAMINE

BAIDOA, Somalia: Mariam Ibrahim, her seven children and two neighboring families were the last to leave their village in southwestern Somalia. They loaded their combined belongings—blankets, cooking pots, sleeping mats, jerry cans, clothes—onto a hired donkey cart and walked beside it for 20 kilometers (12 miles) to Baidoa, the closest city. "There is nobody left now," said the 28-year-old. She joined thousands of others who are arriving in Baidoa each day, staggering from the parched countryside into the garrison city, cloaked in rags and dust.

Clusters of stick and cloth domes are appearing across the outskirts of Somalia's regional capital. Somali and Ethiopian soldiers-part of an African Union force-secure the town against the Al-Qaeda-aligned Shabaab militants whose control begins just 15 kilometers away. Successive seasons of poor rains and failed harvests have left farming families like Ibrahim's destitute and on the brink of famine. The United Nations is warning of an unprecedented global crisis with famine already gripping parts of South Sudan and looming over Nigeria, Yemen and Somalia, threatening the lives of 20 million people. For Somalis, the memory of the 2011 famine which left a quarter of a million people dead is still fresh. But Ibrahim said what is happening now feels worse. First the food ran out, then the wells emptied. And the little water that remains is brackish or diseased. So when her village of Aliyow Mumin suffered an outbreak of cholera in late January, Ibrahim decided to leave.

Born into famine

Muslima Kusow was born into famine 25 years ago and survived 2011, but it was this year's drought which forced her to abandon her home for the first time. She left the farming village of Roobey in early March, trekking four days northwards with her six

children to Baidoa. Asked why, Kusow feigns four slender fingers down her throat to mime swallowing, then holds out an empty hand: "Thirst. Hunger." Her youngest child, two-year-old Asiba, is skinny and pale, lacking the strength to hold her head upright.

At the Deeg-Roor Medical Organisation—the name means "first rains"—Abdirahim Mohamed says new outpatients are registering for the UNICEF-backed feeding program at an exponential rate. In February, 75 children were admitted to the clinic, more than double the number in January and a figure he predicts will double again in March. The worst cases—youngsters too weak to feed, or those suffering from outbreaks of cholera that have killed 286 and infected over 11,000 nationwide this year—are taken to the city hospital.

'Hungry all the time'

Inside, cholera patients lie on blankets on the concrete floor or on metal bed frames, attached to intravenous drips. Tuk-tuks race in disgorging new victims. Visitors are sprayed with chlorine on the way out. In the intensive care unit of the hospital's malnutrition center, nine beds are tightly packed into a hot, dim room. All but one are occupied by mothers with their slowly recovering children. Hamsia Ibrahim, 32, swirls breast milk in a plastic bowl before trickling it into a syringe and feeding it, through a nasal tube, into the stomach of her seven-month-old daughter Shamsa. Her husband and five other children stay in a makeshift camp for the recently uprooted where they arrived last month.

"My other children are hungry all the time, but they are not sick like this," she said of Shamsa, whose diarrhoea and vomiting caused her weight to plummet. She said a local businessman handed out

cooked food at the camp a week ago: "That was the last time we had three meals in a day." The growth of the camps is accelerating. There are 133 of the settlements, expanding towards one another across the barren, rocky land. The UN records new arrivals by the household and says 2,929 arrived in the first week of March. The figure for the whole of February was 3,967. The average household is estimated to number six people meaning roughly 2,500 people are arriving in Baidoa every day.

By mid-afternoon in the camps, the temperature tilts towards 40 degrees, the hot wind conjures dust devils and the thorny trees provide little shade. Everyone is hungry at ADC-3, a camp named, ironically, after Somalia's defunct Agricultural Development Corporation that used to distribute surplus grain. Children lie listless in their families' tattered huts waiting to see if there will be anything to eat today, apart from the cup of sugary black tea that passed for breakfast for most.

Slowly, purposefully Habibo Abdo walked into the camp clutching a bundle of sticks and looking for her relatives. The old, frail woman had walked for two days with nothing to eat or drink and collapsed in the dirt after taking a deep draught of water offered by a well-meaning resident. Moments later, her 30-year-old daughter, Dero, was found and sat stroking her mother's arm, cooling her with drops of water. They, too, had abandoned their home when the crops failed, the food stores ran out and the water ran dry. In the camps of Baidoa, at least, aid agencies provide clean water and medical treatment, there is food in the city's markets and the possibility of earning money as a labourer or beggar. But with meteorologists pessimistic about the prospect of rain, hope is an increasingly scarce commodity. —AFP



BAIDOA, Somalia: Women carry firewood as they walk back to a makeshift camp on the outskirts of Baidoa, in the southwestern Bay region of Somalia, where thousands of internally displaced people arrive daily after they fleeing the parched countryside. —AFP photos



BAIDOA, Somalia: A severely malnourished child in the hands of her mother waits to be processed into a UNICEF-funded health program catering to children displaced by drought, at the regional hospital in Baidoa town.

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THRISSUR ASSOCIATION OF KUWAIT WORKSHOP

Thrissur Association of Kuwait (TRASSK) Vanithavedhi conducted workshop (Integral Development of Child and Motherhood) on Friday 17 March at poppins hall, Abbassiya. The meeting started with prayer. The general secretary Sijo Sunny welcomed the gathering. TRASSK President Jeeves Erinjeri Inaugurated the workshop. Vibheesh

Thikkodi (Writer, teacher and philanthropist) conducted the class. And Mahesh Iyer (Principal, Smart Bhavans School) conducted his interactive session. Felicitations were offered by Vanithavedhi general convener Santhi Venugopal and secretary Aneesa Hassim. Vanithavedhi joint secretary kalarajan proposed vote of thanks.



IMMERSE YOURSELF IN THE HILTON SPA EXPERIENCE

Take a while out of your busy schedule for some Spa time. The Spa at Hilton Kuwait Resort offers many treatments to choose from, you can relax knowing you're in the hands of professional therapists. It's the perfect place to restore balance and purify your body. From the signature Aromatherapy, Thai, Super deluxe, to the Deep Tissue massage there are a large number of treatments available. The Spa

therapists can help tailor treatments and recommend the correct aftercare to make sure the results last.

The Spa also offers "The Tropical Rainforest Shower", it is the ideal place to experience a variety of tropical shower treatments- a warm shower set at varying temperatures, infused with the delicious perfume of tropical fruit. Compliment your experience with a dip in the

Aqua-medic pool, a session in the sauna or steam room. With inspiration taken from across the globe, The Spa at Hilton Kuwait Resort is designed with whole body relaxation in mind. With treatments hand-picked from a variety of cultures, combined with the highest quality service in a comfortable, hygienic environment, you'll enjoy an unrivalled experience of ultimate luxury and serenity.



