



3 Kuwait's new terminal project remains on course: Minister



6 Malala visits hometown for first time since her shooting



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16 Salah strikes again as Liverpool ride their luck to beat Palace



Gazans bury dead after bloodiest day in years

Kuwait condemns Israel's brutal attacks on Palestinian demonstrators

GAZA CITY: Gazans buried their dead yesterday with calls for "revenge" a day after a major demonstration led to clashes that saw Israeli forces kill 16 Palestinians in the bloodiest day since a 2014 war. But while anger seethed over Friday's events, only several hundred protesters returned to tents erected at different sites near the Gaza Strip's border with Israel to resume demonstrations planned to last six weeks in the blockaded enclave. Gaza's health ministry said 15 people suffered wounds that were not life-threatening in low-level clashes along the border yesterday.

Thousands attended funerals for 14 of those killed - two were buried on Friday - with mourners holding Palestinian flags and some chanting "revenge" and firing into the air. The armed wing of Hamas, the Islamist movement that runs the

Gaza Strip, said five of those killed were its members who were participating "in popular events side-by-side with their people". "Where are you, Arabs? Where are you, Muslims?" mourners chanted at one funeral, calling on the Arab and Muslim world to intervene.

Kuwait condemned Israel's brutal attacks on unarmed Palestinian demonstrators in the occupied territory, an official source at the foreign ministry said on Friday. The source added that Kuwait has followed up, with a great sorrow, reports of Israel's brutal attacks against Palestinian demonstrators that are in defiance of international resolutions and violation of all international norms. The source noted that Kuwait, out of its responsibilities towards Muslim and Arab issues, and through its non-permanent membership of the UN

Security Council, called for holding an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council to discuss the ongoing Israeli attacks on the unarmed demonstrators and the excessive use of power.

The source referred to the "martyrdom" of the 16 Palestinians and the wounding of over 1,400 others announced by Palestinian medical sources. The source added that Kuwait strongly supports the legitimate demands of the Palestinian president on the need to provide international protection for Palestinian people in the occupied territory. The source called on the Security Council to shoulder its historic responsibilities in maintaining international peace and security and combating immediately the repressive Israeli practices against Palestinians.

Continued on Page 11



GAZA: Palestinian relatives yesterday mourn over the body of Hamdan Abu Amsha, who was killed a day earlier by Israeli forces, during his funeral in Beit Hanoun in northern Gaza Strip. — AFP

Duterte wants 'govt-to-govt' deployment of Filipino workers

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The Philippines will demand the maximum protection of its overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) in Kuwait, especially the interests and welfare of its domestic helpers, said a senior government official visiting the country. Speaking with the local media at the Philippines Embassy in Sidiq on Friday, Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs Undersecretary for Migrant Workers Affairs Sarah Lou Arriola said a labor 'agreement' that was signed last week was a result of initial and preliminary talks held in Manila between Kuwaiti and Filipino negotiators. "The talks were only at the level of the technical working group of negotiators. They will now go back

to their principals (their governments)," she said.

"From our side, the president has expressed his views on the agreement and said the 'initial agreement signed is not enough' - he wants maximum protection for our workers. President (Rodrigo) Duterte said he wants 'government-to-government' dealings when it comes to the deployment of our workers, perhaps doing away with private recruitment agencies. The agreement initially signed was just a preliminary one - he wants more. As the chief architect of foreign policy, he wants the best for our workers," Arriola said.

According to her, negotiations will continue and will tackle all the aspects of employment - from recruitment and training to deployment and monitoring of workers once they are deployed.

Continued on Page 11



Sarah Arriola

Saudi defenses intercept missile fired by Houthis

RIYADH: Saudi air defenses intercepted a missile fired by Yemeni rebels at the kingdom's southern city of Najran yesterday, the Saudi-led coalition fighting the rebels said, adding that one person was wounded. "The missile was fired at Najran indiscriminately and with the aim of hitting residential areas," coalition spokesman Colonel Turki Al-Malki told the official Saudi Press Agency. "It was successfully intercepted and the debris fell on residential areas, lightly wounding one Indian expatriate."

Yemen's Saba news agency, run by the Iran-backed Houthi rebels, said the missile had been fired at a Saudi National Guard base in Najran, just over the border from Yemen where the Saudi-led coalition intervened on the side of the government in March 2015. The

coalition said on Thursday it intercepted another missile fired by the Houthis at the southern city of Jazan - the latest in a series of such attacks that have drawn widespread condemnation.

The coalition spokesman again hit out at Iran after yesterday's attack, accusing it of "jeopardizing the security of Saudi Arabia, the region and the whole world". The UN Security Council this week condemned "in the strongest possible terms" multiple missile attacks launched by the Houthis on Saudi territory, saying they posed a threat to regional security. In one of the biggest such attacks yet, Saudi forces last weekend said they intercepted seven missiles fired by rebels toward cities including Riyadh, killing one person.

The coalition intervened in Yemen to push back the Houthis who captured the capital Sanaa and forced the government into exile. Riyadh has accused archrival Tehran of providing the missiles and threatened retaliation against Iran. Tehran has denied making any arms deliveries and has said the Saudi accusations are a smokescreen intended to divert attention from its deadly bombing campaign against rebel-held areas, including Sanaa. — AFP


immigrant and non-immigrant visa applicants to list all social media identities they have used in the past five years. The information will be used to vet and identify them, according to the proposals, which would affect about 14.7 million people annually.

The proposals support President Donald Trump's promise to institute "extreme vetting" of foreigners entering the United States to prevent terrorism. Previously, under rules instituted last May, consular officials were instructed to collect social media identities only when they determined "that such information is required to confirm identity or conduct more rigorous national security vetting", a State Department official said at the time.

Continued on Page 11

US visa seekers to be asked for social media IDs

WASHINGTON: In a broad expansion of the information gathered from applicants for US visas, the federal government is proposing to collect social media identities from nearly everyone who seeks entry into the United States, according to a State Department filing on Friday. The proposal, if approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), would require most



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2 Kuwaiti authors sign their books at Baghdad fair 2018

Kuwait, Iraq strengthen cultural ties

BAGHDAD: On the sidelines of Baghdad International Book Fair 2018, the two Kuwaiti authors Saud Al-San'ousi and Buthaina Al-Issa signed their books on Friday. This is the first time for Kuwaiti writers to sign books in Iraq for nearly three decades. Al-Issa told KUNA following the signing ceremony. She thanked the Iraqi side for the warm reception and hospitality offered to the Kuwaiti delegation to the book fair. On his part, Saud Al-San'ousi said he was very impressed by his visit to Baghdad, the heritage sites in the city and the humanitarian characteristics of the Iraqi people.

He said the ongoing book fairs provide an opportunity for the intelligentsia from both countries to meet and discuss ways for enhancing the cultural exchanges. Meanwhile, President of the Union of Iraqi Publishers Abdulwahab Al-Radhi praised the Kuwaiti participation in the book fair, saying that the Iraqi readers have a growing interest in the Kuwaiti books. The Kuwaiti pavilion has seen a remarkable turnout by visitors of the book fair, he pointed out. Kuwait's Deputy Ambassador to Iraq Khaled Al-Jana'i attended the book signing ceremony. Baghdad International Book Fair kicked off yesterday with the participation of around 600 publishing houses from the Arab region and beyond.

Cultural ties
Kuwait's current participation in



BAGHDAD: Kuwait's Deputy Ambassador to Iraq Khaled Al-Jana'i chats with Kuwaiti author Saud Al-San'ousi. — KUNA

Baghdad International Book Fair 2018 aims to strengthen cultural relationship with Iraq, an official said. Kuwait, via the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL), seeks to communicate with Iraqi intellectuals and promote its books. Saad Al-Enezi, Kuwait International Book Fair

head told KUNA. Baghdad is the capital of culture, arts, civilization, knowledge, and education, Al-Enezi noted, pointing out that Kuwait's last participation in the book fair was in 1989.

NCCAL's participation, which came upon an invitation by the Union of Iraqi



Kuwaiti author Buthaina Al-Issa

Publishers, does not seek commercial profits, but, instead, intends to promote Kuwaiti books to Iraqi readers, he said. Kuwait books at the fair are spread amongst 350 titles across various genres, the NCCAL official said, mentioning that Iraqi authorities have not restricted or banned any. For

his part, Union of Iraqi Publishers' President Abdulwahab Al-Radhi expressed his joy over the Kuwaiti participation at the fair after years of estrangement. The event kicked off on Thursday with the participation of around 600 Arab and non-Arab publishing houses. — Agencies

local spotlight

Fall in rent



By Muna Al-Fuzai

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Speculation over investment properties indicated an expected fall in rent in Kuwait by approximately 20 percent in 2018, given the oversupply and low demand that could affect the real estate market. I think rentals will continue to drop after unjustified increases over the past few years, with a noticeable decline of between 30 and 50 percent in some areas amid the absence of any indications of the possibility of rising again soon, for several reasons.

The first reason is supply exceeds demand. The second main and obvious reason is the impact of the government's policies of rationalizing spending, thus lowering the standard of living of some families by curbing salaries. There is constant pressure on expat families, which means that the father chooses to remain alone in Kuwait and sends his family to his home country to control and reduce expenses. Therefore, there will be no need for a large apartment, and a studio or shared apartment with friends will be enough and cheaper.

I believe that the increasing on pressure on expatriates and imposing more fees on them has contributed to the departure of some expatriate families and led to the fall in rent automatically. In the last few months, rent in some private housing areas decreased by more than KD 100. I think the beginning of the school year after summer, for example, is an opportunity to measure any decline, the possibility of stability or a return to rising rent values.

Also, the availability of government housing for citizens and the reduction of the waiting period mean that the number of tenants will be fewer, and more flats will be vacant. According to an international real estate appraisal report, the introduction of new electricity and water tariffs and the rising cost of living by the end of last year led to the displacement of a large segment of the tenants to cheaper places.

The fall in investment property prices definitely worries real estate owners, but banks too are closely monitoring this decline, because it may affect some borrowers. This is normal in the absence of a clear coordination between the parties - those who are benefiting from stability in real estate prices and the government with its policies in dealing with expat families, who need to live in large apartments.

I believe the owners of real estate need to determine a common rent value, taking into account the situation in the country and the effects of government policy on families, especially expatriates. I agree that no landlord wants to keep apartments empty for a long period, but keeping rentals in balance is better than keeping flats empty with no gain for anyone.

NBK celebrates spring season with children at Specialty Hospital



KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) celebrated the season of spring at its Specialty Hospital and Stem Cell Therapy Unit. The celebration comes as part of a program designed for the children undergoing treatment. Children took part in creating a colorful spring wall where they created and designed their own artistic flowers and hanged it on the spring wall. "NBK is keen on sharing this occasion with children as it symbolizes new beginnings," said Joanne Al Abdul Jaleel, NBK Public relations Officer. "Spring is the promise that everything can begin again, children are very smart emotionally to get the spring vibes and move on seeking new beginnings after their treatment."

Al Abdul Jaleel added, "The spring season celebration filled the hearts of children, nurses and doctors who took part in this occasion to create their own flowers and hang it on a festive wall featuring a beautiful nature." "We take great pride today in celebrating with our children at the Specialty Hospital and the Stem Cell Therapy Unit," noted Al Abdul Jaleel. "NBK has always considered supporting the children an essential part of its social and philanthropic outreach." NBK also organized story telling sessions and



movie nights for children at the Specialty Hospital and Stem Cell Therapy Unit during the month of March, as part of a fun-activity program that was launched to support children while they get their treatment and extends all the year round. Moreover, a doctoral committee from the hospital chose the best performing nurse for the month of March to be honored by NBK, as part of this annual program that aims at encouraging team work and dedication.

NBK Children's Hospital stands as a landmark for

the bank's social initiatives towards children. NBK expanded the hospital's capacity and opened recently the only Stem Cell Therapy Unit for children in Kuwait, further expanding its hospital's ability to treat children with cancer and blood diseases. NBK's Social initiatives reflect the Bank's high sense of duty and responsibility towards the community. It is a well rooted tradition that has been carried out by NBK each year in its efforts to continuously have an active role in Kuwait's society.

Bayt.com Report

Job seekers in Kuwait expect career growth

KUWAIT: The Bayt.com 'Jobseeker Confidence Survey,' revealed that over two thirds (67%) of job seekers who provided an answer expect business conditions in Kuwait to 'improve' in a year's time. When it came to current business conditions in Kuwait, only 18% of job seekers thought they are below average. Job seekers have largely positive perceptions of future economic conditions. According to the survey, close to

two thirds (63.1%) of Kuwait job seekers who responded to this question said they expect their country's economy to 'improve' within the next six months, 23.7% said they expect it to 'remain the same', and only 13.2% think it could 'get worse'.

In regards to availability of jobs in Kuwait, nearly six in 10 (57%) job seekers are either 'somewhat hopeful' or 'very hopeful' that they will find their ideal job in the next six months. What's more, close to half of those who answered the question (45%) believe the number of jobs available in Kuwait will increase in the next six months, one third (33%) believe it will remain the same, and only 22% believe it could decrease.

The survey, administered by

Bayt.com, the Middle East's #1 job site, and YouGov, global online market research company, aims to gauge perceptions and attitudes of jobseekers regarding the job hunt. The positive findings of this year's job seeker confidence index are also echoed in the Bayt.com Middle East Job Index, which showed that nearly nine in 10 companies across the MENA region will be hiring over the next 12 months.

Expectations

Even at the personal level, the great majority (92%) of job seekers in Kuwait who provided an answer said they expect their personal financial position to 'improve' or at least 'remain the same' in the next six months. Likewise, 88% of

job seekers who responded to the survey question on career growth said they expect their career growth opportunities to either improve or maintain the same level in the next six months. Currently, three quarters (75%) of Kuwait respondents are either 'satisfied' or neutral towards their career growth opportunities. "At Bayt.com, we work to support all professionals, job seekers and employers alike, in their efforts to overcome any economic changes and to make room for improvements in their careers," said Suhail Masri, Vice President of Employer Solutions, Bayt.com. "We are proud to be able to provide tens of thousands of jobs on a daily basis and to connect many companies and organizations to our database of more than 31 million CVs."

Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: SPC Erin Murphy (right) and SGT Elaina Nanamaker, 28th infantry division Pennsylvania, USA, Pennsylvania National Guard, takes a selfie next to camels ahead of a camel race held in Kabad, southwest of Kuwait City yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

2nd phase of revamping Kuwaiti bourse begins

Kuwaiti banking sector able to cope with future demands

KUWAIT: Bursa Kuwait Company today begins second phase of overhauling the national stock market as part of an ongoing development strategy. The development process coincides with a declaration by the Financial Times Stock Exchange (FTSE) Russell that promoting the Kuwaiti bourse, to be enlisted among Russell's international stocks, would be in two segments.

The team in charge of upgrading services and the bourse products, which groups the Capital Market Authority, the bourse company and Kuwait Clearing Company, had declared that the market, in the development process, would be divided into three ones—the first, the main and the auctions. The first segment will be promoted within the FTSE index for international stocks, in tandem with the bi-annual review of this index, due on September 24. The enlisting of the second segment will coincide with the index quarterly review.

First phase included a strategy "roadmap," drawn up between December 2014 and March 2015. The Kuwaiti bourse company is aspiring to develop the national financial markets and enhance them to regional levels. Bursa Kuwait Company, owned by the Capital Market Authority, was established on April 21, 2014, signaling first step toward privatizing the stock market, established in 1983. Transitional phase began on April 25, 2016, when Bursa Kuwait Company officially took charge of the operations at the bourse.

Kuwaiti banking sector

In another development, Board Chairman of the Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) Ali Al-Mousa affirmed yesterday the Kuwaiti banking sector's ability to cope with future demands. The banking sector is also able to take advantage of latest technological developments, Al-Mousa said, adding such devel-

opments pave the way toward newer prospects. The CBK chief made his remarks to reporters on the sidelines of the bank's general assembly meeting in Kuwait City. The banking industry is currently facing essential changes on a global level whether in its tools or services, said Al-Mousa.

Most local banks, including CBK, have updated their operational systems, he said, adding most state institutions in Kuwait have also adopted such a step. Kuwait is one of the proactive countries in the region to keep up with industrialized countries around the world, particularly in adopting new technologies, said Al-Mousa. It is only a matter of time until the banking industry in Kuwait witnesses a total transformation in operation tools and customer services, affirmed the CBK head. Meanwhile, Al-Mousa mentioned that CBK's net profits in 2017 reached KD 55.4 million (\$183 million), with a 10 percent increase compared to 2016. — Agencies

Municipality achieves financial self-sufficiency

KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality's strategy to realize financial self-sufficiency (FSS) has borne fruit, with no need for financing from the public treasury, said Director General Engineer Ahmad Al-Manfohi yesterday. The Municipality has recovered KD 50 million (\$167 million), he added. As part of a strategy, the Municipality receives money in return of the various services it offers in different fields, advertising, trade and electronic, in addition to stopping financial wastage in contracts in different areas, Al-Manfohi added.

The Municipality has achieved its

strategic goals through raising the financial value of these services, he stated, noting that the KD 50 million revenues in the FY 2017-2018, has been the result of great efforts. The figure is more than double the KD 16 million (\$70 million) of 2016-2017. The plan adopted by the Municipality included streamlining issuance of advertising and shops licenses, electronically, in addition to competing contracts for road advertisements. According to Al-Manfohi, the total values of cleaning contracts fell from KD 280 million (\$935.8 million) to KD 130 million (\$434.4 million). He said the contracts had been "remedied" based on remarks by the State Audit Bureau. — KUNA



Engineer Ahmad Al-Manfohi

Kuwait gripped with dusty weather and low visibility

KUWAIT: Unstable weather marked with thick dust is prevailing throughout Kuwait with northwesterly winds roaring at 60 km/h, said Abdulaziz Al-Qarawi, weather monitor at Kuwait Meteorological Center. Visibility dropped lower than 500 meters in most Kuwaiti areas, coupled with gatherings of rainy and thunderous clouds. Meanwhile, the maximum temperature is in the range of 33-35 degrees, while at sea waves have reached 4-7 feet, Al-Qarawi said.

At night, the weather will be cloudy and the dust will recede gradually. In the coastal areas, the winds are blowing at 20-45 km/h. The heat during the night is forecast to drop to 16-18 degrees. Tomorrow, the weather will begin to improve gradually, with unsteady northwesterly winds blowing at 15-40 km/h. There will be scattered mists and the maximum temperature will range between 30 and 33 degrees. Yesterday night was partially cloudy with unsteady northwesterly winds at 15-35 km/h. Lowest heat was between 13 and 17 degrees.



KUWAIT: Unstable weather marked with thick dust prevailed throughout Kuwait on Friday with visibility dropping lower than 500 meters in most Kuwaiti areas. — KUNA

Interior Ministry warns

The Interior Ministry urged motorists to be cautious of weather conditions and visibility ebb in some regions. The MoI warned the

drivers to be aware of any obstacles on the roads and advised them to drive slowly. The ministry is reachable for any emergency on the hotline 112. — Agencies

Minister surveys the site of new terminal

KUWAIT: A key project to build a new terminal at Kuwait International Airport is progressing smoothly, Kuwait's Minister of Public Works Hussam Al-Roumi said yesterday. "We are here today to see how far the construction process has come," Al-Roumi, who also serves as Minister of State for Municipal Affairs, told the

press as he surveyed the site of the new terminal. He stressed that His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has emphasized the need to complete the project in a timely manner.

Al-Roumi revealed that other projects would follow suit soon, including a new airport apron and parking lot. On the new terminal, the Kuwaiti minister said the "architectural masterpiece" features 51 gates to accommodate up to 26 million passengers a year. He went on to say that the Ministry of Public Works has been in constant contact with Turkish conglomerate Limak Holding, the contractors behind the terminal, in an effort to expedite the completion of the project. — KUNA

Switzerland backs Kuwait's efforts to resolve crisis

BERN: The Swiss Confederation supports all efforts carried out by Kuwait to resolve the Gulf crisis, said Kuwaiti Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Khaled Al-Jarallah. This statement came at the conclusion of the fourth Kuwaiti-Swiss

strategic dialogue attended by the State Secretary of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs Pascale Baeriswly and top diplomats from both countries. Al-Jarallah indicated that Switzerland backs up the efforts aimed at ending the critical situation in the GCC region. Meanwhile, he said that the Kuwaiti-Swiss meeting had focused on all possible fields of cooperation and ways to develop them. The situations in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen in addition to the Gulf crisis were also on the table of discussions, said Al-Jarallah who added that both countries stressed their desires to cooperate and collaborate on issues pertaining to bilateral ties as well as regional and international developments. — KUNA

Local

Undersecretary, nursing board of directors discuss nursing concerns

No Kuwaiti in list of 500 of world's most football players

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Health Ministry Undersecretary Dr Mustafa Redha received Kuwait Nursing Society's board of directors headed by Bandar Nashmi Al-Enezi to discuss nursing concerns. Enezi said the topics discussed in the meeting included amending the nursing payroll of 2009, giving Kuwaiti, GCC and bedoon nurses two days off weekly, referring the nursing services director to retirement and training courses needed for promotion. He added that Redha expressed full understanding of the demands and promised to study their feasibility as soon as possible.

MPs to discuss proposals

Well-informed parliamentary sources predicted that in its session to be held on Tuesday, April 3, the parliament will discuss a proposal to form a committee to investigate appointments, another to form a committee to investigate a recent yacht fire, a third proposal to form a temporary committee to study the reasons of demographic imbalance and visa trafficking and a fourth on having the parliamen-

tary human rights committee investigate the domestic helpers recruitment company.

Gas enhancement plant

Australian firm WorelyParsons has completed primary designs of a project to repair and expand a gas enhancement plant in southeastern Kuwait. The \$270 million project will add a third unit at plant number 160.

Municipal Council law

MP Hamdan Al-Azmi announced plans to submit a proposal to amend the Municipal Council law determining municipal election constituencies. "It is a genuine right of the council itself to determine them and not the government," he underlined, promising to include this in a grilling motion he intends to file against the PM.

E-connection

With the aim of serving the industrial sector and reducing paperwork, the ministry of electricity and water announced the completion of electronic linkage with 12

government bodies. MEW's technical control manager Iqbal Al-Tayyar said the e-connection is complete after five years of trial operations. She added that the new feature will help investors and attract investment to Kuwait.

Tender for gas vessels

Minister of Oil and Minister of Electricity and Water Bakheet Al-Rasheedi said a tender to build three giant liquefied gas vessels was offered for bidding in 2017 to replace a previous one offered for bidding in 2014. Rasheedi added that a contract was signed on Jan 24, 2018 to build the vessels with a total value of \$213 million (\$71.2 million per vessel) after the first tender was cancelled due to overpricing.

Building footbridges

The Roads and Land Transport Authority director Ahmed Al-Hessan called for building footbridges outside every school overlooking main roads in Ahmadi and Mubarak Al-Kabeer. Hessan also sent a letter in this regard to the municipality.



KUWAIT: Farwaniya detectives raided several illegal street markets in Jleeb and confiscated large quantities of foul foodstuff, vegetables and contraband subsidized supplies, in addition to arresting a number of street vendors.

Security campaign at chalets; drug suspects nabbed

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: A large-scale security inspection campaign was launched at the Lo'loot Al-Khairan chalets area, said security sources, noting that the campaign resulted in filing seven drug-related cases, arresting four people under the effect of drugs and alcohol, arresting 10 wanted people, arresting eight people for not holding any ID, impounding five vehicles, 10 bikes and ATVs and filing 415 citations for various traffic violations.

Illegal street markets

Farwaniya detectives raided several illegal street markets in Jleeb and confiscated large quantities of foul foodstuff, vegetables and contraband subsidized supplies, in addition to arresting a number of street vendors.

Enforcing the law

Following up on an incident which took place on Thursday at Jaber Al-Ahmed secondary school, the Interior Ministry's Acting Undersecretary, the Education Ministry's Undersecretary and Environment Public Authority's Acting Director met to discuss what took place and agreed that everyone should respect state laws and regulations. The meeting also discussed setting certain procedures to be followed in the future on enforcing the law on government employees.

Liquor brewery busted

The Interior Ministry's Relations and Security Media Department announced that Mubarak Al-Kabeer and Ahmadi security arrested two Asians for brewing liquor inside a house in Qurain. Security sources added that on raiding the place, detectives found 171 barrels, four distillation devices, eight large jerry-cans and 312 bottles ready for sale.



News in brief

Oil Ministry's website

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Ministry of Oil has introduced its newly revamped website in a bid to provide more efficient and easily accessible services online. The new website is a comprehensive source for all information and studies germane to the local oil industry, Kuwaiti acting Minister of Oil Sheikh Talal Al-Sabah said in a statement yesterday. He explained that the website serves many purposes, chiefly, acquainting the general public with the services offered by the ministry, saying that any feedback would be highly appreciated. The Kuwaiti oil minister pointed out that the website promises visitors a better user experience with many new features, including a new design, which makes it easier to navigate. Meanwhile, Sheikha Tamathur Al-Sabah, the ministry's public relations officer, said that the website's smooth navigation makes it unlike most government websites that are often plagued by monotonous content. She went on to hail the initiative as a new beginning for the ministry. —UNA

US Tomb of Unknowns

WASHINGTON: Chief of General Staff of the Kuwaiti Army Lt-Gen Mohammad Khaled Al-Khuder laid a wreath of flowers at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery, Virginia, in remembrance of the US soldiers lost in war. During the ceremony on Thursday, the US Army Band performed the national anthems of the State of Kuwait and the United States. As part of his official visit to the US, Lt-Gen Al-Khuder met with US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen Joseph F Dunford at the Pentagon. The two military chiefs discussed ways of promoting the defense cooperation between both countries and other issues of common concern. Lt-Gen Al-Khuder arrived here earlier today, leading a high-ranking military delegation on visit to the US. —KUNA

Protecting women

CAIRO: The Arab League has called for implementing international and regional treaties for protecting women against abuse in their relationship with men. This came in a statement yesterday, by the director at the Arab League department of woman, family and childhood, Enas Mekki, addressing a seminar about means of bolstering prosecution mechanisms in anti-women violence during armed struggles. Mekki has indicated that terrorist groups misinterpret some Islamic principles to justify violence against women, namely in intimate intercourse. Khawla Mattar, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), has said that women in the Arab world, particularly in Syria, are being subject to repression, injustice and abuse. Women, in some circumstances, have been held in cages in Ghouta, an embattled region located outskirts of the Syrian capital, she said. —KUNA

Legal residency status

KUWAIT: Kuwait Central System for Remedy of Situations of Illegal Residents said yesterday it settled legal residency status of 12,733 people since early 2011 up until March this year. Colonel Abdulaziz Al-Asousi, Acting Director of Remedy Department, said 8,521 people have completed legal status settlement process. Al-Asousi said the Central System was in the process of legalizing status of 4,212 people after identifying their original nationalities. He said those who corrected their legal status generally belonged to Saudi, Iraq, Syria, Iranian and Jordanian nationalities. There were around 1,400 people who belonged to other countries. Al-Asousi called on all people wishing to correct their legal status to come forward to the Central System and proceed with the procedures in order to have legal residencies in Kuwait. —KUNA

Arab libraries gateway

ALEXANDRIA: General Director of Kuwait National Library Kamel Abduljelil underlined yesterday significance of launching the digital gateway for Arab libraries, spearheaded by Alexandria Library. The project serves national and Arab libraries, he said, in a statement during inauguration of Alexandria International Book Fair, the 14th edition. He indicated that users would be able to reach data and information easily and quickly. Abduljelil indicated at other accomplishments namely the joint Arab index and the Arab digital library. He expressed desire to enhance cooperation with Alexandria library in line with a memo, endorsed in 2002 between the library and Kuwait's National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters. Alexandria library regularly and effectively participates in Kuwait's Al-Gurain Cultural Festival. —KUNA

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Local

Kuwait condemns Israel venomous acts against innocent Palestinians

16 Palestinians killed; over 1,400 injured

NEW YORK: As 16 people lie dead and more than 1,400 others are injured, Kuwait, in a statement to a UNSC session late Friday, expressed "utter condemnation" of the Israeli venomous acts against innocent Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Kuwaiti Permanent Representative to the UN Headquarters in New York Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi said in a speech to the urgent UNSC session on the recent violence in the Gaza Strip that Palestinians had the right to express their views in a peaceful manner during the annual 'Land Day' - a celebration of Palestinians' right to return to the lands of their ancestors. "We have to be clear that what have occurred today was a peaceful demonstration carried out by unarmed people, which was met by direct brute force," said Ambassador Al-Otaibi who condemned the Israeli actions that went against international human rights. The Kuwaiti diplomat said that the Palestinian people should not remain as an "exception" when it comes to the true implementation of human rights, stressing that the Israeli aggressors should abide by the 1949 Geneva Convention concerning the just treatment of people in occupied lands.

Ambassador Al-Otaibi said that it was about time for an international protection to be allocated to the Palestinian people against the atrocities carried out by Israel. The world should not forget that what have occurred today should be linked with the fact that the Gaza Strip has been suffering from over a decade-long Israeli blockade, he noted.

For over 50 years, Israel has been bashing all international

laws concerning the treatment of Palestinians and the result so far has affected any global efforts to better the life of Palestine's people, affirmed Al-Otaibi. He indicated that recent global reports revealed that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was facing a great challenge in funding its various programs to help Palestinians due to Israeli policies.

The annual 'Land Day' celebration, which takes place on March 30, has a profound impact on the Israeli psyche that the only way to silence Palestinians would be through violence, said Al-Otaibi who called on Tel Aviv to abide by UNSC resolution 2334 concerning the respect of Palestinian land and the halt of settlement activities on Palestine's soil. To allow the Middle East peace process to go forward, Israel should also abide by all international laws concerning the situation in the occupied lands and this means that it should come to terms with the Palestinian aspirations for an independent state within the 1967 borders and East Jerusalem as the capital of the future country.

Kuwait's stance on the most recent atrocities committed by Israel was met by positive reactions from the Palestinian representative at the UN Riyadh Mansour and Arab League representative Majed Abdulaziz. UNSC permanent members China, Russia, and the UK, France, and the US had expressed concerns over the latest acts of violence in the Gaza Strip, calling for measures to settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a justly manner to end the bloodshed. —KUNA



Kuwaiti Permanent Representative to UN Headquarters Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi

A weekly roundup of Kuwait international humanitarian efforts

KUWAIT: Living up to its UN recognition as 'International Humanitarian Center', Kuwait continued assisting needy people in a number of countries in the region throughout the week. In Irbil, Kuwait distributed humanitarian aid, provided by charities, to families returned their homes and needy people. This is done by Kuwait's Consulate General in Irbil in collaboration with Barzani Charity Foundation. In a statement to KUNA, Kuwait's consul to Irbil Omar Al-Kandari said the aid is provided to the Iraqi families, which returned to Mosul city, as well as to the poor and needy people in the province.