KNES ANNUAL YEAR CONCERT: 'A BEAUTIFUL WORLD'

The Year 2 pupils of Kuwait National English School celebrated their annual concert, titled 'A Beautiful World' on Sunday night, 12th March 2017. Pupils, in vivid and colorful costumes, paid tribute to springtime with particular focus on birds, plants and animals through song and dance.

The message of the concert highlighted our schools Mission Statement of us having only One 'Earth Home' and taking care of her so that we have a beautiful planet still left over for future generations. The concert ended with a vibrant African Dance. The audience thoroughly enjoyed the performances.



YMCA KUWAIT HOSTS FAREWELL TO KOSHY

YMCA Kuwait gave a Farewell to Koshy Alexander, who is leaving Kuwait for good. He was in Kuwait for the past Twenty Seven years and has been very active in the YMCA activities. He hails from Trivandrum, Kerala. The meeting was held in Salmiya, presided by Dr AT Varghese (President). Parimanam Manoj (General Secretary) welcomed all. A memento was presented for his valuable service to the

YMCA during his tenure. Dr AT Varghese, Aghesh Skariah Thomas, Biji Samuel, Mathew Eapen, Saji Varghese Palakkunnel, Raju Kurukavellil, Johnkutty Oommen, Sunu Oommen & Parimanam Manoj made felicitation speeches during the meeting. In the reply speech, he expressed the valuable support received from YMCA Kuwait & members. Vote of thanks was given by Mr. Aghesh Skariah and the function ended with a grand dinner.



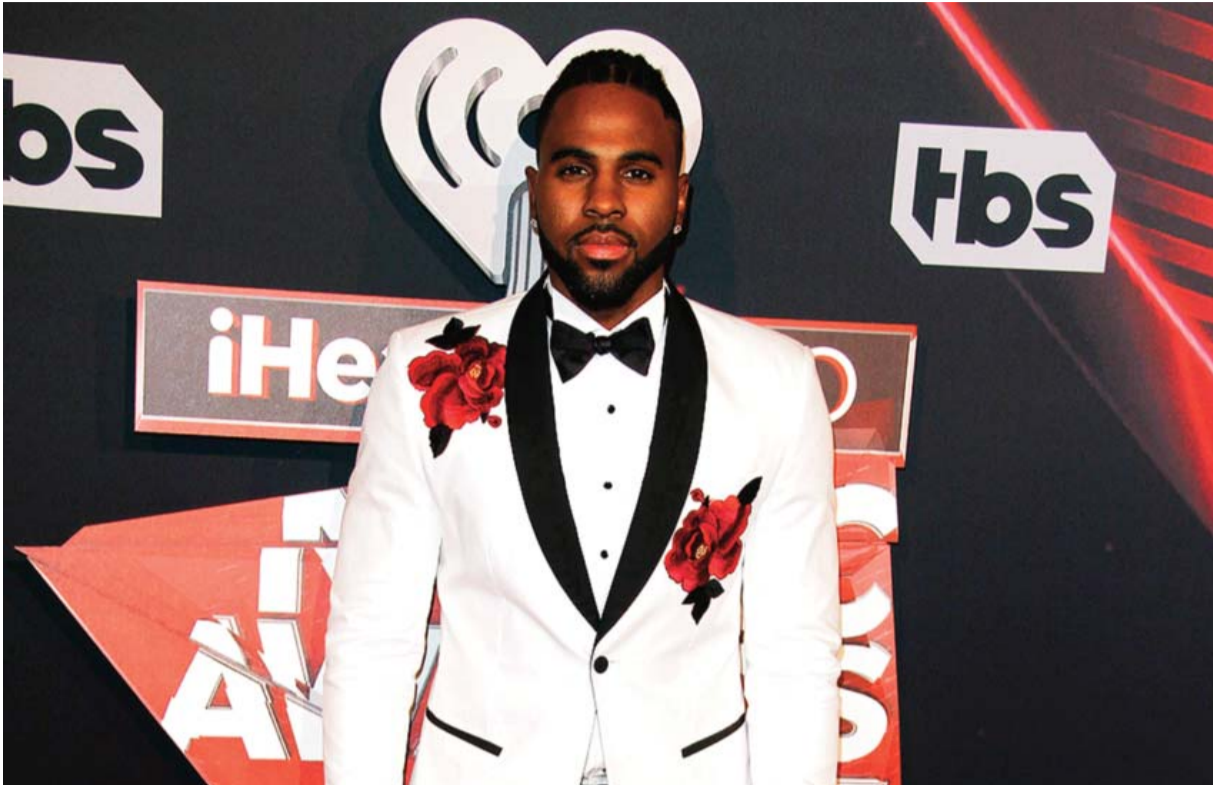


AL-ANBAA GALA CELEBRATION FOR 41ST ANNIVERSARY

Al-Anbaa local Arabic daily recently celebrated its 41st anniversary by holding a special ceremony at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Al-Baraka Ballroom. The ceremony was held under the auspice of minister of information and minister of state for cabinet affairs, Sheikh Mohammed Al-Abdullah and was attended by Kuwaiti and Arab dignitaries, writers, artists and diplomats. —Photos by Joseph Shagra



GOSSIP



Jason Derulo planning acting career

Jason Derulo is planning a break from music to focus on a career in acting. The 'Don't Wanna Go Home' hitmaker has revealed his plans to have a stab at Hollywood after he releases his first album since 2015's 'Everything Is 4', as he's always had a passion for movies ever since he studied theatre at college. And he already has some experience on his CV having previously had guest appearances in TV's 'Lethal Weapon' and 'Empire'. Revealing his plans to take time out and act, he said: "I definitely want to do more - it's just finding time as doing a movie that's four months of my time without doing shows and making music. "This is something I have wanted to do for a long time but I always end up getting the music bug but I do really want to take the time out and do some serious acting. "It's something I have always been into and I actually did acting at college, I went to musical theatre college." The 27-year-old singer - who has spawned hits including 'Talk Dirty', 'The Other Side' and 'Wiggle' - is currently putting the finishing touches to his first studio LP in two years and has teased there are a number of "unexpected" duets on there, which came together at his own studio.

According to the Daily Star newspaper, he said: "I'm finishing up the album now, I have some really great stuff I'm excited to share. The album is coming very soon, there's some really dope, unexpected collaborations coming. "I have really enjoyed this album, it is the first album that I have done within my own space, and it's just been an incredible process. "When I'm inviting these artists to come to the studio I am inviting them to come to my compound and it has been a dope experience." Derulo has already released his collaboration with Nicki Minaj and Ty Dolla Sign, 'Swalla' and it's likely that one of the collaborators on his new album could be Scottish DJ Calvin Harris as he previously revealed the pair were keen to work on music together once they can find some time in their busy schedules. Jason previously said: "We've been in contact and Calvin and I are interested in working together for sure. "But it's just finding the right time and right song, we both have busy schedules, but I hope so."