He added that the aid comes after conducting a field survey in collaboration with local humanitarian organizations to specify those who deserve assistance in order to alleviate their suffering. Kuwait has spared no efforts in aiding all segments of Iraqi people, he said, indicating that 600 food baskets were distributed to needy families in northern Irbil. Kuwait's aid is offered to the Iraqi people in line with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's humanitarian initiative aiming to mitigate the suffering of the Iraqis, he said. The aid comes also within the framework of the "Kuwait by your side" campaign, the consul made clear.

For his part, Razkar Obaid, head of Barzani Charity Foundation's office in Mosul said in a similar statement that 750 food baskets were given to the families returned to some areas in Mosul. He referred that such families are in bad need of aid as areas where they live are very poor. Since the beginning of 2018, Kuwait, in collaboration with Barzani foundation, has delivered eight convoys of aid to Mosul that covered more than 7000 families, he elaborated.

Trio of mobile clinics

In Baghdad, Kuwait has provided the Iraqi government with a trio of mobile clinics in the latest chapter of an aid campaign the country has set in motion for its Gulf neighbor. The clinics were unveiled in a lavish ceremony hosted by Kuwait's embassy in Baghdad on Monday, with Kuwaiti ambassador Salem Al-Zamanan and Iraq's chief lawmaker Salim Al-Jabbouri in attendance.

"We look forward to a brighter and more prosperous future for Iraq," the Kuwaiti envoy said, citing a recent conference his country hosted over reconstruction in the war-torn nation. Meanwhile, Al-Jabbouri expressed his gratitude for Kuwait's support at a time where Baghdad seeks to emerge from the shadow of war, saying that "such acts of altruism have become synonymous with the Kuwaiti people."

On the Kuwaiti campaign, Iraq's top lawmaker described it as a "gracious initiative that reflects an earnest desire for



Kuwait distributes humanitarian aid, provided by charities, to Iraqi families in Mosul city. —KUNA

an improvement in bilateral ties." The chairman of the United Iraqi Medical Society Ahmad Al-Haiti pointed out that these fully-equipped mobile clinics have been designed to grant the Iraqi people access to basic healthcare. He added that physicians now have a wide array of equipment at their disposal, which will come in handy in dealing with critical cases as well as carrying out various medical procedures.

Free eye surgery camp

Copious amounts of Kuwaiti aid have poured into Iraq in recent years, running the gamut from food and healthcare to educational assistance. In Riyadh, Al-Rahma international charity launched a free eye surgery camp in Yemen's Aden to perform operations on the Yemeni patients. The "Kuwait by your side" campaign said in a press statement the surgical camp supported by Kuwait was inaugurated in the presence of some Yemeni officials. The camp will receive patients, conduct free medical checkups and operations on them, and offer treatment, the statement added.

Kuwait, through its charities, has been working to assist the Yemeni people in all governorates in the areas of education, health, shelter, food and water. In Ramallah, head of Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) Mazen Ghunaim underlined Kuwait's prominent role in financing execution of a water treatment plant project in Gaza Strip. He added at a news conference held in Ramallah that PWA will commence executing the project during the few coming months. He thanked donor counties, which greatly contributed to securing the needed funds for the largest water venture in Gaza that, Kuwait donated \$60 million.

Palestine was granted \$565 during the International Donor Group for Palestine held in March 20 at the European Union (EU) headquarters in Brussels, which makes 80 percent of the total value of the project, he affirmed. He described the situation in Gaza as "catastrophic", as the Strip is facing an environmental crisis, noting that 97 of the water is unfit for human consumption. The water treatment project central center will provide 55 million cubic meter annually in its first phase until year 2021, while the plant will be expanded in the future in its second phase to be capable

of producing 110 million cubic meters on an annual basis, he said.

PWA offered all the needed measure to start the project at the technical and administrative levels, he added. The venture could be operating in five years if it does not encounter any Israeli hampering, he said. It comes as a strategic solution and sustainable water service provider. It also helps in halting drain in the underground reservoir, and stopping deterioration of seawaters, as well as offering thousands of job opportunities.

The date of commencing the project will be decided during a meeting of the venture partners, to be held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, by the end of next month, PWA said. "Kuwait is committed to pay \$200 million for reconstruction of the Strip through various projects", said Director of Operations Department of Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development Marwan Al-Ghanem. The Kuwaiti donation of \$60 million will be offered to finance the water plant project as well as supporting health and education issues, he added. —KUNA

KIB sponsors Society for Engineering and Petroleum at KU

KUWAIT: In an effort to support students the second semester of the academic year 2017/2018, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) has sponsored The Society for Engineering and Petroleum at Kuwait University. As a part of its sponsorship, the Bank provided its financial support the students to facilitate all their events and activities. On his part, Corporate Communications Team Leader at KIB, Fahad Al-Sarhan, said: "As a leading national financial institution, KIB has always sought to support diverse segments of the local community, particularly students and youth. Our

ongoing support of students and their activities has always been a key component of our robust social responsibility program."

Al-Sarhan added that KIB continuously seeks to provide its support to students through various means, including sponsoring educational and youth-related initiatives, as well as organizing a number of school visits to promote financial and economic awareness amongst the younger generation. Additionally, he noted that the Bank sponsors a myriad of exhibitions and activities for newly graduated students and those expected to graduate. Through these efforts, the Bank aims at offering students both educational and career opportunities that match their career goals, whilst ensuring a brighter future for the nation. It is also worth noting that, through its leading social responsibility program, KIB remains committed to participating in initiatives and activities that cater to all segments of the local community.



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As a result, some of our services will be affected during this period, including:

- Activation or deactivation of certain services
- Changing packages
- Number Portability service

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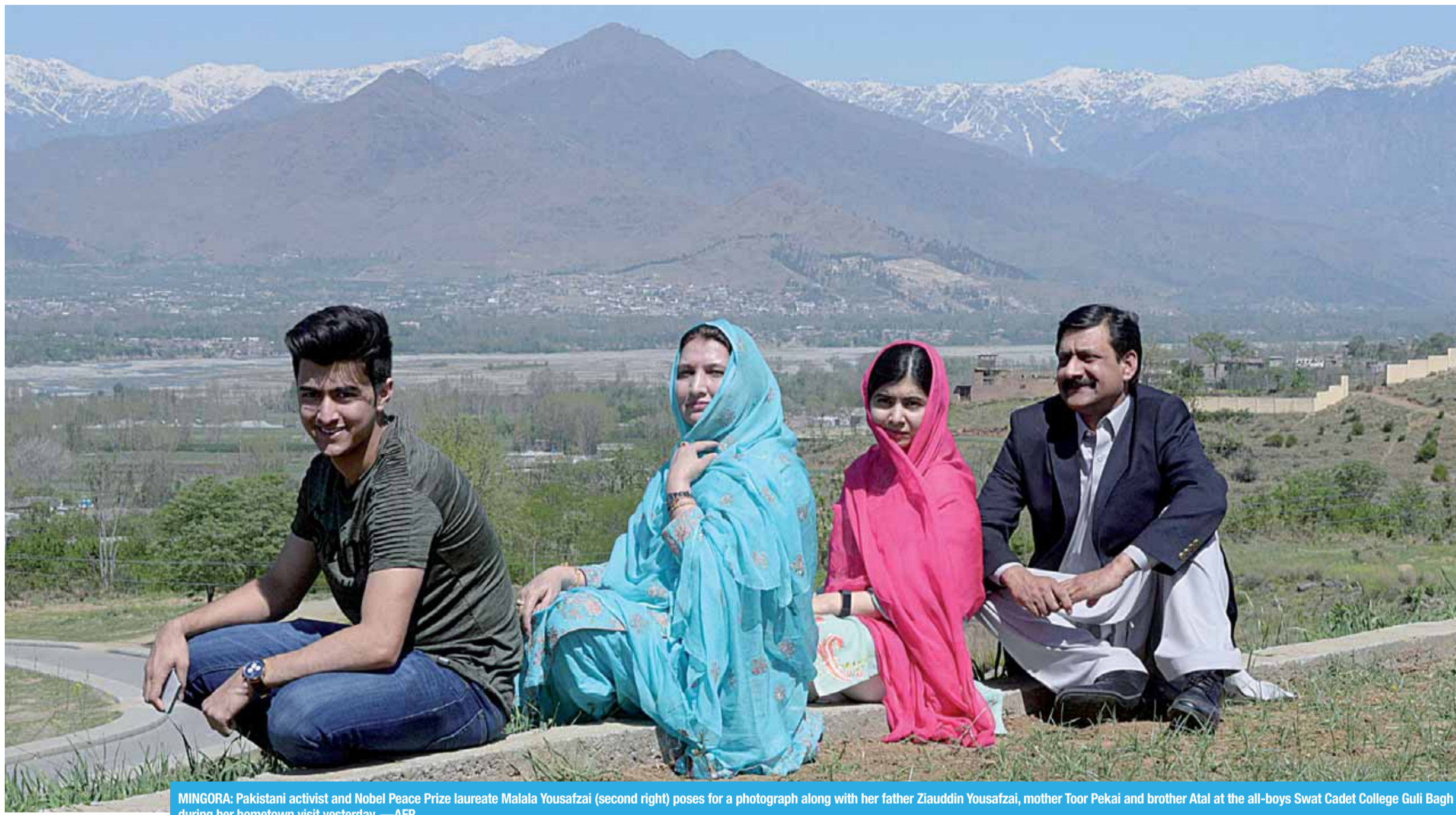


Students protest as India sets new dates for exams

Gender equality push picks up pace in Tunisia

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MINGORA: Pakistani activist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai (second right) poses for a photograph along with her father Ziauddin Yousafzai, mother Toor Pekai and brother Atal at the all-boys Swat Cadet College Guli Bagh during her hometown visit yesterday. —AFP

Malala visits district where she was shot

Nobel laureate tours all-boys military-run school

MINGORA, Pakistan: Malala Yousafzai visited the Swat valley yesterday for her first trip back to the once militant-infested Pakistani region where she was shot in the head by the Taliban more than five years ago. "I left Swat with my eyes closed and now I am back with my eyes open," she told AFP, referring to how she was airlifted out in a coma after the attack in 2012. "I am extremely delighted. My dream has come true. Peace has returned to Swat because of the invaluable sacrifices rendered by my brothers and sisters," she said at a school outside Mingora, the district's main town, where she was escorted by the Pakistani military.

The brief trip by the 20-year-old Nobel laureate is a highly symbolic moment for Pakistan, which regularly touts Swat as a success story in its long battle with extremism as it defends itself against accusations by the US and others that its northwest remains a safe haven for militancy. The visit - in which she was accompanied by her father, mother, and two brothers - was kept tightly under wraps. She took pictures of Swat valley from an army helicopter and tweeted them saying: "The most beautiful place on earth to me."

After flying from Islamabad, she met with friends and family before visiting the all-boys Swat Cadet College Guli Bagh, a military-run school some 15 km outside Mingora. "So much joy seeing my family home, visiting friends and putting my feet on this soil again," she tweet-

ed. There she lingered some 45 minutes, taking photographs, before travelling back to Islamabad. The entire visit is believed to have lasted just over two hours.

Mingora is where Malala's family was living and where she was attending school on Oct 9, 2012, when a gunman boarded her school bus, asked "Who is Malala?", and shot her. She was treated first at an army hospital then airlifted to the British city of Birmingham. Her near-miraculous recovery, and tireless career as an education advocate, have since turned her into a global symbol for human rights, and in 2014 she became the youngest person ever to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize when she was just 17.

Her family also told AFP of their joy in coming home. "I am unable to believe I am back in Swat and meeting my own people," her father Ziauddin Yousafzai said, in comments echoed by her mother Toor Pekai. The trip comes two days after Malala, currently a student at Oxford University in Britain, made her emotional return to Pakistan, where her surprise visit

has been met with widespread joy and pride. She broke down in tears as she made a televised speech on Thursday, saying it was her "dream" to be back, and has vowed to Pakistani media that she will return permanently after she has completed her education.

However, she has also been met with pockets of intense criticism. Malala is widely respected internationally, but opinion is divided in Pakistan, where some conservatives view her as a Western agent on a mission to shame her country. There had been much speculation within the country over whether Malala would go to Swat during her visit. The mountainous region, once a prized tourist destination famed for its pristine scenery, was overrun by the Pakistani Taliban in 2007. The militants imposed a brutal, bloody rule, but the army drove them out in 2009. Recently restrictions on tourists visiting the area were lifted.

However security has remained fragile, as the assault on Malala three years after the military operation demon-

strated. In February this year 11 military personnel were killed in an attack, and analysts have warned the militants still have a presence there. Residents of the area have praised Malala to AFP in recent days, crediting her with helping to generate improvements in education - especially for girls - in the deeply conservative region, part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Earlier this month an all-girls school built with money from the Malala Fund opened in Shangla district northeast of Mingora, where her family lived before moving to the city. Malala told AFP in Swat that she could see vast changes in the area since 2012 - but added she has read reports which claim up to 50 percent of children are still out of school. "We will have to work very hard to bring them all to school," she vowed.

Residents of Swat also welcomed her visit and urged fellow Pakistanis to support her efforts to promote girls' education. "We welcome Malala and the slogan that she has raised - one pen, one teacher. We have pinned our hopes in Malala," Nazir Khan, a government servant, told AFP. "People have positive as well as negative views about her," fellow resident Arshad Ali said. "We need to see what she has done until now, she has constructed a model school at Shangla reflecting her sincerity of purpose - to promote education especially among girls in the country." —AFP

“ People have positive as well as negative views about her ”

On guns and more, dialogue of the deaf in America

WASHINGTON: Most Americans favor tougher gun control laws as they repeatedly endure the tragedy of school shootings, one massacre after another, and other random gun violence. So why doesn't Congress do something? The paradox enrages gun control activists, who accuse lawmakers of inertia and hypocrisy. But this seeming no-brainer is not limited to gun violence, and it stems from many, many decades of how Americans do politics.

With the way Congressional districts are carved up, and a two-chamber system in which the Senate holds as much weight as the House of Representatives, Congress is far from being an exact representation of the US population. Winning a majority of the votes does not necessarily mean you achieve a majority in Congress. And this is even more true for the office of president, which is elected indirectly, through the Electoral College.

"The founders intended the system to work in a way that would guard against policy changing with the whims and passions of the citizenry," Gregory Wawro, a political science professor at Columbia University, told AFP. "But that comes at a cost of making it difficult to change policy, even when there is significant demand for it," he added.

What's a majority, anyway?

On any given issue, there are different kinds of majorities. Take the issue of immigration: polls show that Americans back the idea of "secure borders"-but they don't want a wall built along the frontier with Mexico, as President Donald Trump plans to do. Americans want to see young undocumented immigrants who came to the country as kids get some kind of legal status, but they also want to cut the number of legal immigrants who are coming in now.

Democrats and Republicans alike say they represent the majority, and struggle to reach a legislative compromise that reconciles all these competing demands, which are sometimes contradictory. On the issue of guns, 97 percent of Americans favor universal background checks on people wishing to buy a firearm, according to a Quinnipiac survey.

But that percentage goes down depending when other gun control measures are put up for debate: 83 percent back a waiting period after a gun purchase, and 67 percent favor banning assault-style rifles like those often used in mass shootings. When lawmakers try to calibrate any kind of reform package, they hit a wall.