Drake 'cut Jennifer Lopez from album after failed romance'

Drake reportedly cut Jennifer Lopez from his new album after their romance failed. The 30-year-old rap star recently enjoyed a brief fling with the 'Jenny from the Block' star - but Drake decided to cut their collaboration from his new album 'More Life' after Jennifer broke off their romance and started a relationship with baseball legend Alex Rodriguez. Jennifer, 47, was poised to appear on the track 'Get It Together' but the female verse was instead recorded by Jorja Smith after their fling ended, according to the Daily Star newspaper. Despite this, Drake recently hinted that he is not quite over the star. On the song 'Free Smoke' on his new album 'More Life', Drake raps: "I drunk text J-Lo/ Old number, so it bounce back." Jennifer, meanwhile, has rubbished claims she only dates younger men, following her on/off romance with Drake and a previous long-term romance with Casper Smart, 29. She explained: "First of all, stop! I don't date younger men. I don't think men have to be younger. It's not about that. I just meet people, and if I go out with them, I go out with them. And if I like them, I like them, and if I don't, I don't. It's about the person, you know what I mean? It's about who they are. It has nothing to do with age! "There's this thing, because I dated beau [her backing dancer Casper Smart], and he was younger, and he was the first guy I ever dated who was younger than me, but then I got labeled right away."



Iggy Azalea announces new single

Iggy Azalea has announced her new single will be released on Friday. The 26-year-old rapper has taken to social media to reveal the track, entitled 'Mo Bounce', will hit shelves and streaming websites at the end of the week. Taking to Twitter, the 'Fancy' hitmaker posted a photo of the artwork for the single, alongside the caption: "You guys did good putting the pieces together! My new single #MoBounce comes out next Friday! 3/24. Get ready. (sic)" Iggy also took to Instagram to announce the news, sharing pieces of the artwork across nine separate posts which when viewed on her account make up a large version of the photo. Each image was captioned: "#MoBounce March 24 (sic)" The announcement comes after the 'Black Widow' musician recently took to Twitter to apologise for the delay in releasing her album 'Digital Distortion' - which was set for release last year - but said she felt it was important to push it back to 2017 so she could include songs which reflected the "personal changes" she has been through, namely her split from Nick Young. She said: "Hi guys ... I have decided to include one of the songs from my upcoming album 'Digital Distortion' on the new Def Jam #DirectDeposit tape ... "Also I felt it was important to say; I know it's been a long wait for my album - SORRY! ... I hope my fans understand my life has been filled with so many personal changes ... I felt it was important I made some creative changes too - I needed my album to reflect where my head's at in 2017 ... "I really appreciate the patience & I'm so excited for all the new music, new visuals, album preorder dates etc. ... I'll be releasing throughout the month of March. Thanks for your support <3 IGGY (sic)" 'Mo Bounce' will be released on March 24.

Ed Sheeran made James Blunt uncomfortable

Ed Sheeran made James Blunt feel "uncomfortable" when they wrote songs together. The 26-year-old singer is a co-writer on the 'You're Beautiful' hitmaker's new album 'The Afterlove' and James, 43, had never written material from such a personal point of view until his friend pushed him to go deeper with his feelings. Discussing 'Make Me Better', a song about James' wife Sofia Wellesey, the 43-year-old star told the Daily Telegraph: "It's a song I'm uncomfortable with for that reason. Ed said 'Come on, it's your job, you veil a lot of things', for that reason it was great to work with him. "He is so open and he dragged me into that space." Meanwhile, James recently claimed he and the 'Shape of You' hitmaker made up the story that Princess Beatrice accidentally sliced Ed's face with a sword. The pair hit the headlines in November when it was reported that 'Castle on the Hill' singer had been struck in the face with a sharp weapon by the royal as she was pretending to 'knight' fellow musician James at a party at the Royal Lodge in Windsor. But the 'Goodbye My Lover' singer has now claimed they fabricated the story in order to cover up the fact that Ed had simply cut himself whilst drunk. He said: "Ed was drunk, messing around, and he cut himself. We made a fancy story up; people fell for it. It was very embarrassing." And asked how much of the story involving the 'Sing' hitmaker and 28-year-old Beatrice was made up, James said: "All of it!" Ed has also refused to comment on the subject in the past, after claiming he wasn't sure if he was allowed to talk about it. He said in January: "Yeah... there's... I don't know if I can talk about that, you know."



Cabello on the 'scariest' part of leaving Fifth Harmony

Camila Cabello says the "scariest part" of leaving Fifth Harmony was the unknown path she faces as a solo artist. The 20-year-old singer - who made up one fifth of the girl group alongside Ally Brooke, Normani Kordei, Dinah Jane and Lauren Jauregui - quit the band in December 2016 and she is glad she took the risks involved with pursuing a solo career as "expressing" herself has "become a necessity". Speaking to the latest issue of FAULT magazine, she admitted: "I think the scariest part about it is leaving a successful project to pursue a new dream with a new path full of questions of self-discovery that only you can answer. But even when I feel so grateful for the opportunity to be a part of my former group, expressing myself as an artist became a necessity." The 'Hay Ma' hitmaker also admits that she is a perfectionist and gets "frustrated" with herself when her music isn't 100 per cent how she would like it to be. Asked about the pressure to get things perfect, she said: "I've always felt pressure to get everything perfect, and I've never gotten there, but I think that's what keeps me growing, and keeps me frustrated with myself and keeps me reaching. I think if you're ever comfortable and think 'wow, this is it. I've figured it out', you stop trying and you stop growing." The brunette beauty is gearing up to release her debut solo album and says she would often write for herself throughout her five years in the 'Work From Home' group. She said: "I was always writing, not necessarily for myself, but just because I really wanted to be a songwriter. I think as I was writing I found my own voice as an artist and as a person, and I'm discovering more about it every day." Camila has enjoyed the freedom to work with different writers and producers on mastering her "own musical vision". Asked what the best part of her solo journey has been so far, she said: "Working with so many talented writers and producers and following my own musical vision. I love the ability to create something out of nothing altogether." Little is known about Camila's LP, but she is hoping to release it in autumn. She said: "I hope to release my first few songs before summer and then go from there and hopefully an album in the Fall."