Not a priority for Congress

Supporting a policy does not mean voters make it a top priority when they go to the polls. "Elections are very imperfect mechanisms for holding elected people accountable," said Jennifer Nicoll Victor, a professor of political science at George Mason University. Voters often have only two ways to answer a bunch of different questions-when you factor in their mood on Election

Day, and what is churning through the rapid-fire news cycle at that moment, results may not accurately reflect voters' beliefs.

This probably explains why, for instance, many Americans remain loyal to Trump while not believing him when he denies having had relationships with porn star Stormy Daniels, Playboy models and other women who say they had extra-marital sex with him. They feel these scandals are not enough to dump Trump altogether.

As far as firearms go, the National Rifle Association plays a pivotal role in how the debate has become so intractable. The NRA is not just a powerful lobbying organization, says Nicoll Victor. Rather, it has "built a culture of gun interests and gun rights and gun manufacturers and gun enthusiasts." Republicans in Congress are part of this culture and balk at the idea of questioning it, even slightly, out of fear of being cut off from the group and its deep pockets when it comes to campaign contributions.

But the anti-gun movement has been slower to build a major grassroots wave. Massacres at Columbine High School in Colorado in 1999 and Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut in 2012 gave rise to activist organizations. But it was not until the Valentine's Day massacre at the school in Parkland, Florida that the gun control movement really started to gain momentum, with hundreds of thousands of students and others protesting in Washington last weekend.

Polarized political parties

In 1986, then president Ronald Reagan, a Republican, signed a bill granting legal status



WASHINGTON DC: The lawn outside the US Capitol is covered with 7,000 pairs of empty shoes to memorialize the 7,000 children killed by gun violence since the Sandy Hook school shooting, in a display organized by the global advocacy group Avaaz. —AFP

to 2.7 million undocumented immigrants. In 1996, Democrat Bill Clinton enacted a law making it harder for poor people to access welfare benefits. In both cases, the president had to cross the political aisle: Reagan dealt with a House controlled by the Democrats, and Clinton reached agreement with a Republican majority on Capitol Hill.

John Hudak, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington, recalls also that many Republican lawmakers backed a ban on assault rifles in 1994. That measure

expired in 2004. "This was a time when gun control was a less partisan issue," Hudak said. "You could never imagine a Republican member of Congress, no matter a president, being supportive of something like that today," he added. That's because the two parties have each become more ideologically uniform, and the gap between them is wider than ever. But it is at least conceivable that Trump might be more amenable to reform if the Democrats retake Congress in November's midterm elections. —AFP

International

Russia: Britain must cut over 50 diplomats, crisis deepens

The biggest wave of tit-for-tat expulsions in recent memory

MOSCOW: Russia said yesterday that Britain had to reduce its diplomatic staff by more than 50 more people as a crisis in ties between Moscow and the West escalated over the nerve agent attack on a former spy. The new measures came after 23 British diplomats left Russia earlier this month and are seen as Moscow's punishment after Britain's allies expelled Russian diplomats over the March 4 poisoning of former double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in an English city.

"Russia suggested parity. The British side has more than 50 more people," foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said. On Friday, Moscow summoned British ambassador Laurie Bristow, giving London a month to cut the number of diplomatic staff in Russia to the same number Russia has in Britain.

He was summoned along with the heads of diplomatic missions from 23 other countries who were told that some of their diplomats had to leave, in the biggest wave of tit-for-tat expulsions in recent memory. Bristow had been handed a protest note over the "provocative and unfounded actions of the British side which instigated the unwarranted expulsion of Russian diplomats from a variety of states," the Russian foreign ministry said.

In London, a Foreign Office spokeswoman said yesterday: "We are considering the implication of the measures announced yesterday by the Russian foreign ministry." The Foreign Office had said it regretted the most recent developments but insisted Russia was the culprit. "This doesn't change the facts of the matter: the attempted assassination of two people on British soil, for which there is no alternative conclusion other than that the Russian state was culpable," it said. More than 150 Russian diplomats have been ordered

out of the US, EU members, NATO countries and other nations. On Friday, Russia expelled diplomats from 23 countries-most of them EU member states-in retaliation against the West. France, Germany, Canada and Poland each said that Russia was expelling four of their diplomats. Other countries including Australia, Ukraine, the Netherlands, Sweden, the Czech Republic, Finland, Lithuania and Norway were also told to pull their envoys.

Russians set to leave US

In the United States, 60 Russian diplomats expelled by Washington prepared yesterday to leave the country. In total, 171 people-diplomats which Washington alleges are "spies" and their families-were set to leave the United States, Moscow's envoy Anatoly Antonov told Russian reporters in Washington.

The Russian government provided two planes for the evacuation and one of them will make a brief stopover in New York to collect 14 families, he added, according to TASS state news agency. US media showed footage of a Russian government plane on the tarmac at Washington's Dulles airport, apparently getting ready to take the expelled Russians home. Britain has said it is "highly likely" that Russia is responsible for the Skripal attack using the Novichok nerve agent developed in the Soviet Union, but Russia has angrily denied any involvement. Britain has suspended high-level diplomatic contact with Moscow and said it would not be sending any members of its royal family to the 2018 football World Cup hosted by Russia. Russia responded by expelling 23 British diplomats, closing a British consulate in Saint Petersburg and halting the activities of the British Council educational and cultural organization.

“Provocative and unfounded actions”



ST PETERSBURG: A photo taken on March 29, 2018 shows the US Consulate building. —AFP

Access to Yulia Skripal

Britain said yesterday it was considering Moscow's request for consular access to Yulia Skripal, while taking into account her wishes. The 33-year-old came out of critical care on Thursday and was "improving rapidly", said Salisbury District Hospital. She is now in a "stable" condition-with the BBC reporting that she was conscious and

talking. "We are considering requests for consular access in line with our obligations under international and domestic law, including the rights and wishes of Yulia Skripal," a Foreign Office spokeswoman said. Sergei Skripal, 66, remains in a critical but stable condition. Skripal sold secrets to Britain and moved there in a 2010 spy swap. His daughter was visiting from Russia. —AFP

Who will be Mexico's next president?

MEXICO CITY: Wanted: job candidate capable of dealing with a vitriolic Donald Trump, a record murder rate, a messy war on drugs, a sluggish economy and a political system rotting with corruption. As the campaign kicks off for Mexico's July 1 elections, the country's next president has a long list of problems waiting for him or her. Here is a look at the four candidates vying for the job:

Lopez Obrador, the front-runner

Veteran leftist Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador is one of the most divisive figures in Mexican politics. Making his third presidential bid-which he vows will be the last-the man known as "AMLO" has sought to present a mellow side, toning down his fiery attacks on the "mafia of power" and laughing off critics' dire warnings about how he would wreck Latin America's second-largest economy.

When enemies accuse him of ties to Russia, he has slyly turned the insult to irony, donning a Russian ushanka hat and calling himself "Andres Manuelovich." The former Mexico City mayor can afford to crack jokes: the latest polls give him a comfortable lead. But Lopez Obrador, 64, also has a knack for shooting himself in the foot. In 2006, he led for most of the race. Then he lost his cool in the home stretch, insulted the sitting president, Vicente Fox, as a "big-mouth" (loosely translated), and refused to accept defeat when he narrowly lost the race. He has never hesitated to burn political bridges.

Anaya, the 'boy wonder'

With his slender build and boyish looks, Ricardo Anaya can seem a bit like a teenager who somehow wound up running for president of Mexico. But the 39-year-old's rapid political rise was anything but an accident. Running for the conservative PAN party, Anaya has mounted a campaign straight out of Silicon valley, roaming an open stage in wire-rimmed glasses, his shirt open at the collar,



MEXICO CITY: Ricardo Anaya, presidential candidate for the "Mexico al Frente" Coalition, speaks to supporters like a start campaign at the Santa Fe center. —AFP

and promising to address Mexico's problems with innovation and ideas. Known for his sharp intelligence, Anaya got his start in politics at age 17, when he knocked on the door of a local PAN leader in his hometown, Queretaro, and told her he wanted to work for the party. "He was very young, very resolute and very aware that he wanted to be doing this instead of going to parties," the politician, Senator Marcela Torres, told AFP. By 21, Anaya was running for state legislature, by 33 he was elected to Congress, and by 34 he was the speaker of the lower house.

Journalists nicknamed him "the boy wonder" for his rapid rise, his ambition, perfectionism and attention to detail. Critics say he has a Machiavellian thirst for power, visible in the way he sidelined rivals for his party's presi-

dential nomination and forged an ideologically messy alliance with the left-wing PRD to boost his chances in the polls. In characteristically decisive style, Anaya married his first love, his childhood sweetheart Carolina Martinez. They have three children.

Jose Antonio Meade might be remembered as the best president Mexico never had. A respected technocrat, Meade, 49, has held a series of ministerial posts in both PAN and PRI governments, most recently as President Enrique Pena Nieto's finance minister. Even many Mexicans who don't plan to vote for him say he is highly qualified for the job. But he is carrying the very heavy baggage of the deeply unpopular president, and lacks the natural charisma that might have made it lighter. —AFP

Macron tackles France's unfair school system

SAINT-DENIS: Used to teaching 24 children or more at a time, Zahia Adnani now spends her days with a group around half that size in her colorful classroom north of Paris where a flagship effort to tackle inequality is under way. Adnani's Taos Amrouche school is in the high-immigration Paris suburb of Seine-Saint-Denis, home to the national sports stadium and Charles de Gaulle airport, as well as deep problems of poverty, crime and Islamism.

Over decades, governments have launched plan after plan here focused on improving local infrastructure and housing, upgrading living conditions slowly in the area's ghettos and their high-rise tower blocks. Emmanuel Macron, the 40-year-old centrist president elected last May, wants a change of emphasis: while public investment will continue, he wants to focus efforts on improving early-age literacy to help bust the poverty trap.

When pupils returned to class last September, the government forced schools in high-priority zones, including many areas of Seine-Saint-Denis, to divide their classes into two for children aged six to seven. Instead of a maximum 24 pupils, there should be 12 or less per teacher. "I'm very positive about it," Adnani says during a chat in the staffroom of her recently opened school, which stands among new low-rise residential blocks — signs of the

investment going into the area. Around 2,500 classes nationwide are like hers, meaning roughly 30,000 children are benefiting from the special treatment.

Achievement gap

The aim is to correct one of the biggest failings of the French public education system: the gap in achievement between children from poor and wealthier backgrounds. "I don't feel like I lose children along the way," Adnani said. "And you can spend more time with those pupils who advance quicker than the others."

As well as allowing more individualized teaching, smaller classes are easier to control-an advantage in an area like Seine-Saint-Denis where discipline problems are widespread. From September, the initiative will be expanded in the same high-priority zones to a second school year, for pupils aged seven to eight, meaning 5,600 classes will take part. Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer is yet to unveil any results of the change, but he claims the feedback has been "more than excellent".

'Unbearable' injustice

For Macron, who is married to his former school teacher Brigitte, the reform is about more than just education. Ten months after his election, it remains his key social policy for deprived areas and a response to critics who see the ex-investment banker as a "president of the rich", too focused on pro-business reforms. It also backs up his public commitment to taking on inequalities.

"One thing is unbearable in a society," Macron said in February. "It's saying 'you are from a certain place so you don't have



PARIS: A picture taken on March 30, 2018 shows students in a classroom at Paris I Pantheon-Sorbonne University. —AFP

the same access as the others. You don't have the same opportunities to succeed." A child at a French school in a deprived area is four times more likely to end up struggling than their peers from higher income areas, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has found.

On this measurement, France was the worst performing of 36 major economies measured by the respected Paris-based research institute, far behind Britain or the United States but also Brazil and Mexico. "Not only do inequalities start at a very young age, but on top of that, investment in France has not been well targeted and is not balanced," OECD education expert Eric Charbonnier told AFP. Most countries spend more on primary education than on

secondary schools. But not France. Investment per child in primary schools is 15 percent lower than the average in the OECD's 35 members, which are mostly Western industrialized nations. At secondary level, investment is 37 percent higher than average. Sylvie Charriere, who was a secondary school headteacher in Seine-Saint-Denis until recently, used to see the consequences of the imbalance at the start of every year. Charriere, a ruling party MP elected for Macron's party in June, said roughly a third of the arriving 11 and 12 year olds were struggling to read. "It's very hard to help them make progress," she told AFP. "So you need to tackle the problem at its root: and the root is learning how to read," which happens in France at age six and seven. —AFP

Unarmed California man shot 8 times by police: Report

LOS ANGELES: Unarmed Californian Stephon Clark was shot eight times-mostly in the back-by police in Sacramento, according to a private autopsy released Friday that said he lay dying for several minutes. The Clark family attorney, celebrated civil rights lawyer Benjamin Crump, said the examination showed no entry wounds in the front of his body, demonstrating that the 22-year-old could not have been a threat to police.

The news has sparked outrage among activists who vowed to take to the streets for a fourth day of protests that have severely disrupted life in the city, although violence and arrests have been minimal. Crump told reporters Clark was "slain in another senseless police killing under increasingly questionable circumstances" after being chased to his backyard in the California capital by officers who fired 20 rounds.

The review was conducted by high-profile pathologist Bennet Omalu, the former chief medical examiner in San Joaquin County, who is highly regarded for his work on football-related concussion. Omalu said in a statement he found "four entry wounds in the lower part of Stephon's back; one in the side of his neck, with an exit wound elsewhere in his neck; one in the back of his neck; one under an armpit entering from the side, with an exit wound on the other side of his body; and one in the outside of a leg." The incident was triggered by an emergency 911 phone call late on March 18 stating that a man was smashing car windows in the neighborhood. Clark appeared to fit the suspect's profile and officers chased him, backed by a helicopter equipped with infrared cameras.

'He wasn't facing the officers'

Clark-who police say remains the prime suspect-was recorded by the helicopter and police body-cams running through the neighborhood before entering his backyard. The officers burst into the yard with weapons drawn and confronted the father-of-two before opening fire. The officers-one of whom is black-were put on leave but days of disruptive protests followed the incident, which has revived a recurring debate over police abuses against African Americans.

"The proposition that he was facing the officers is inconsistent with the prevailing forensic evidence," Omalu told a news conference in Sacramento. "He was facing the house, with his left to the officers. He wasn't facing the officers. His left back was facing to the officers." Omalu said it took three to 10 minutes for Clark to succumb to his injuries, emphasizing that "it was not an instant death."

Sacramento's Black Lives Matter chapter announced an evening protest at City Hall as news of the autopsy sparked a fresh wave of anger in the area, where 16 people-three unarmed-have died in confrontations with law enforcement in the last two years. "Outside autopsy released and the first shot was in his left side WHICH MEANS HE WAS GOING INTO HIS HOUSE AND NOT CHARGING OFFICERS," the group said in a Facebook post. "The remainder shots were IN HIS BACK!!! We need to HIT THESE STREETS TO!!! NIGHT!!!" Earlier in the day, the group's leader Tanya Faison was quoted by the Sacramento Bee newspaper as saying she "can't predict how the community is going to react" to the news. —AFP

International

Power to the people: Electricity finally reaches Indian landmark

'We've waited decades for this and we're so happy'

MUMBAI: Deepa Bhoir used to sit in darkness outside her island home and stare at Mumbai glowing in the distance. Now she stays up late watching soap operas—one of millions of Indians whose lives have been transformed by a drive to get power to every corner of the country. Bhoir and her husband Sasuram are among hundreds of villagers on the UNESCO world heritage-listed island of Elephanta to have had mains electricity installed in their houses for the first time.