Queen get Monopoly game

The 'We Will Rock You' group's guitarist Brian May was forced to officially announce their version of the world famous board game after details were leaked on Amazon, but the 69-year-old guitar god - who is joined by Roger Taylor and Spike Edney in the legendary rock group - revealed they've been working on it for over a year and managed to keep tight-lipped about it until the leak. In a series of tweets, he wrote: "Well YES !!! So somebody leaked this info ! I should have leaked it myself ! I think Queen fans will love our new Monopoly game ! Bri ...Launch of our fabulous new official Queen Monopoly game scuppered by a leak to AMAZON ! But you guys will love it I'm sure. I do ! Bri ... OK - since the news is out there ... guess what these little guys are ? Which one would you choose? Bri ... "YES ! it's true !!! We've been very secretly developing Queen Monopoly for over a year. "And it is due in a shop near you in May. I'm excited - It was a blast working on it - like making an album ! We hope you love it ! choose your weapons !!! Bri (sic)" May showed off the individual game metal pieces on Instagram, which include the hoover late great frontman, Freddie Mercury - who died in 1991 aged 45 due to complications caused by AIDS - used in the music video for 1984's 'I Want to Break Free', Brian's guitar, the wireless from 'Radio Ga Ga' and 1978's 'Bicycle Race' video. Gamers and fans of the 'Bohemian Rhapsody' hitmakers will be able to make their way around the board following their journey to success, starting off at their first ever gig in 1970 at Imperial College, London and Mercury's last ever performance with the band in 1986 at Knebworth Park in Hertfordshire. The game is slated for release in May.

Ben Wheatley couldn't care less about High-Rise walkouts

Ben Wheatley couldn't care less if people walkout of his new movie 'High-Rise'. The 44-year-old English director's dystopian drama is based on J.G. Ballard's novel of the same name and the story is set in the UK in an alternate 1970s in a tower block which is for the rich and privileged whom become disinterested in the outside world and society due to the conveniences on offer. Wheatley's film follows Tom Hiddleston's character, neurologist Dr. Robert Laing, as the apartment block descends into chaos. The movie has proven to be divisive as there have been reports of viewers walking out of screenings while reviews have veered from glowing to critical, with some writers describing it as "pointless and pretentious". Speaking at the Three Empire Awards on Sunday, when asked what he thought about the walk-outs, Wheatley replied: "Well, I couldn't care!" He was then asked if that was all he had to say on the matter, and he replied: "Absolutely!" As well as Hiddleston, the film also stars Jeremy Irons, Sienna Miller, Luke Evans, Elisabeth Moss, James Purefoy, Keeley Hawes and Augustus Prew. Although Wheatley is being bullish about the walkouts now, he has previously admitted that a reaction like that can be "bruising" to his ego. He said: "There's walkouts, but what kind of an idiot walks out of a film? I don't think I've ever walked out of a movie. I've always made the movies for me and that sounds arrogant, but I understand there's an audience that's like me and I play to that audience. My gamble is that it's big enough to support the film." On the world premiere walkouts he added: "It can be bruising on the day, but it's fine. I get worried that one day you'll make a film nobody will go and see. But at least people are passionate about it." Wheatley attended the Empire Awards as 'High-Rise' was nominated for Best

British Film but lost out to 'I, Daniel Blake'. However, Wheatley did not leave the ceremony at The Roundhouse in London empty-handed as 'The Greasy Strangler' - on which he acted as executive producer - was named Best Comedy.



GOSSIP

Robbie Williams to release new album on YouTube



Robbie Williams will release his next album on YouTube. The 43-year-old singer is planning to release a number of tracks which did not make it onto his last record, 'The Heavy Entertainment Show', as a compilation titled 'Under The Radar Volume 2'. A source told The Sun: "Robbie has the songs recorded and ready to go. The tracklisting for 'The Heavy Entertainment Show' was meticulously picked by him as he wanted it to have a certain sound but he has loads of great music still in the vault. "There's also intriguing stuff left over from previous albums that fans will want to hear. "After previously keeping his fans waiting so long for new music he wants to keep them interested." Meanwhile, Robbie recently blasted modern pop stars as "boring" because they don't take drugs and diss one and other. The 'Mixed Signals' singer thinks it's "weird" that artists

aren't as rock 'n' roll as they used to be, with antics which were all the rage in the 90s such as trashing hotel rooms and feuding with your peers - like he did with his rival Liam Gallagher - all going out of fashion. He said: "We were a different breed back then [in the 90s] - cussing and dissing and needing to say things in order to be interesting. I don't think people do that now. It was expected of everybody to be drunk and off their face on cocaine. People don't do that now - it seems so weird ... If people did that now, it would just look a bit sad. I think it just depends what drugs are out there at the time. What's out there at the moment? Ketamine? Or am I out of date on that?"

Reynolds and Gyllenhaal fear alien attack



Life stars Jake Gyllenhaal and Ryan Reynolds would be useless if they had to battle a real-life alien invasion. The two actors appear together in the sci-fi thriller, in which they must battle an aggressive extraterrestrial organism from Mars. Although Ryan, 40, and Jake, 36, display heroic qualities in the movie they don't think they'd put up much of a fight if little green men from outer space decided to conquer Earth. Speaking at the world premiere of 'Life', held at SXSW in Austin, Texas, Ryan - who plays Roy Adams in the film - said: "If this happened to me, I'm not qualified for this. I spent 30 minutes working on a microwave a few days ago." And Jake - who portrays David Jordan - confirmed he'd be no good in that situation either. He added: "Seriously, I find treadmills complicated, so I don't know that I'd be able to survive on the International Space Station if a creature attacked." But one thing that the pair did do well was have great camaraderie on set - although these elements are missing from the finished edit. Co-star Rebecca Ferguson said: "I realized [after seeing it] that the film that I saw is not the film I shot. On set it was a sort of very homey, fun environment, a lot

of jokes." Jake agreed, describing the set "a wonderful place to be" despite the fear-filled plot. He shared: "We were laughing all the time. None of us takes ourselves that seriously, so there was a really wonderful spirit on set all the time." 'Life' follows a team of scientists aboard the International Space Station, whose mission of discovery turns to one of survival when they begin to conduct experiments a rapidly evolving lifeform that could have caused extinction on Mars, and now threatens the crew and all life on Earth. Director David Espinosa has likened the film to Sir Ridley Scott's 1979 sci-fi horror classic 'Alien' but pointed out one key distinction that he hopes audiences make. He added: "The realism of ['Life'] makes it different than other movies. Alien takes place 200 years into the future - this one could take place tomorrow." Also starring in 'Life' are Olga Dihovichnaya, Ariyon Bakare and Hiroyuki Sanada, while 'Deadpool' writers Paul Wernick and Rhett Reese penned the screenplay.