Local officials hope tourists, who take a short boat ride from the bustle of Mumbai to visit the island's famed fifth century caves, will now spend more time and money there, boosting local businesses and jobs. "We've waited decades for this and we're so happy. Now I can watch all my favorite shows without any interruptions. The TV is almost always on!" Bhoir tells AFP, grinning.

The island is renowned for its temple caves dating back more than 1,500 years and is home to around 1,200 people. But despite living just 10 kilometers from India's financial capital, islanders have spent much of their lives without power. "Lacking electricity was depressing and we faced numerous hardships," says Sasuram, explaining that he and Deepa would often sleep outside during the summer to try to keep cool. "It was sweltering inside. We would lie and look at the glittering lights of Mumbai and long for electricity to

live fuller and more satisfying lives," the 54-year-old adds.

Boredom

Residents used kerosene lamps and candles until the late 1980s when they received diesel generators that provided intermittent electricity between 7:00 pm and 10:00 pm every night. They were, however, unreliable

2014, according to government data. There are still an estimated 33 million households without electricity and Modi wants them all to have power by the end of the year. A meter was installed in the Bhoirs' home last month after the Maharashtra state government completed its 250-million-rupee electrification project for the island.

Engineers spent three months laying a seven-kilometer undersea cable that connects a mainland substation to transformers in each Elephanta village. In brightly painted homes, ceiling fans whirl at high speed as light bulbs illuminate dark rooms struggling to keep out the stifling early summer heat. "It's been 70 years since India's independence and we've been promised electricity for so long. I'm just glad to see it before I die," says 69-year-old Bhagwan Tali.

Embracing change

Elephanta, also known as Gharapuri, meaning "the city of caves" is a world away from Mumbai. Monkeys outnumber humans and there are no cars on the island, just a miniature railway. The only shops are stalls selling snacks and trinkets for tourists. "My business is weak as most cold drinks, ice creams and chocolates can't be sold," says 52-year-old shopkeeper Surekha Bhagat, eagerly waiting for her stall to be hooked up to the grid.

Elephanta has one school for children under 16 — and there is no hospital, leaving the elderly and sick vulnerable during a medical emergency.

Every week, Tulsa Bhoir makes the one-hour boat trip to Mumbai to buy fresh vegetables, milk and other foodstuffs. The 43-

Power to every corner of the country



and expensive and the limited supply meant the Bhoirs' two children regularly did their homework by candlelight.

Deepa and Sasuram were often unable to charge their phones or other electrical devices. They felt cut off from the world and battled boredom. "We would go to sleep early because there was nothing much to do. But now we stay awake to midnight or 1 am watching our favourite shows. It's a welcome change," says Deepa, 43. More than 16,000 Indian villages have been electrified since Prime Minister Narendra Modi was elected in



MUMBAI: This photo taken on March 9, 2018 shows an electricity supply metering board on a wall of houses in a village on Elephanta Island near Mumbai. —AFP

year-old hopes electricity will spur infrastructure. "I'm excited to see how our island changes for the better," she said.

Devendra Fadnis—the chief minister of Maharashtra state, of which Mumbai is the capital—has said electricity means there is "tremendous scope for tourism" on Elephanta. Every day several thousand people visit the island's seven caves, which contain ancient Hindu carvings, but leave before the last boat

at 5:30 pm and rarely venture into the villages.

Officials hope electricity will persuade them to spend the night. Some locals—including Sachin Bhagat, who wants banks and ATMs to open on Elephanta—are already planning to offer their modest houses as homestays. "The villagers aren't afraid of change but are embracing it," the 34-year-old says. "We want development so that our lives will become much easier." —AFP

Botswana's president steps down after a decade at the helm

GABORONE: Ian Khama, a retired army general, stepped down as president of Botswana yesterday, handing the diamond-rich country to his deputy after a decade at the helm. Mokgweetsi Masisi becomes only the third leader to take charge of the southern African nation outside the Khama political dynasty that has dominated national politics since independence from Britain in 1966.

Masisi, 55, inherits a country that has for decades been heralded as a beacon of African democracy and sound economic management but faces a huge task of reducing the country's dependence on diamonds. "I am not sure about his competency in as far as the economy is concerned, but if he has the respect of his ministers then he should be able to make them deliver," said political analyst Ndulamo Anthony Morima.

Masisi, a trained teacher who has also worked for the United Nations Children's Fund as an education project officer for eight years until 2003, was elected lawmaker in 2009. He served in the president's office as a minister of public affairs from 2011 until 2014 when Khama named him minister of education, a post he held until appointed vice president last year. "The business community sees him as being more business-friendly so that should work well for the economy. He seems to be more likely to come up with regulation that enables more economic activity," said RMB Botswana economist Moatlhodi Sebabole.

Masisi takes office more than a year before the election under Botswana's constitution that restricts the president to serving two five-year terms. Khama, son of the son of Botswana's first president, Seretse, also took over from Festus Mogae a year before the 2009 election. One of the world's poorest countries in the 1970s, Botswana transformed itself into one of the fastest-growing economies by harnessing around \$3 billion a year in diamond sales, to become one of the world's biggest producers, and gained middle-income status.

But dependence on its wealth from the diamond industry might be catching up with the landlocked country of just two million after the collapse in commodity prices in 2014 tipped its economy into recession three years ago. "He is well versed with current challenges that the country is facing and I am sure he is quite capable of delivering," said Mothusi Sename, a 41-year-old taxi driver in Gaborone, referring to Masisi.

End of political dynasty

Khama's departure leaves his younger brother and tourism minister Tshekedi as the only member of the family holding a high-profile post in the government, and depending on who Masisi picks as vice president, it would be the first time a Khama is not part of the top tier of national leadership.

Khama, a 65-year old bachelor, is known as a straight talker having publicly criticized leaders including US President Donald Trump for an alleged slur against African countries and then-president Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe for overstaying his welcome. Khama was born in Britain after his father married a white British woman Ruth Williams, defying convention and opposition in Africa and Britain. Their story was depicted in the 2016 film 'A United Kingdom'. His party, Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), is expected to name Masisi as its presidential candidate for next year's election. Masisi will be inaugurated today. —AFP

Students protest leak as India sets new dates for exams

NEW DELHI: Hundreds of angry students took to the streets of the Indian capital Friday as police quizzed dozens of people over the leaking of high school exams that will force more than one million students to retake tests. Police have questioned 45 people, including students and tutors, over the leak but no arrests have been announced.

Mathematics and economics exam papers were distributed on the WhatsApp messaging app prior to the tests, forcing the cancellations and sparking fury among students and their parents. On a second day of protests, hundreds of students in New Delhi chanted against the exam board, which they accused of negligence.

Education secretary Anil Swarup said more than one million students will have to retake the economics exam on April 25. The mathematics test may be held in July. This could be restricted to Delhi and neighboring Haryana state, however, as an investigation found the leak was limited to these areas. Around 1.6 million students nationwide had feared they would have to retake the maths exam.

"It is most unfortunate... that children have been made to suffer on account of someone else playing dirty tricks," Swarup said. Cheating and exam fraud—such as paying bribes to buy test papers—is common in India. More elaborate ruses have included relatives scaling the walls of exam centers to give crib sheets to students.

The Central Board of Secondary Education exams are crucial for students hoping to attend India's most prestigious universities. Angry parents and students have



AMRITSAR: Indian students shout slogans during a protest against education minister Prakash Javadekar. —FP

demand answers from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, which has faced criticism over digital security in recent weeks, especially over an identity card database that holds the biometric and personal details of more than one billion Indians.

India's ruling and opposition parties have also accused

each other of mining and sharing the personal information of people who follow their social media accounts or use their apps, similar to the recent Facebook data scandal. That row erupted after a security expert alleged that user data of people linked to Prime Minister Modi's personal app was shared without their consent. —AFP

Filipinos celebrate Easter with crucifixion, flogging

SAN FERNANDO: Filipino zealots marked Good Friday with a bloody display of religious frenzy by having themselves nailed to crosses and whipping their backs raw in Asia's bastion of Catholicism. Though frowned upon by the Church, the gruesome re-enactments of Christ's final moments draw thousands of believers—and tourists—in a carnival-like atmosphere that is big business for locals.

In a collection of towns north of Manila, eight people had eight-centimetre (three-inch) spikes driven through their palms and feet in hot, dry fields meant to echo the site where Christ was crucified some 2,000 years ago. Among an otherwise male field of penitents was 39-year-old Mary Jane Sazon, who made her seventh trip up onto the cross.

"Fulfilling my vow is important to me because ever since I started this the Lord answers my prayers," Sazon told reporters as she pushed her dark hair back with freshly bandaged hands. She would not be drawn on being the only woman crucified on Friday, saying: "I don't care what other people might say." While the ordeal is undeniably painful, the penitents' weight rests on a wooden step and they spend only a few moments nailed to the cross before being carried to the medical tent for treatment.

At the same time, scores of bare-chested men, some of whose faces were concealed by hoods, lashed their backs bloody as they walked through the streets before self-snapping onlookers. The swinging of their whips left droplets of blood on cars, houses and even bottles of soda displayed on snack vendors' tables that lined the road. "If one of my family members gets sick, this is what we do," said Norman Lapuot, 25, as he flogged himself with a bamboo-tipped whip. "I do this for my relatives."

'I felt the pain'

Lapuot, who said it was his fourth time taking part in the ceremony, added that he believed the ritual bloodlet-



CUTUD: A participant carrying his daughter walks to the crosses during a reenactment of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ during Good Friday celebrations ahead of Easter in the village of Cutud near San Fernando, north of Manila. —AFP

ting had helped his grandfather recover from a stroke. While a majority of the Philippines' 80 million Catholics spend Good Friday at church or with family, participants undergo the ordeal to atone for sins or to seek divine intervention.

The gruesome sights left some of the roughly 12,000 in attendance wide-eyed and wincing with vicarious pain. "The most terrifying was the feet part, when the guy was screaming very loud," said 28-year-old Juliette Pawinska, referring to when the spikes were driven in during one crucifixion. "I actually felt the pain that he felt," added the Polish national, who lives in the Philippines and works as a computer programmer.

The mock crucifixions on Good Friday have been going on for decades despite official disapproval from the nation's dominant Catholic Church. "The Church never encourages self-flagellation, much less crucifixion," Father

Roy Bellen, a spokesman for the archdiocese of Manila, told AFP. "All sacrifices being asked from Catholics during Lent and Holy Week should lead to actions that benefit the poor and the needy," he added.

Food stalls, cab drivers and even souvenir stands get a boost from the event which draws thousands of visitors every year. Rose Anne Galang, whose full-time job is as a factory worker, said she pulled in some extra cash selling pork dumplings to hungry tourists. "It's my first time, but business was really good," she added with a smile. "I'll be back next year."

The people willing to have themselves nailed to the cross will also likely turn up in 2019. "Our beloved Jesus Christ has been our inspiration, so every time there is a problem we need to hurt ourselves," said 57-year-old Ruben Enaje, who has been crucified at the event for 32 consecutive years. —AFP

International

Iranians use visa-free travel to Serbia to flee into Europe

They complain that, as Arabs, they have few rights in Iran

BELGRADE: Until six months ago, the Lovimi family from Iran had never heard of Serbia. But here they are, currently in Belgrade, after arriving without visas last August, waiting to continue on to Germany, where they plan to build a new and better life in the future. The family of four comes from the town of Ahvaz in the province of Khuzestan in Iran's south west, where the majority of the population is Arabic.

They complain that, as Arabs, they have few rights in Iran, their children are forced to learn Farsi and not Arabic in school, and they are treated as second-class citizens, with little hope of finding a job. So, when Belgrade and Tehran abolished reciprocal tourist visas last August, the Lovimis decided to take their chance and come to Belgrade. And from there, they hoped to continue on to the EU and a better future. The Lovimis are not the only ones.

According to official statistics, around 7,000 fellow Iranians have arrived in Serbia since August, initially as tourists, but some of them with no intention of returning home. Shahla Lovimi, a 40-year-old housewife, says she and her family had originally gone to Turkey with the intention of carrying on from there to Germany via Italy. "We have never had the intention to go through Belgrade. We have never heard about Belgrade. We went to Turkey and the smuggler took us here," she tells AFP. She and her car mechanic husband and their two children, aged 11 and 17, paid the smuggler 22,000 euros (\$27,000).

Left on their own

For two months, they lived in various Belgrade apartments and hostels, waiting for the smuggler to pick them up and take

them to the EU by car. But when the smuggler vanished four months ago, leaving them on their own, the Lovimis turned to Info Park, a local non-governmental group helping refugees.

According to Info Park's communication officer Stevan Tatalovic, a number of Iranians are using the visa liberalization agreement to come to Europe and stay there illegally as migrants. "These are often people who are persecuted for political reasons, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender) people, or people whose religion was not Islam," Tatalovic said.

Their intention is not to seek asylum in Serbia, but to continue on, often to Britain or other EU countries, he said. Serbia argues that visa liberalization will help develop tourism between the two countries and attract business investment in the longer term. Nevertheless, Serbian Trade Minister Rasim Ljajic said the two countries are aware of, and will clamp down on any possible abuses of the visa-free scheme.

However, Info Park's Tatalovic said that with direct flights between Tehran and Belgrade resuming after 27 years, up to 600 Iranians could soon be arriving in Serbia every week. Two airlines are already offering flights and a third will follow in April and most of the flights are already fully booked until the end of summer. "The migration systems in Europe must recalibrate for this new route," Info Park warned in a recent statement.

While the numbers cannot be compared with hundreds of thousands who passed through Serbia in 2015 and 2016, EU officials are nevertheless concerned. Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic said recently that the EU and Germany were already asking why the country had abolished the visa



BELGRADE: Ramin Lovimi, a refugee from Iran, his wife Shahla Lovimi and their daughter Asma Lovimi are pictured during an interview with AFP at a migrant center. —AFP

regime. Hundreds of thousands of migrants travelling to western and northern Europe passed through Belgrade along the so-called Balkan route until it was shut down in 2016.

Trying their luck on foot

Several thousands of them got stuck in Serbia, but every day dozens try to continue their journey. Shahla Lovimi says

her family will try to reach the EU on foot. "The smuggler has disappeared and we have no money to pay another one. We will maybe try our luck walking," she says. The family was intercepted by police when they tried to enter EU member Croatia earlier this month, and they were sent back to Serbia. But Lovimi insists they will try again as going back to Iran is not an option for them. —AFP



7,000 Iranians have arrived in Serbia

Syrians quit Ghouta as talks for last pocket stutter

DOUMA: Hundreds more Syrian rebels and civilians prepared Friday to leave Eastern Ghouta under a negotiated withdrawal, as Russia unilaterally announced a similar deal to empty the final pocket of the battered enclave. The former rebel bastion on the outskirts of Damascus has been drained by a nearly six-week Syrian government assault and two evacuation deals brokered by regime ally Moscow.

Under such agreements, rebels agree to hand over territory in exchange for safe passage for them and civilians to opposition-held northwest Syria. More than 36,000 people have already been bussed out of the enclave, and fresh evacuations were under way on Friday. Some 4,800 people, including fighters, were boarding buses in a pocket of Ghouta held by the Faylaq Al-Rahman rebel faction, Syrian state media reported.