No more Terminators

Plans for a new 'Terminator' movie have been cancelled. Arnold Schwarzenegger was expected to step back into the role he made famous 32 years ago later this year alongside Emilia Clarke, who played Sarah Connor in 2015's 'Terminator Genisys', but it has now been claimed Paramount executives have decided not to make another film. A source told the New York Daily News newspaper: "It is over for 'The Terminator' and Arnold. "The studio has taken the sequel off the production slate completely, meaning there is no preproduction or any plans for another sequel. The talent had been offered long term deals, but this is not happening. "The 'Genisys' movie was seen as a way of reviving (the franchise), but the critics were not happy and somehow the studio bosses fell out of love with making more, even though they made huge profits." However, another company could still take on the rights to the franchise but, given that Arnold turns 70 later this year, that is deemed unlikely. The source added: "It would need an independent production company to think about making this, and asking Arnie back at age 70 to play that again may be a tough ask." The news comes after it was recently reported James Cameron - who created the franchise with Gale Anne Hurd - had been asked to oversee a new 'Terminator Film'. James was at the helm for the 1984 movie and sequel 'Terminator 2: Judgement Day', but not involved in 2003's 'Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines', 2009's 'Terminator Salvation' or 2015's 'Terminator Genisys', all of which did not do as well as the first installments. However, the rights to the saga revert to him in 2019, but before that happens, 'Deadpool' director Tim Miller was said to be in talks with Cameron about advising on another film. According to reports, 'Terminator Genisys' financier David Ellison was backing a new film and respected sci-fi authors had been asked to come up with plot ideas.



Luke Evans liberated by role

Luke Evans found his role in 'Beauty and the Beast' "liberating". The 37-year-old actor relished every moment of playing the "ridiculous, self-absorbed and terrifying" villain Gaston in the new live-action take on the classic fairytale because his alter ego was so different to himself in real life. He said: "It's fun to play a character who does all the things you'd never dare to do in real life. It's liberating - you can't feel self-conscious about playing somebody like Gaston, you just have to go with it. "I owe it to the animated giant of a creature we see in the original to be that ridiculous and self-absorbed and terrifying. And to enjoy it." It wasn't just the comic aspects of the role that Luke enjoyed, as he also delighted in the "challenge" of the action scenes. He said: "Stunts are a trust exercise - it's you plus a team of stunt people. "You can't fear stuff - the second you feel nervous about jumping off a rooftop, you have to let the stuntman do it, because you forget about acting. But that's the challenge and I really enjoy it." The Welsh actor made sure he took away some souvenirs from the set of the film, which also stars Emma Watson, Dan Stevens and Josh Gad. He told Woman magazine: "I keep all the swords from my films. Gaston didn't have a real one, but he has an interesting breast plate, which wasn't used in the film so I asked to take that.

Kunis and McKinnon to co-star in spy movie

Mila Kunis and Kate McKinnon are in talks to co-star in 'The Spy Who Dumped Me'. The actresses are being considered for the leading roles in the movie, written and directed by Susanna Fogel, about two best friends who become caught up in international espionage after one of their former boyfriends was revealed as a spy, The Wrap reports. Brian Grazer and Imagine Entertainment are producing the movie for Lionsgate. Meanwhile, last year Mila, 33, who has two children with husband Ashton Kutcher, said that she was sick of being compromised in her career because of her gender and she had learned to stand up for herself. She said: "It's what we are conditioned to believe - that if we speak up, our livelihoods will be threatened ... Throughout my career, there have been moments when I have been insulted, sidelined, paid less, creatively ignored, and otherwise diminished based on my gender. And always, I tried to give people the benefit of the doubt; maybe they knew more, maybe they had more experience, maybe there was something I was missing ... "I'm done compromising; even more so, I'm done with being compromised. So from this point forward, when I am confronted with one of these comments, subtle or overt, I will address them head on; I will stop in the moment and do my best to educate. I cannot guarantee that my objections will be taken to heart, but at least now I am part of creating an environment where there is the opportunity for growth. And if my comments fall on deaf ears, I will choose to walk away."



Nelly Furtado explains break from music

Nelly Furtado took a break from music because she parted ways with her management for personal reasons. The 'I'm Like a Bird' hitmaker - who has 13-year-old daughter Nevis with ex Jasper Gahunia - struggled with juggling being a mother at the age of 22 and her music career and she was forced to take time out when her business relationship failed. In an interview with Refinery 29, she revealed: "My life was pretty much on fast-forward from the age of 20. "I signed my first record deal, and then it was constant juggling of my work and my home life. I became a mother at quite a young age, I was 25, then I had a long-term business relationship [with her ex-manager] who was like a father figure to me. A couple of years ago I realised we had to part ways, and when that ended I took a look at a bunch of stuff in my life, and had this urge to simplify it. I didn't quit music, but I quit juggling. I thought, 'I'm going to clean my own toilet and wash my own underwear!" The 38-year-old singer says her latest album 'The Ride' was her channeling her emotions creatively and realizing what she wanted from life by digging out the "truth" from the people around her. She explained: "The album is all realizations. I didn't wanna be surrounded by bull**** anymore; I want to demand truth from the people around me and from myself. It's about dreams not always matching up to reality and coming out of the other side."



MEL C SURPRISES SCHOOL OF ROCK AUDIENCE

Mel C joined the 'School of Rock-The Musical' cast onstage for a special performance of 'Wannabe'. The 43-year-old singer surprised the audience at the performance of the musical in London last week, when she joined the cast to sing the Spice Girls' classic single. The West End production of Andrew Lloyd Webber's 'School of Rock - The Musical' is based on the 2003 film of the same title. It features music from the movie, as well as new music written by Lloyd Webber with lyrics by Glenn Slater. The adult West End cast of 'School of Rock - The Musical' is led by comedy star David Fynn as Dewey Finn and he is joined on stage at each performance by one of three teams of thirteen young performers who make up Dewey's band. Meanwhile, Mel recently

insisted a Spice Girls reunion will only work if all five members are involved. The singer decided not to reunite with her bandmates Mel B, Geri Horner and Emma Bunton after Victoria Beckham opted out and Mel believes it needs all five members to work. Speaking on ITV's 'The Nightly Show', she told Davina McCall: "That's where I'm at right now, that's where myself and Victoria are at. "It's not really doing the band justice to go out as a four-piece, whoever is missing, it doesn't matter." For me, Spice Girls, it's like a jigsaw puzzle. "It's different to other bands because you look at Take That and they are going out as a three-piece, and they are brilliant, I love the boys. "But with the Spice Girls everything about us was the individuality and what that created together."



MY HAIR JOURNEY THIS YEAR

By Yalda Golsharifi

Most of you guys know that I've tried out so many different hairstyles and I love changing up my look every now and then. Having the same hairstyle everyday can get really boring and repetitive. I think a cool hairstyle can really transform any look and make you look more put together. There are so many looks you can try out without having to damage your hair with dye. Here are some of my favorites!



1. A fresh new cut

Getting a new haircut always makes me feel so much better and more confident; it's like having a fresh start. Cutting my hair super short was so spontaneous because I've always had long hair for as long as I can remember, but I really loved rocking the short hair. It was such a nice change for me.



2- The perfect blow out

Going to the salon and getting a blow-dry is one of my favorite pick me ups. Whenever my hair is looking dull and flat, I love adding some volume and life to my hair with a quick blow dry.

3- Extensions

It's easy to get bored with the length of your hair which is why I love switching up my look with clip in extensions. This time I went for the super long Naomi Campbell look which I'm loving right now! There are so many ways I can style it and it's such a change from my shoulder length hair that I'm used to.



4- Messy up do

For the days where I'm in a rush or running late, throwing my hair up into a messy bun is the fastest way to get my hair out of my face while still looking stylish and chic.



5- Braids

Braids are the perfect solution to when you're having a bad hair day. With my busy schedule, long days, and trying to fit in workouts whenever I can, putting my hair into braids is the best way to keep my hair from looking like a complete disaster by the end of the day.



6- Hair accessories

You can turn any basic hair do into a statement by adding some hair accessories. We love experimenting with different kinds of accessories like hair threads and jewels in our salon and we've been really having fun with this trend.



A handout picture released by The National Gallery, London, yesterday shows the 1785 oil on canvas painting by British artist Thomas Gainsborough 1727 - 1788 entitled 'Mr and Mrs William Hallett ("The Morning Walk")'. — AFP

Man faces court for slashing Gainsborough painting

A man suspected of slashing an 18th century painting at Britain's National Gallery which featured in a James Bond film is due to appear in court yesterday. Keith Gregory, 63, was arrested on Saturday after allegedly damaging Thomas Gainsborough's painting "The Morning Walk" in the prestigious London museum. The gallery said in a statement that the attacker had used a "sharp instrument". "The damage is limited to two long scratches which have penetrated the paint layers but not the supporting canvas," the statement said. "A man was quickly detained by gallery assistants with the help of some visitors. He was arrested by the Metropolitan Police," it added.

The east wing of the gallery, where the permanent exhibition of British paintings is housed, was evacuated and closed for two hours. "The Morning Walk" depicts a young couple walking through a woodland landscape and was completed in 1785, shortly before the young lovers were married. It could be seen in the background in a scene in the 2012 Bond film "Skyfall" starring Daniel Craig. Gregory was charged on Sunday and remanded in custody. The painting has been removed from the gallery to be assessed by restorers. — AFP

Tissot Ballade introduces the silicon balance spring

It's time to make technological precision accessible

Innovation

Tissot has years of experience in producing high-precision and ultra-reliable mechanical watches, which has earned it many prizes in the international chronometry competition. Time doesn't change but the accuracy of its calculation gets greater with new technologies. We have gone from using hourglasses to heating the sand and producing silicon balance springs for the beating heart of the watch. The silicon properties make it more resistant and consistent, allowing for a greater precision and guaranteeing longevity, in this case introduced to an already impressive Powermatic 80 movement, which offers up to 80 hours of power reserve. Yet again, Tissot revolutionises the watch industry in its price segment, using a technology only seen in high-end watches. It stays true to its motto of providing luxury at affordable price with the Tissot Ballade.

Tradition

Although the collection is one of Tissot's classic pieces, it has taken it to the next level by introducing this new technology for the first time in the brand's history. In terms of design, elegant ticks mean the Tissot Ballade has a timeless style that will only increase its appeal through the years. The smart silhouette of the timepiece and the polished finishes, leaving a satiny effect, make it the perfect watch to go from day to night, completely effortlessly. Thoughtful details, including the Clous de Paris on the

bezel, which perfectly lines up with the efficient movement, and a clear, readable dial, make this watch a pleasure to wear. It's time to have it all!

Features

- Swiss Made
- Automatic movement officially certified chronometer (COSC)
- 316L stainless steel case with see-through caseback
- Scratch-resistant sapphire crystal
- Water-resistant up to a pressure of 5 bar (50 m / 165 ft)
- 316L solid stainless steel bracelet or leather strap with butterfly clasp and push-buttons
- Bicolour yellow-gold and rose-gold executions are PVD coatings
- Dimensions: Gent 41mm - 39mm / Lady 32mm - 30.6mm



Costa Coffee launches Old Paradise Street No.19

All new Limited Edition Roast

Costa Coffee, part of Al-Ghanim Industries Food and Beverage portfolio, launched the first in the series of Limited Edition Roasts, Old Paradise Street No.19, a unique single origin coffee from Papua New Guinea carefully chosen because of its clean fruity taste combined with delicious caramel and nuts flavor. The Old Paradise Street is a series of blend developed by Costa Coffee for its range of Limited Edition Roasts that are available in limited quantities for [RE7]customers looking to try something different. The launch of the Old Paradise No.19 roast is available at Costa Coffee stores across Kuwait started yesterday and for a limited time.

Coffee drink to give it a different and unique taste, or intriguing your taste buds by swapping your usual coffee choice, be sure to savor its irresistible new flavor. Old Paradise Street roasts are only available for a limited time so don't miss the opportunity to try it before it's gone.

Costa's VIP and Loyal customers received a special package delivered right to their doorstep, containing a handmade perfume that captures the new roast distinct flavors. Costa is the UK's favorite coffee shop, having been awarded "Best Branded Coffee Shop Chain in the UK and Ireland" by Allegra Strategies for seven years running since 2010.



The single origin beans of the roast have been brought to Kuwait via Costa Coffee's Roastery at Old Paradise Street, London from where the roast takes its name. Every bean is slow roasted under the meticulous eye of Costa's Master Roaster, Gennaro Pelliccia, to ensure nothing less than perfection in every batch.

Costa Kuwait is glad to be presenting coffee lovers with a new flavorful roast that will surely meet their tastes in whatever way they like to have their coffee. At Costa, we focus on providing quality and care in addition to exclusive tastes, ensuring our customers enjoy every moment of their coffee experience with us. Whether choosing the new roast in your favorite Costa

FEATURES



Pugs try to get their owner's attention, in Bucharest, Romania. — AP photos



A Don Sphinx cat reaches for a judge while being evaluated, in Bucharest, Romania.



An English bulldog gets a kiss from its owner, in Bucharest, Romania.