The agreement for that withdrawal, reached last week, left the overpopulated, devastated town of Douma as the final rebel holdout in the region. Russia's defense ministry on Friday said it had brokered a deal that would see rebels abandon Douma "shortly", but the fighters there quickly denied it. "We categorically refuse leaving or being displaced," said Jaish al-Islam's spokesman Hamza Bayraqdar. "That's an essential demand of the negotiations. We have not reached an agreement yet," he told AFP, adding that talks were ongoing.

Civilians hang in balance

Civilians in Douma have become anxious over their



QALAAAT AL-MADIQ: A rebel fighter from Eastern Ghouta, holds his weapon as he kisses a child after arriving in Qalaat Al-Madiq following the ongoing evacuation deals made between rebel fighters and Russia, an ally of the Syrian President. —AFP

uncertain fate. "Jaish Al-Islam is here and has to resolve the issue of civilians. We hope we can be done with this whole thing," said 39-year-old resident Mohammad Al-Husseini. "If they made me choose between leaving or staying, I'll stay. I didn't stay here for seven years just to leave in the end," he added.

Eastern Ghouta was the armed opposition's last stronghold around Damascus, which groups regularly targeted with rockets and mortar rounds. To secure Damascus, President Bashar Al-Assad launched a ferocious air and ground assault on February 18 to oust rebels from Ghouta. The Syrian Observatory for

Human Rights monitor says more than 1,600 civilians have been killed in the onslaught, which has overrun more than 90 percent of Ghouta. Troops pursued a divide-and-conquer strategy, seizing most of the enclave then breaking up what was left of it into three isolated pockets.

Moscow stepped in and swiftly announced two withdrawal agreements with rebels, the first of which saw more than 4,500 fighters and civilians bussed out of the town of Harasta. The second deal, reached with Faylaq al-Rahman one week ago, has seen over 31,000 people quit the towns of Arbin and Zamalka and the Jobar district. —AFP

Teenage suicide bombers launch attack in Nigeria

KANO: Four teenage girl suicide bombers have killed two people in multiple attacks in northeast Nigeria, residents said yesterday, in the latest assault since the government announced it was in ceasefire talks with Boko Haram. The suspected Boko Haram attack took place late Friday in the northeast Borno state capital of Maiduguri, the epicenter of the group's Islamist insurgency. The girls, estimated to be between the ages of 13 and 18, attacked the Zawuya settlement on the outskirts of Maiduguri, killing two people, residents said. "We lost two people, a woman and a boy, in two of the four suicide explosions," Zawuya resident Musa Haruna Isa said. One of the bombers blew up while trying to scale a low mud wall outside a house that starting crumbling and detonated her explosive belt, killing the boy, Isa said.

"One of them exploded near an open-air mosque, injuring one person," he said, adding that another bomber "panicked from the explosions from her colleagues and squeezed the trigger in the open, killing only herself." However, police said that just one person died in the attack. "They (bombers) detonated the explosives killing themselves and one other person... 13 persons were injured and were taken to a hospital where they are responding to treatment," Maiduguri police said in a statement. The attack highlighted the challenge the government faces in reaching a ceasefire agreement with the fractionalised Boko Haram. Last week, when more than 100 schoolgirls were returned to Dapchi after being kidnapped by the jihadist group, Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari said his government was offering amnesty to "repentant" jihadists. But senior security officials cautioned that reaching any agreement with the group will be difficult, as it is split into competing factions with different goals.

The Islamic State-affiliated faction reportedly in talks with the government is led by Abu Mus'ab Al-Barnawi and is known for attacks on military targets, while another faction led by Abubakar Shekau is notorious for suicide bombings killing civilians. Zawuya, a settlement of people displaced by Boko Haram mostly from Rann, a town on the remote northeast border with Cameroon, lies close to the Muna Garage area, home to some 40,000 internally displaced people. Both camps have been repeatedly targeted by Boko Haram attacks. —AFP

Nazi-era law still hampers abortion access in Germany

BERLIN: After a German court fined her 6,000 euros (\$7,400) for spelling out on her practice's website that she performs abortions, gynaecologist Kristina Haenel vowed that "it can't go on like this". Likewise, her Kassel-based colleague Nora Szasz, who is facing a similar threat under a Nazi-era law, said she would not give in. "We are not afraid," Haenel told AFP, vowing she is ready to take the battle to Germany's highest court against a 1933 law that bans medical practitioners from advertising that they carry out terminations of pregnancies.

Germany, despite being a leading voice for women's rights in the 1970s, imposes tight restrictions on abortion. The procedure is permitted but only under strictly regulated circumstances. It is left out of universities' course books for student doctors and kept unavailable in swathes of the country. Haenel and Szasz have fallen foul of the law because they stated on the website of their medical practice that they perform abortions.

"That's just a mention among 12 other types of surgical procedures that I carry out as a gynecologist," said Szasz, who was recently charged for flouting article 219a of the penal code. With the cases of Haenel and Szasz in the media spotlight, the issue has sparked a political debate, with some among the opposition calling for article 219a to be scrapped and for women to be given access to the critical information.

Noting that article 219a dated back to May 1933, shortly after Adolf Hitler assumed full powers of Nazi Germany, Verena Osgyan, a local MP for the Greens in the Bavarian regional parliament, told AFP that it was an "unbelievable anachronism". More than 80 years on, abortion remains a taboo, said Berlin gynaecologist Christiane Tennhardt. "In Germany, legislation remains very complex and contradictory," said Jutta Plieffe, of Pro Familia, which counsels women on pregnancies and sexuality and receives public funding.

Doctors not taught abortions

Germany records an average of 100,000 abortions for 790,000 births, while in France, there are 210,000-



MUNICH: A woman holds a placard as she protests against childbearing abortions in front of the entrance of a local health authority in the Freilahn district. —AFP

220,000 terminations for 800,000 births. A woman who wants to abort within the first trimester is required to attend a consultation at a registered centre. The aim of the interview is to "incite the woman to continue the pregnancy," according to the rules, even if in the end, she has the final say. A three-day waiting period is then imposed for the woman to reconsider her options. Excluding special circumstances such as a pregnancy that threatens the life of the mother, or one arising from rape, abortion—which can cost hundreds of euros—is not a procedure that is reimbursable by health insurance.

In some regions, including in the predominantly Catholic state of Bavaria, it may be necessary to travel 100 kilometers to find a doctor who performs the procedure. In parts of the rich southern region, no public hospital offers such terminations. "Many of the doctors who do it are long past their retirement age," said Osgyan. Some patients choose to turn to Austria. And the situation looks far from improving, as doctors are not taught the procedure in universities. Because of the penal code restriction, no research grant is provided and neither are medical congresses held on the subject, said Pro Familia.

Blocking any reform of the current legislation, Health Minister Jens Spahn has spoken out for the protection of "human life at birth". "When it comes to the life of animals, those who now want to promote abortions are uncompromising," charged the openly gay minister, taking aim at liberals calling for greater openness about terminations. Spahn, 37, a critic of Merkel within her Christian Democrats, has not been known to shy away from controversy. —AFP

Gender equality push picks up pace in Tunisia

TUNIS: Long seen as a pioneer for women's rights in the Arab world, Tunisia is pushing ahead with reforms promised after its 2011 revolution—but campaigners say much remains to be done. The country's 2014 constitution was praised as a key achievement in the revolt that toppled longtime dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and sparked the Arab Spring uprisings. But much of it has yet to be passed into law, including provisions on gender equality.

Now, moves are afoot on women's political representation, interfaith marriage and the contentious question of inheritance. A law on violence against women, passed last year, finally came into force in January. A new electoral code forces political parties to put forward female candidates for municipal elections set for May. Since September, Tunisian women have been free to marry non-Muslims. But now a commission set up by President Beji Caid Essebsi to examine "individual liberties" and equality is to tackle a particularly contentious question—reforms to the country's inheritance laws.

'It's time'

Current legislation, inspired by Islamic law, allocates a man twice the inheritance of a woman. Women led more than 1,500 demonstrators in Tunis earlier this month to call for equal inheritance rights. But their demands and Essebsi's moves to change the law have sparked outrage from conservatives.

Muslim clerics have labelled Essebsi's proposals "a flagrant violation" of Islamic precepts. But Bochra Belhaj Hmida, head of the commission, said "there is a real political will" to change the legislation. "The president's initiative is likely to be adopted by parliament," she told AFP. "The role of the politicians is to raise the level of citizens' awareness... It's time," she added. Ennahdha Laws similar to the current Tunisian legislation apply in many Muslim-majority countries.

In Morocco, 100 intellectuals signed a petition in late March demanding an end to unequal inheritance laws, but public opinion remains divided. In Tunisia, rare opinion polls suggest a majority of people are opposed to equality in inheritance. But many parents already apply the principle by giving their daughters extra money while they are still alive.

'Not simple'

Observers say there is a window of opportunity to change the law ahead of 2019 elections, thanks to Essebsi's current hold on power and the consensus behind his party, Nidaa Tounes, and the Islamists of Ennahdha. But given the subject's sensitivity, the commission has put off publishing its proposals until after municipal elections in May.

Hmida said Essebsi wanted to "leave a very important trace in history", echoing that of Tunisia's first president Habib Bourguiba, who gave the country its groundbreaking personal status code. Adopted in 1956, the code granted Tunisian women rights that were unprecedented in the Arab world. "There are elements that are politically favorable towards reform," said Sana Ben Achour, a law professor and feminist campaigner. "But it's not simple. It touches on heritage that has been passed down for thousands of years."

She said much needed to be done to "rally practicing Muslims" who see equality as contrary to the Koran. Essebsi's commission is also set to propose changes to laws on family status and passing on nationality to children. It has plenty of work to do: it has identified some 2,500 texts as unconstitutional—including anal testing of homosexuals and prison terms for "attacks on morality". —AFP

Analysis

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WASHINGTON WATCH

A letter to Nancy Pelosi

By Dr James J Zogby

During the week of March 25, 2018, Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi led a delegation of 10 house democrats to Israel and Jordan. I sent her the following letter:

Dear Leader Pelosi,

I have just learned that you are leading a delegation of Democratic Members of Congress visiting Israel and Jordan this week. I hope I am not too late in writing to you to offer some concerns that I hope will help frame your conversations while you are in the region. I realize that this year marks the 70th anniversary of Israel's Independence and that you have already issued a statement congratulating the Israeli people. I ask you to please remember that for Palestinians this date represents the anniversary of the Nakba, the expulsion of 700,000 of their compatriots who have been living in exile hoping to return to their homes and to be reunited with their families and communities. I urge you to be sensitive to this tragedy.

This week, Palestinian citizens of Israel will be marking "Land Day," commemorating the 40th anniversary of the day on which they rose up in national demonstrations to protest Israel's confiscation of their lands in an effort to "Judaize the Galilee." A visit to Nazareth in the heart of Galilee would be appreciated by the 20 percent of Israel's population who are Palestinian Arabs. If you go to Nazareth, I hope you will be able to visit the impressive monument, Haggar's Tent, in the town center. It was built by the Palestinian citizens of Israel in remembrance of their families and friends living as refugees in exile

Just 25 years ago, I stood with some of you on the White House lawn as we celebrated the Oslo Accords and the hope for an Israeli-Palestinian peace. In 1996, following his election as Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu was invited to address a joint session of Congress. He used his election and that speech to announce his intention to end the Oslo process. The policies he pursued so damaged the chances for peace and so frustrated then-President Clinton that for a period of time the White House refused to meet with him. I also recall traveling with President Clinton in 1998 when he spoke in Gaza, Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and I recall his deep frustration with the Israeli leader. During this period, settlements expanded and repression increased, as did the violence of Palestinian extremists. Both Israeli and Palestinian hardliners were hell-bent on destroying the chances for peace. Both largely succeeded.

There was some hope that the Taba negotiations that followed the ill-fated Camp David Summit might restart the peace process. But when Ehud Barak lost the 2001 election to Ariel Sharon, once again the hopes for peace were dashed. What followed were years of unremitting tragic violence in which Israelis and many more Palestinians perished. At the same time, the neglect of the Bush Administration paved the way for even more repressive Israeli policies.

Today, while most American political leaders embrace a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is increasingly difficult to imagine how such a solution could even occur. There are now 700,000 Israeli settlers in the West Bank connected with each other and with Israel, by a network of Jewish-only roads that by design cut the territories into pieces. This deplorable situation is compounded by the Wall which Israel has built largely on Palestinian land, that separates villages from their lands and from each other. Then there are the Israeli policies of home demolitions, mass arrests without charges, humiliating internal checkpoints, and unrestrained settler violence against Palestinians and their properties. Given this depressing situation, I would urge you to temper your praise for Israel and recognize that the current governing coalition in Israel has been advancing not only these policies but new legislation that would annex the West Bank, consolidating their hold over the Palestinians, and making the prospects for a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians even more unlikely. This status quo is unsustainable and calls on your leadership to make sure what comes next is progress towards peace rather than a slide towards violence.

To that end, there are questions I think would be timely and important to raise with Israeli leaders:

- With accelerated settlement expansion in the Palestinian territories that makes a viable, independent Palestinian state impossible to achieve, what is the Israeli long-term vision for Palestinians? It appears that they have opted to move toward a one-state apartheid solution in which Palestinians remain a captive nation without rights.

- Human rights organizations document a pattern of abuse of Palestinian children in Israeli military prisons. Why does this abuse continue, and what can be done to stop it?

- Last month, Israel suspended a plan to impose taxes on properties owned by Christian churches in Jerusalem, following outcry from the Palestinian Christian community. Are there assurances that the plan to unfairly target Christian properties has been permanently scrapped and not just delayed for imposition at a more opportune time?