Slobbery kisses: Romania hosts show for 1,600 exotic pets

A tabby feline with big furry claws, bald cats with shell-like ears and skinny tails, and slobbery wrinkled pugs were the stars as Bucharest hosted a show featuring over 1,600 exotic pets. The pet show in the Romanian capital kicked off with a free dog handling session for some of the 1,500 dogs. Owners proudly paraded their pets at the March 10-12 event or entered them into beauty contests.

Rare breeds of dogs, cats and exotic animals are status symbols in Romania - but there was plenty of affection too, as owners cuddled or performed with their dogs. The array of pets included coiffed canines and bright-eyed cats. Exotic bald cats with webbed paws vied for attention with dogs like pugs or basset hounds. One boy visiting the show got into a cage to hug a dozing cognac-colored dog about the same size as him. Dogs took part from Romania, Bulgaria, France, Greece, Italy, Moldova, Norway, Poland, Russia, Spain, Sweden and Ukraine. Three pugs with tightly coiled tails stood on their hind legs seeking their owner's attention. Two basset hounds had silver scarves wrapped around their necks. Lali the greyhound trotted along the red carpet with an alert expression, watching its owner toss a tennis ball in her hand. — AP



Lali the greyhound walks with its owner during an evaluation.



A Don Sphinx cat reaches out of a cage.



A French Bulldog walks with its owner.



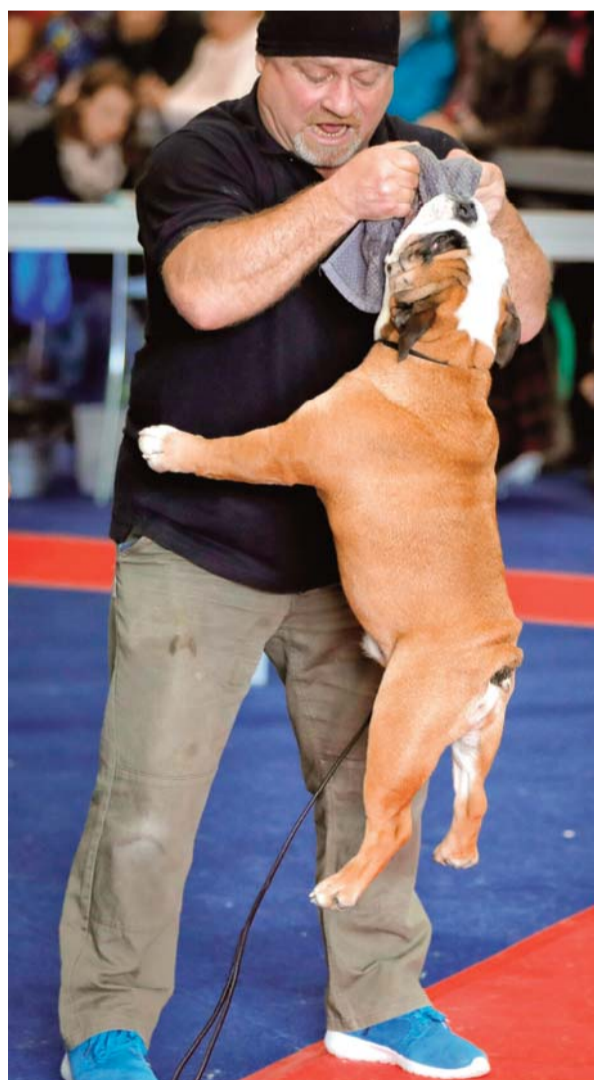
A woman holds a Scottish Fold cat.



A judge tries to get the attention of a Bengal cat.



Don Sphinx cats sit in an enclosure.



Jake the English bulldog hods on to a towel while demonstrating its abilities.



A boy sits inside a cage while petting a dog.



A woman holds a wire-haired Dachshund.



A small dog waits for an evaluation.



A man displays a Norwegian Forrest cat.

George W Bush portrait collection tops bestseller lists

A book collection of paintings of military veterans by former US President George W Bush has raced to the top of US bestseller lists. Subtitled "A Commander in Chief's Tribute to America's Warriors," the volume features 66 portraits of wounded or traumatized personnel he has met who served in the US Army in Iraq or Afghanistan following the terror attacks on September 11, 2001. Published in late February, the book is at the top of the New York

Times bestselling non-fiction category for the second week. It stands at number 18 of all books selling on Amazon.

Each portrait is accompanied by the veteran's story, written by Bush, who wanted to "honor the sacrifice and courage of America's military veterans," his presidential center said on its website. Bush will donate his profits from the book to the nonprofit center, whose Military Service Initiative "works to ensure that post-9/11 veterans and their

families make successful transitions to civilian life with a focus on gaining meaningful employment and overcoming the invisible wounds of war," the publisher Crown Publishing Group said in a statement.

Although the 43rd president has never voiced regret over launching the US-led wars in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, which caused hundreds of thousands of civilian casualties, his book showcases his efforts to help some

of the "remarkable men and women who were injured carrying out my orders," as he wrote on his Instagram account. Some 2.5 million US military personnel have served in Afghanistan or Iraq since 2001. Of those, 6,896 service members were killed and more than 50,000 injured, according to a compilation of Defense Department data. — AFP

Man faces court for slashing Gainsborough painting



Satirical sculptures burn during the traditional Fallas festival in Valencia, Spain, Sunday. Every year the city of Valencia celebrates the ancient 'Las Fallas' fiesta, a noisy week that is full of fireworks and processions in honor of Saint Joseph that ends in the midnight of March 19, burning large paper mache satiric figures displayed around the streets of the city. — AP

Banksy West Bank hotel to receive first guests

Secretive British street artist Banksy's hotel next to Israel's controversial separation wall was due to welcomed its first customers yesterday, two weeks after its surprise launch. The Walled-Off Hotel in Bethlehem is only four meters (yards) from the controversial wall which cuts through the occupied West Bank, and all the rooms face it. The nine rooms, which Banksy described as having the "worst view of hotel in the world," range from \$30 for a bunk bed in one room to \$965 per night for the presidential suite.

Guests, who will each put down a \$1,000 deposit to ward off theft of the dozens of new Banksy works on the walls, were due to start arriving early afternoon, hotel staff said. Manager Wissam Salsaa said they were nearly totally booked for the next three months. "We have arrivals today from six different countries, and I think most of our clients are flying just to stay here," he told AFP. He rejected criticism the prices were unaffordable for many Palestinians, saying they had nearly 50 staff to pay and any profits would go back into the community.

"Everyone that came here thinks this is the most amazing project," he said. "For letting the voice of the Palestinians be heard." The hotel was announced unexpectedly at the beginning of the month and the artwork, Banksy's largest new collection in years, has been donated to the local community, the hotel's website says. The artist closely protects his identity and was not in attendance at the launch. The wall is one of the most striking symbols of Israel's 50-year occupation, and has become a major focus for demonstrations and artwork-including by Banksy.