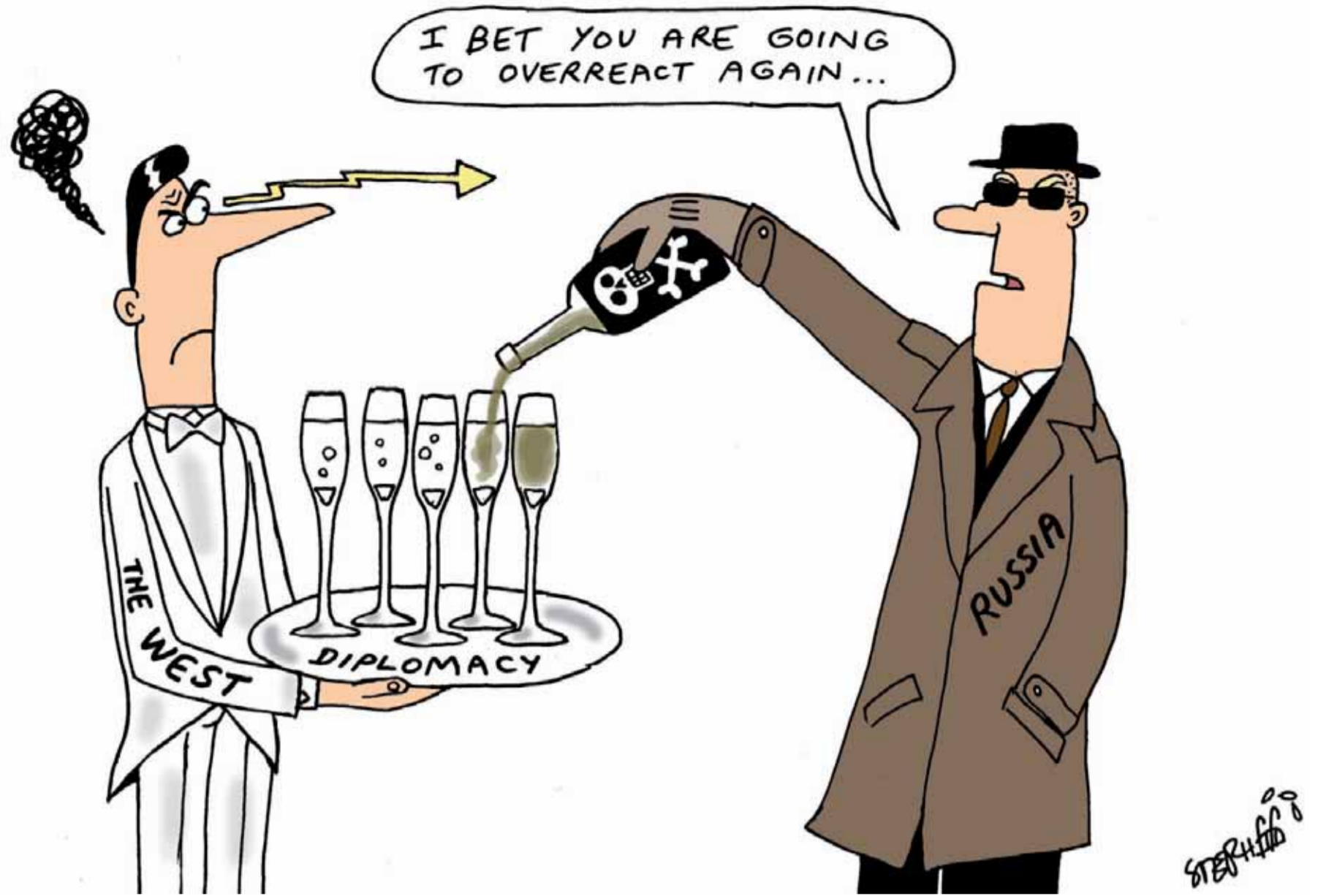
- The humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate under Israel's blockade with the UN warning Gaza could become "unlivable" in the coming years. Shouldn't the siege be lifted and replaced with political means to resolve the Gaza crisis without punishing the civilian population?

As your trip also coincides with Easter, we would strongly encourage you to visit with political and religious leaders in the Palestinian territories - from Jerusalem to Bethlehem - to hear directly from them about life under occupation and the challenges they face. For too long, Congress has been more of an obstacle than an ally in the effort to achieve an Israeli-Palestinian peace. Annually, Congress has ignored or even rewarded Israel's bad behavior, while repeatedly targeting Palestinians with punitive or threatening measures. This visit may provide you with opportunity to change that perception, uphold the values of human and democratic rights, and to help restore needed balance to our country's approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

I do hope your trip goes well and I hope that you are able to raise some of these critical issues with the Israelis.

Best regards, James Zogby

NOTE: Dr James J Zogby is the President of the Arab American Institute



Facebook gets thumbs down over scandal

When it comes to its handling of the scandal over how its users' data was harvested to help elect US President Donald Trump, Facebook gets an almighty thumbs down from crisis management experts. Public relations specialists questioned by AFP were damning in their verdict of how the world's biggest social network has dealt with the fallout of the revelations that Cambridge Analytica obtained users' personal information to try to manipulate US voters.

Slow and unconvincing explanations they say have left Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg dangerously exposed. While the news that the data of 50 million users had been hijacked broke in the The Observer newspaper on March 17, it took Zuckerberg five days to publicly address the firestorm by apologizing first on Facebook and then CNN. That is an eternity in the digital age, said Marie Muzard, head of the MMC communications agency. "The most basic of basics in crisis management is that every hour that passes without reacting allows a little more sound and fury to gather," she said. What makes that all the more ironic was that much of that fury was gathering on Facebook itself. "Because Facebook is a communications platform it has especially a responsibility to be timely and proactive in its response," said Seth Linden, president of New York-based Dukas Linden Public Relations. "It's one of the most influential brands in the world, which made the lack of a timely response even more negatively impactful."

'Not convincing'

The manner of Zuckerberg's mea culpa and his attempts to explain the breach have been far from convincing, according to Laure Boulay of the Paris-based L'Atelier de l'Opinion (Opinion Workshop). Instead the crisis has "highlighted the kind of smokescreen" behind which Facebook has worked, she said. "You can see they need to restore confidence, but Facebook is in a very weak position

because it was not transparent enough before all this happened about how it worked and what its teams were doing," she added.

Muzard was even more damning. "Zuckerberg was smart enough to hold up his hands up and try to offload some of the responsibility onto the researcher Aleksandr Kogan and Cambridge Analytica. Yet pleading naively and saying that they never thought the data would be used to swing elections is very problematic. "It is just not credible for a company as smart as Facebook to say that," she said. "If we are to believe that it means that Zuckerberg has created a monster that he cannot control, like Frankenstein. And if we don't swallow that, it implies is that he may be lying," she added.

With the face of the social network having to face the music alone up until now, Zuckerberg risks being burned, experts warned. His problems grew further Friday after the leak of a memo from a high-ranking executive hinting that Facebook was determined to grow despite risks to users. Many commentators have noted the conspicuous absence of Zuckerberg's right-hand woman, Sheryl Sandberg, as the crisis has deepened. She is the architect of the Internet giant's hugely profitable advertising business based on exploiting its users' data. The bestselling self-help author had been regarded as the savvy, emotionally intelligent "adult" of the company in contrast to the youthful geeky Zuckerberg.

Zuckerberg vulnerable

"The crux of the crisis is the almost hero status of Zuckerberg and Sandberg," Boulay insisted. "They have been weakened and we are now practically in the narrative of the fallen idol.



The way the company is totally identified with its founder rather than those who actually run the company has left it fragile in the face of the crisis," she added. Muzard warned that Zuckerberg is personally vulnerable if the "crisis of confidence lingers on. He might find it hard to hold on if shareholders start getting out. Things can happen very quickly. His equivalent at Uber did not survive a series of crises, and because Zuckerberg personifies Facebook there is no real fall guy to take the bullet for him."

He is therefore taking a big gamble by agreeing to testify before the US Congress, even if Facebook has also ramped up its lobbying of politicians. "There is tremendous pressure on him," said Linden, who has prepared other company bosses to face grillings by lawmakers. Ideally, he said Zuckerberg would need a month of coaching. "He must have the patience, knowledge and delivery needed to get through this experience. He must understand the nuances of key congressional committee members' style and their state's needs, and he must be informative without being unintentionally condescending or unclear in his message," Linden said. "He must also have the right physical posture and tone of voice. Even with the best preparation, it will be a physically and emotionally exhausting," he predicted. —AFP

Regulation and apathy hit bitcoin market

Wild fluctuations within the bitcoin market have once again sparked debate between investors who believe it is merely undergoing a "correction" and those who see it as a costly fad. After a buying fever at the end of 2017 that sent the price of a token to nearly \$20,000 and a spectacular fall at the beginning of the year, bitcoin's price made a modest recovery before falling sharply again this month. "This is a healthy correction after an exuberant 2017," said Kyle Salmani, founder of crypto-currency fund Multicoin Capital, which manages \$50 million of private cash.

Despite his optimism for the sector, Salmani's fund is not betting on a rise in bitcoin prices, instead focusing on competitors with more impressive recent track record and more innovative technologies. "Certainly the halcyon days of performance gains from 2017 seem long gone," added Jordan Hiscott, investment manager at the Ayondo Markets online platform.

The bubble bursts

Bitcoin now makes up only 40 percent of the volume of crypto-currency transactions, having accounted for 80 percent of the market just a few months ago, according to coinmarketcap.com data. The weekly number of Google searches containing the term bitcoin is five times lower than at its peak, in the week of December 17 to 23. Bitcoin now trades at around \$8,000, compared with \$19,511 at the end of December, according to Bloomberg figures.

Morgan Stanley analysts stressed in a note published in early March that bitcoin was behaving much

like the stock market did in the dot-com crash of the 2000s, only at "15 times the speed". However, the cryptocurrency has already lost about 90 percent of its value on two occasions since its 2009 launch - in 2011 and 2015 - before recovering. "I wouldn't be surprised to see prices fall to \$5,000 from here or go back above \$10,000," said Craig Erlam, an analyst online currency trading platform Oanda.

But he believes that the levels reached in December will not be seen again anytime soon. "The incentive for holding bitcoin is simply the belief that it will become more adopted and widespread," he said, explaining why many were still holding onto their bitcoin wallets.

Welcome regulations?

The market's volatility has tended to defy expert analysis, but some link the recent fall to stricter regulations. Those policing the largest bitcoin markets, the FSA in Japan and the SEC in the United States, have increased warnings and action against suspect trading platforms. In addition, social networks Facebook and Twitter as well as the search engine Google have all announced a ban on advertising for ICOs - fundraising campaigns carried out in cryptocurrency. "In the short term, it's bad news," acknowledged David Drake, who manages the LDJ Capital investment fund. "But we need regulations," he told AFP.

Others put the volatility down to sell-offs by historical players in the bitcoin market who carved out huge positions when it was in its infancy. A Tokyo attorney and bankruptcy trustee for the now-defunct cryptocurrency exchange Mt. Gox revealed that he had liquidated \$400 million of bitcoin tokens on behalf of creditors, depressing the market. The lawyer, nicknamed "Tokyo Whale", said he had sold the tokens between December and February, and did not rule out resuming the sell-off, with \$1.9 billion still to be offloaded. "With this kind of volume yet to surface, in my view, prices on bitcoin will remain depressed until this situation has been resolved," warned Hiscott. —AFP



News

Overlooked 'organ' could play role in cancer spread

PARIS: Thanks to a laser-equipped mini-microscope developed by a French start-up, scientists have discovered a previously undetected feature of the human anatomy that could help explain why some cancers spread so quickly. Nobody was looking for the interstitium, as the new quasi-organ is called, because no one knew it was there, at least not in complex form revealed in a study published this week. As with many breakthroughs in medicine and science, it was - to paraphrase Louis Pasteur's oft-quoted dictum - a case of chance favoring the prepared.

In 2015, a pair of doctors at New York's Beth Israel Medical Center, David Carr-Locke and Petros Benias, found something unexpected while using the high-tech endoscopic probe to look for signs of cancer on a patient's bile duct. There on a screen, clear as day, was a lattice-like layer of liquid-filled cavities that did not match anything found in the anatomy chapters of medical school textbooks. "These have no obvious correlate to known structures," they noted dryly in the journal Scientific Reports.

And then the mystery deepened. The doctors showed the images to a pathologist, Neil Theise, who used a thinly sliced fleck of tissue removed from the patient to prepare the kind of glass slides scientists have been peering at with microscopes for centuries. But the novel layer of tissue simply wasn't there - or at least it wasn't visible.

Sacha Loiseau, founder and director of Mauna Kea Technologies, which made the camera-equipped probe that had revealed the phantom tissue, explained why. "The classic microscope on a lab bench magnifies dead tissue from a biopsy that has been dehydrated and

treated with chemicals," he told AFP. The meshwork of liquid bubbles visible in the patient's body, in other words, had pancaked in the slides like a collapsed building, leaving hardly a trace.

A 'highway of fluid'

"This made a fluid-filled tissue type throughout the body appear solid in biopsy slides," Theise said in a statement. "Our research corrects for this to expand the anatomy of most tissues." The probe bundles some 30,000 optic fibres topped by a camera barely bigger than the head of a pin. Lasers light up the tissue, and sensors analyze the reflected pattern. "We have reinvented the microscope so that it can be inserted into the body of a patient to observe living tissue in its natural environment," said Loiseau.

The result is a virtual, in-vivo biopsy. The newly found network of fluid-filled pockets - held in place by collagen proteins, which are stiff, and more flexible elastin - may act like a shock absorber preventing tissue tear as organs, muscles and vessels go through their daily motions, the researchers said. Once they knew what to look for, the scientists found interstitium throughout the body: Below the skin's surface, lining the digestive tract, in the lungs and urinary tract, and even surrounding arteries and veins. Layers long thought to be dense, connective tissue, it turned out, were in fact interconnected and fluid-filled compartments. Described as a "highway of moving fluid", the meshwork "may be important in cancer metastasis", the study suggested.

Scientists have long known that half the fluid in the body is found within cells, and about 14 percent inside the heart, blood vessels and lymphatic system. The remaining fluid is "interstitial", or between the cells, and the new study argues that the interstitium should be considered as an organ in its own right - indeed, one of the largest in the body. Organ or not, "this finding has potential to drive dramatic advances in medicine, including the possibility that the direct sampling of interstitial fluid may become a powerful diagnostic tool," said Theise. — AFP



Palestinian activists wave the national flag during a demonstration yesterday along Israel's border with Gaza. — AFP

Gazans bury dead after bloodiest day...

Continued from Page 1

A general strike was being held in both the Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank. Minor clashes broke out between Israeli forces and Palestinians in Hebron, while a small protest was held in Nablus, both in the West Bank. In addition to the 16 Palestinians killed, more than 1,400 were also wounded Friday, 758 of them by live fire, with the remainder hurt by rubber bullets and tear gas inhalation, according to the Gazan health ministry.

Israel defended its soldiers' actions, when troops opened fire on Palestinians who strayed from the main protest camp attended by tens of thousands and approached the heavily fortified fence cutting off the Gaza Strip. The Israeli military says it opened fire only when necessary against those throwing stones and fire-bombs or rolling tyres at soldiers. It said there were attempts to damage the fence and infiltrate Israel, while alleging there was also an attempted gun attack against soldiers along the border. No casualties were reported among Israelis.

Palestinians accused Israel of using disproportionate force, saying its soldiers opened fire on protesters who did not pose a threat, while human rights groups questioned Israel's use of live fire. UN chief Antonio Guterres called for an "independent and transparent investigation" and European Union diplomatic chief Federica Mogherini followed suit, calling in a statement for a probe into Israel's use of live ammunition. Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman issued a scornful rejection of the demands. "I do not understand the chorus of hypocrites who want a commission of inquiry," he posted in Hebrew on his Twitter account. "They got confused and thought Hamas organized a Woodstock Festival yesterday and that we should give them flowers."

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas declared yesterday a day of national mourning and in a speech said he held Israel fully responsible for the deaths. His spokesman yesterday called on the United States at the UN Security Council to not provide "cover for Israel to continue its

aggression against the Palestinian people". An Israeli military spokesman said Friday's events were "not a protest demonstration" but "organized terrorist activity" by Hamas, which has fought three wars with Israel since 2008. "If it continues, we shall have no choice but to respond inside the Gaza Strip against terrorist targets which we understand to be behind these events," Brigadier General Ronen Manelis told journalists.

The six-week protest is in support of Palestinian refugees and the timetable holds significance for a range of reasons that have added to tensions. It began on Land Day, when Palestinians commemorate the killing of six unarmed Arab protesters in Israel in 1976, and as Jewish Israelis readied to observe the Passover holiday, which started at sundown on Friday. Protests will continue until the United States opens its new Jerusalem embassy around May 14, a move that has provoked deep anger among the Palestinians, who see the city's annexed eastern sector as the capital of their future state.

May 14 will also mark 70 years since the creation of Israel, while Palestinians will mark what they call the Nakba, or "catastrophe," the following day. The Nakba commemorates the more than 700,000 Palestinians who either fled or were expelled from their homes in the war surrounding Israel's creation in 1948.