Israel refers to it as the security barrier and insists it is crucial for keeping out would-be attackers, but an advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice declared it illegal in 2004. The hotel's website encourages guests to explore the possibility of painting on the wall-with a graffiti supplies store next door with "everything you need to make your mark". There was no major launch party planned, with staff dressed in red waistcoats serving Walled-Off Salads and afternoon tea in the lobby. A few tourists mulled around inspecting the gallery selling Palestinian art and a museum highlighting the history of the region.

Bea Kaufmann, a German living in the Israeli commercial capital Tel Aviv, said she had come with friends as she thinks it is "important to see the other side" of the conflict. The rooms themselves have a deliberate faded luxury, with typical green eyes - and autism. Rather than being treated like an outsider, which too often is the plight of kids on the spectrum, Julia is one of the gang. Look: On this friendliest of streets (actually Studio J at New York's Kaufman Astoria Studios, where "Sesame Street" lives) Julia is about to play a game with Oscar, Abby and Grover. In this scene being taped for airing next season, these Muppet chums have been challenged to spot objects shaped like squares or circles or triangles.

Museum, not gym

The museum's curator, British professor Gavin Grindon, told AFP earlier this month they wanted to highlight the negative impact of Western intervention. "A lot of other hotels have a gym, this one has a museum." "It is 100 years that British people have been coming here and making a bit of an imperial mess, from Tony Blair all the way back to Lord (Arthur) Balfour in 1917." The Balfour Declaration, signed by then British foreign secretary Balfour in 1917, promised the Jews a homeland in what was then mandate Palestine. The agreement is hailed by Israel as paving the way for its creation in 1948 and detested by Palestinians, who say it gave away their homeland.

Banksy has a long history in the Palestinian territories. In February 2015, he allegedly sneaked into the Gaza Strip through a smuggling tunnel and painted three works on the walls of Gaza homes destroyed in Israeli air strikes during the previous year's conflict. In 2007, he painted a number of artworks in Bethlehem, including a young girl frisking an Israeli soldier pinned up against a wall. In 2005, he sprayed nine stenciled images at different locations along the eight-meter-high (27 foot) wall. They included a ladder reaching over the wall, a young girl being carried over it by balloons and a window on the grey concrete showing beautiful mountains in the background. His works, like elsewhere in the world, have become tourist attractions. — AFP



This file photo shows a Banksy installation hangs above the booths in the lobby at street artist Banksy's newly opened Walled Off hotel in the Israeli occupied West Bank town of Bethlehem. — AFP photos



This file photo shows a visitor looking inside a room at street artist Banksy's newly opened Walled Off hotel in the Israeli occupied West Bank town of Bethlehem.

A MUPPET WITH AUTISM TO BE WELCOMED SOON ON 'SESAME STREET'

Folks on Sesame Street have a way of making everyone feel accepted. That certainly goes for Julia, a Muppet youngster with blazing red hair, bright green eyes - and autism. Rather than being treated like an outsider, which too often is the plight of kids on the spectrum, Julia is one of the gang. Look: On this friendliest of streets (actually Studio J at New York's Kaufman Astoria Studios, where "Sesame Street" lives) Julia is about to play a game with Oscar, Abby and Grover. In this scene being taped for airing next season, these Muppet chums have been challenged to spot objects shaped like squares or circles or triangles.

"You're lucky," says Abby to Grover. "You have Julia on your team, and she is really good at finding shapes!" With that, they skedaddle, an exit that calls for the six Muppeteers squatted out of sight below them to scramble accordingly. Joining her pals, Julia (performed by Stacey Gordon) takes off hunting. For more than a year, Julia has existed in print and digital illustrations as the centerpiece of a multifaceted initiative by Sesame Workshop called "Sesame Street and Autism: See Amazing in All Children."

Social skills

She has been the subject of a storybook released along with videos, e-books, an app and website. The goal is to promote a better understanding of what the Autism Speaks advocacy group describes as "a range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech and nonverbal communication, as well as by unique strengths and differences." But now Julia has been brought to life in fine Muppet fettle. She makes her TV debut on "Sesame Street" in the "Meet Julia" episode airing April 10 on both PBS and HBO. Additional videos featuring Julia will be available online.

Developing Julia and all the other components of this campaign has required years of consultation with organizations, experts and families within the autism community, according to Jeanette Betancourt, Sesame Workshop's senior vice president of US Social Impact. "In the US, one in 68 children is diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder," she says. "We wanted to promote a better understanding and reduce the stigma often found around these children. We're modeling the way both children and adults can look at autism from a strength-based perspective: finding things that all children share."

Julia is at the heart of this effort. But while she represents the full range of children on the spectrum, she isn't meant to typify each one of them: "Just as we look at all children as being unique, we should do the same thing when we're looking at children with autism," Betancourt says. It was with keen interest that Stacey Gordon first learned of Julia more than a year ago. "I said, 'If she's ever a puppet, I want to BE Julia!'" No wonder. Gordon is a Phoenix-based puppeteer who performs, conducts classes and workshops, and creates whimsical puppets for sale to the public.

Little differently

She also has a son with autism, and, before she started her family, was a therapist to youngsters on the spectrum. Although she figured her chances of landing the

dream role of Julia were nil, her contacts in the puppet world paid off: Two friends who worked as Muppeteers on "Sesame Street" dropped her name to the producers. After submitting tapes, then coming to New York for an audition, she was hired. In the introductory segment, Julia is having fun with Abby and Elmo when Big Bird walks up. He wants to be her new friend, but she doesn't speak to him. He thinks she doesn't like him.



This image released by Sesame Workshop shows Julia, a new autistic muppet character debuting on the 47th Season of 'Sesame Street,' on April 10, 2017, on both PBS and HBO. — AP

"She does things just a little differently, in a Julia sort of way," Abby informs him. Julia, chuckling, then displays a different-but-fun way of playing tag, and everyone joins in. But when a siren wails, she covers her ears and looks stricken. "She needs to take a break," Big Bird's human friend Alan calmly explains. Soon, all is well and play resumes. "The 'Meet Julia' episode is something that I wish my son's friends had been able to see when they were small," says Gordon. "I remember him having meltdowns and his classmates not understanding how to react."

Gordon says her son, now 13, isn't drawn to puppetry. "He's more interested in math and science, and plays the piano brilliantly," she says with pride. But she's having a blast being part of the show that helped hook her, as a child, on puppeteering. "It is so much fun to be on set with everyone, and get to play up all the positive things I've seen with the kids that I've worked with," Gordon says. "At the same time, I come at this with a reverence. I don't want to let the autism community down." — AP