US President Donald Trump has harshly criticized the Palestinians in the past, but the State Department said only that it was "deeply saddened" by the loss of life and urged steps to lower tensions. Human Rights Watch criticized Israel's actions. "Israeli allegations of violence by some protesters do not change the fact that using lethal force is banned by international law except to meet an imminent threat to life," the New York-based group said, calling the number of killed and wounded "shocking."

Israel had deployed troop reinforcements along the border, including more than 100 special forces snipers, saying it would prevent attempts to break through the fence. Protests along the border are common, often culminating in young Palestinian men throwing stones at Israeli soldiers who respond with tear gas along with rubber and live bullets. But the "March of Return" protest that began on Friday is on a larger scale and intended to involve families with women and children camping in tent cities near the border for weeks. — Agencies

Duterte wants 'govt-to-govt'...

Continued from Page 1

Arriola cited some more specific demands of Duterte - workers must be able to sleep seven continuous hours a day without interruption; and they must get decent food - no leftovers.

"Our president also acknowledged the fact that the Philippines is a poor country, but appealed to treat Filipino workers with dignity. Also, there must be standard employment contracts to be formulated by both countries. This negotiation for our workers is very important because some governments (in the Gulf) who are also receiving workers from the Philippines are also looking forward to the outcome of these negotiations. We are hoping for a model agreement, and this is what our president wants. The negotiations are not yet over; they will continue and will take some more time before the lifting of the deployment ban. Both countries are talking, and our lines of communication are open for each other," Arriola said.

On March 16, Kuwait and the Philippines signed an agreement regulating some working conditions for domestic workers in Kuwait. The deal may end a two-month crisis sparked by reports that abuse by employers in Kuwait had driven several Filipinos to suicide. The Philippines stopped sending workers to Kuwait in January after a Filipina maid (Joana Demafelis) was found dead in a freezer, the latest incident in what Manila called a pattern of abuse committed against OFWs in Kuwait.

"The deal will ensure the rights of both employers and employees," KUNA had quoted Foreign Ministry Undersecretary for Consulate Affairs Sami Al-Hamad as saying. Hamad said the two sides agreed that domestic workers from the Philippines will have the right to retain their passports as well as the right to

refuse being transferred to other employers.

Arriola thanked the Kuwaiti delegation for taking time to come to Manila to negotiate, which she said was a good sign of a treasured friendship. "We have a relationship to preserve and we are friends with Kuwait. Our previous governments did very little - if nothing at all - for our workers, no offense intended, but this time, we really have to be firm. At the moment, we need an agreement that is clear and can uphold the dignity of our workers. As to the sincerity and love for the country and his people, Duterte practices what he preaches and has this unquestionable commitment to his people and OFWs," she said.

Arriola arrived in Kuwait on Thursday to see for herself the conditions of Filipinos in Kuwait and the ongoing repatriation being done in connection with the Kuwaiti government's amnesty program. "My agency, under the DFA's Office of Migrant Workers Affairs, is in charge of mass repatriation. The Philippine government took the initiative to give all amnesty takers free plane tickets. We want to make sure that repatriation efforts are orderly conducted," she said.

"We have repatriated around 4,000 undocumented Filipinos in Kuwait. We are still waiting for the rest to come forward, as the Kuwaiti government had stated that the number of undocumented Filipinos in Kuwait is up to 10,000. We want all of them to avail of the amnesty. The president has ordered us to use DFA funds to help every Filipino who wants to go home. We are here to support the ambassador, and have deployed several people from the Philippines to help in the repatriation efforts," Arriola added.

Arriola also met some Filipino community leaders on Friday. There are more than 100 Filipino community organizations in Kuwait. Currently, there are more than 1,000 distressed runaway housemaids at the embassy's shelter, and officials have confirmed receiving an average of 20-30 workers at the shelter every day, mostly victims of various forms of physical, verbal or sexual abuse, unpaid salaries, lack of food or overwork. Kuwait is home to 250,000 Filipinos, 165,000 of them working as domestic helpers.

US visa seekers to be asked for...

Continued from Page 1

The State Department said then that the tighter vetting would apply only to those "who have been determined to warrant additional scrutiny in connection with terrorism or other national security-related visa ineligibilities."

The American Civil Liberties Union expressed concern, saying the move would have a "chilling" effect on freedom of speech and association. "People will now have to wonder if what they say online will be misconstrued or misunderstood by a government official," Hina Shamsi, director ACLU's National Security Project, said in a statement. "We're also concerned about how the

Trump administration defines the vague and over-broad term 'terrorist activities' because it is inherently political and can be used to discriminate against immigrants who have done nothing wrong," she said. "There is a real risk that social media vetting will unfairly target immigrants and travelers from Muslim-majority countries for discriminatory visa denials, without doing anything to protect national security."

The new proposal was published in the Federal Register on Friday. The public has 60 days to comment on the revised procedures before the OMB approves or rejects them. If approved, the measures also will require applicants to submit five years of previously used telephone numbers, email addresses and their international travel history. They will be asked if they have been deported or removed from any country and whether family members have been involved in terrorist activities, the department said. The department said it intends not to routinely ask most diplomatic and official visa applicants for the additional information. — Reuters

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Sports

Panik's homer in ninth lifts Giants to 1-0 win over Dodgers

Washington's Max Scherzer strike out 10 in six scoreless innings

LOS ANGELES: Joe Panik hit Kenley Jansen's second pitch for a home run leading off the ninth inning Friday night, giving the San Francisco Giants a second straight 1-0 win over the Los Angeles Dodgers in Los Angeles in a game that featured brilliant pitching performances by starters Johnny Cueto and Alex Wood. Panik also delivered the only run of the Giants' Opening Day win, homering off Dodgers ace Clayton Kershaw in the fifth inning. He waited until Wood had left after eight one-hit innings in the rematch, once again smacking a difference-making homer into the seats in right field at Dodger Stadium. This time it was against the Dodgers' closer, Jansen (0-1). Seeking the Giants' first no-hitter against the Dodgers since Rube Marquard in 1915, Cueto retired the first 18 Los Angeles batters before Chris Taylor blooped a single to right field to open the seventh.



Diamondbacks win their first two games of the season

Globe Life Park, evening the four-game, opening-weekend series at a game apiece. Fister (1-0), who was acquired by the Rangers as a free agent in the offseason, struck out three and walked three in besting Houston's 1A ace, Dallas Keuchel. Keuchel (0-1), surrendered three runs (all earned) on seven hits in six innings of work. He struck out four and walked one in a 99-pitch stint. Texas pounded out 10 hits in the win, led by Shin-Soo Choo with three, and Nomar Mazara scored twice. The Astros managed just five hits off five Texas pitchers, with reigning American League MVP Jose Altuve collecting two of those.

ANGELS 2, AS 1

Pitching, defense and Mike Trout turned out to be just the formula visiting Los Angeles needed to win first game of the season at the Oakland Coliseum. Trout went hitless on Thursday, but homered off A's starter Sean Manaea in the first inning Friday and scored the Angels' other run in the ninth, while Angels starter Tyler Skaggs and the three relievers combined to keep the Oakland bats quiet most of the night. Manaea also was good, giving up one run on four hits in 7 2/3 innings, striking out seven and walking none. Skaggs earned the win, giving up three hits in 6 1/3 scoreless innings, striking out five and walking none.

PIRATES 13, TIGERS 10 (13 INNINGS)

Gregory Polanco clubbed a three-run homer in the top of the 13th inning as visiting Pittsburgh outlasted Detroit in each team's season opener at Comerica Park. Adam Frazier and Josh Harrison poked two-out singles off Alex Wilson to start the rally, and Polanco followed with a 416-foot bomb off a 3-0 fastball to provide the winning hit in a game that lasted five hours, 27 minutes. Steven Brault pitched three scoreless innings to earn the win. The teams combined to use 15 pitchers in a contest that featured 31 hits, 13 walks and five errors.

DIAMONDBACKS 9, ROCKIES 8

Arizona shortstop Nick Ahmed homered and had a career-high five RBIs and A.J. Pollock had two hits and two RBIs in the Diamondbacks' home victory over Colorado at Chase Field. Ahmed hit a three-run homer to cap a five-run first inning, and his RBI single off Antonio Senzatele in a two-run fifth broke a tie at seven as the Diamondbacks won their first two games of the season

of singles in a season-opening victory over host Cincinnati at the Great American Ball Park. Scherzer, the two-time defending National League Cy Young Award winner, gave up five hits and walked one while improving to 3-1 in five career starts against the Reds. The Nationals scored in the first inning after Adam Eaton singled to open the game and took third on Harper's one-out single. Ryan Zimmerman grounded to third baseman Eugenio Suarez, whose throw to second forced Harper, but the Reds could not complete the double play as Eaton scored for a 1-0 lead.

TEXAS 5, HOUSTON 1

Doug Fister gave up a run and scattered four hits in five strong innings, and Joey Gallo and Elvis Andrus each had two hits and an RBI as Texas defeated Houston at



MIAMI: Miguel Rojas #19 of the Miami Marlins singles in the game winning run in the bottom of the 17th inning against the Chicago Cubs at Marlins Park on Friday in Miami. — AFP

RED SOX 1, RAYS 0

Rafael Devers' RBI single in the seventh inning proved to be enough offense for visiting Boston after a solid start by David Price paved the way to victory against Tampa Bay Rays at Tropicana Field in St. Petersburg, Fla. Price (1-0), who spent the first seven-plus seasons of his career with the Rays, tossed seven shutout innings with five strikeouts while allowing only four hits and walking none. Craig Kimbrel struck out the side in the ninth for his first save of the year. It was another solid outing for a Red Sox starter after Chris Sale tossed a six-inning one-hitter with nine strikeouts in the season opener Thursday, only for Boston to blow a 4-0 lead in the late innings.

MARLINS 2, CUBS 1 (17 INNINGS)

Miguel Rojas' line-drive, walk-off single to center gave Miami a dramatic win over visiting Chicago at Marlins Park, but Miami's bullpen was the story of the night. Miami's Jarlin Garcia pitched five perfect innings of relief before finally allowing a walk in the 15th inning. He finished his night with six scoreless innings, striking out six and allowing just one hit and two walks. As a whole, the Marlins bullpen allowed no runs in 11 2/3 innings. Rookie Brian Anderson, who started the rally with a two-out single, scored from second base on the play. Rojas' only hit of the night came off closer Brandon Morrow, who made his Cubs debut. Rojas was the first batter Morrow faced.

YANKEES 4, BLUE JAYS 2

Masahiro Tanaka retired the final 13 hitters he faced and pitched six solid innings as New York beat host Toronto at the Rogers Centre. Tanaka (1-0) began his fifth season with the Yankees by allowing one run and three hits. He struck out eight, including seven of the final 12 hitters and threw 61 of 79 pitches for strikes. Tanaka improved to 10-4 in 16 career starts against the Blue Jays, who struck out 15 times against him in New York on Sept. 29.

NATIONALS 2, REDS 0

Washington right-hander Max Scherzer struck out 10 in six scoreless innings and Bryce Harper had a pair

MLB results/standings

Pittsburgh 13, Detroit 10; Washington 2, Cincinnati 0; NY Yankees 4, Toronto 2; Boston 1, Tampa Bay 0; Miami 2, Chicago Cubs 1; Philadelphia 5, Atlanta 4; Texas 5, Houston 1; Arizona 9, Colorado 8; San Francisco 1, LA Dodgers 0; Milwaukee 8, San Diego 6.

American League				National League			
American League - East				National League - East			
W	L	PCT	GB	NY Mets	Washington	Atlanta	Philadelphia
NY Yankees	2	0	1.000	-	1	0	1.000
Baltimore	1	0	1.000	0.5	1	1	.500
Boston	1	1	.500	1	1	1	.500
Tampa Bay	1	1	.500	1	1	1	.500
Toronto	0	2	.000	2	Miami	1	1
American League - Central				National League - Central			
Chicago White Sox	1	0	1.000	-	Milwaukee	2	0
Cleveland	0	1	.000	1	Pittsburgh	1	0
Kansas City	0	1	.000	1	Chicago Cubs	1	1
Detroit	0	1	.000	1	Cincinnati	0	1
Minnesota	0	1	.000	1	St. Louis	0	1
American League - West				National League - West			
Seattle	1	0	1.000	-	Arizona	2	0
Houston	1	1	.500	0.5	San Francisco	2	0
LA Angels	1	1	.500	0.5	Colorado	0	2
Oakland	1	1	.500	0.5	LA Dodgers	0	2
Texas	1	1	.500	0.5	San Diego	0	2

for the first time since 2012. Ian Desmond, Gerardo Parra and Charlie Blackmon homered for Colorado, which enters the final game of a three-game series looking to avoid its second 0-3 start in franchise history.

PHILADELPHIA 5, ATLANTA 4 (11 INNINGS)

First baseman Carlos Santana drove in three runs, including the game-winning sacrifice fly in the 11th inning, to help visiting Philadelphia defeat Atlanta at SunTrust Park and give rookie manager Gabe Kapler his first career victory. Santana, who was 1-for-3 with a home run, delivered a long fly ball to left field against Atlanta rookie reliever Shane Carle (0-1) to drive in J.P. Crawford with the

go-ahead run. The winning pitcher was Drew Hutchison (1-0), who threw two scoreless innings. He retired Ender Inciarte on a fly ball with two runners on base to end the game.

BREWERS 8, PADRES 6

Ryan Braun hit a three-run, two-out, two-strike homer off San Diego closer Brad Hand to cap a five-run, ninth-inning Milwaukee rally at Petco Park. Although he was only 1-for-4, Braun had five RBIs in the game on a first-inning ground out, a fifth-inning sacrifice fly and the game-winning homer. The loss snapped a streak of 127 straight wins for the Padres when they took a lead into the ninth inning at Petco Park. — Reuters



LONDON: File photo shows, Australia's Sally Pearson celebrates winning the final of the women's 100m hurdles athletics event at the 2017 IAAF World Championships at the London Stadium in London. — AFP

Pearson battles injury to make Games hurdles

GOLD COAST: Australia's world hurdles champion Sally Pearson said yesterday she was "90 percent" certain of competing at the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games as she battles an Achilles' problem.

Pearson hasn't raced over the hurdles since early March but is targeting the 100-metres hurdles heats on April 12. "I'd be 90 percent (certain for the hurdles). It will be an issue all the way through (to a final)," the 31-year-old told reporters in Brisbane. "I don't think the pain will affect my performance. I'll be able to block it out as much as possible.

"It's not going to be a controlled race-it's going to be all-out. It has to be." Injuries have been a constant for Pearson, who suf-

fered a broken wrist from a race fall which derailed her 2015 world titles campaign, while a hamstring problem hit her 2016 Rio Olympics hopes.

Last year Pearson claimed a second 100m hurdles world title in London. "I was thinking the other day if this was my first major (event, with such a preparation), I'd be struggling a bit more," Pearson said. "All my big decisions have helped me to cope with this competition, even though there is more spotlight and pressure being in my home town. "I'm dealing with it well and staying relaxed. "It's a matter of what my body wants to do on the day and that's pretty much going to make my decision for me."

Pearson said she plans to train on Monday or Tuesday after running in a 100m-flat leg in an Australian relay team earlier this week in Brisbane. Against Pearson, who has a 12.28 sec personal best, Jamaica has entered for the Games 100m hurdles three competitors with a sub-12.7 sec personal best, including 2015 world champion Danielle Williams (12.57). —AFP

Caribbean schoolgirl eyes selfie with pin-up Peaty

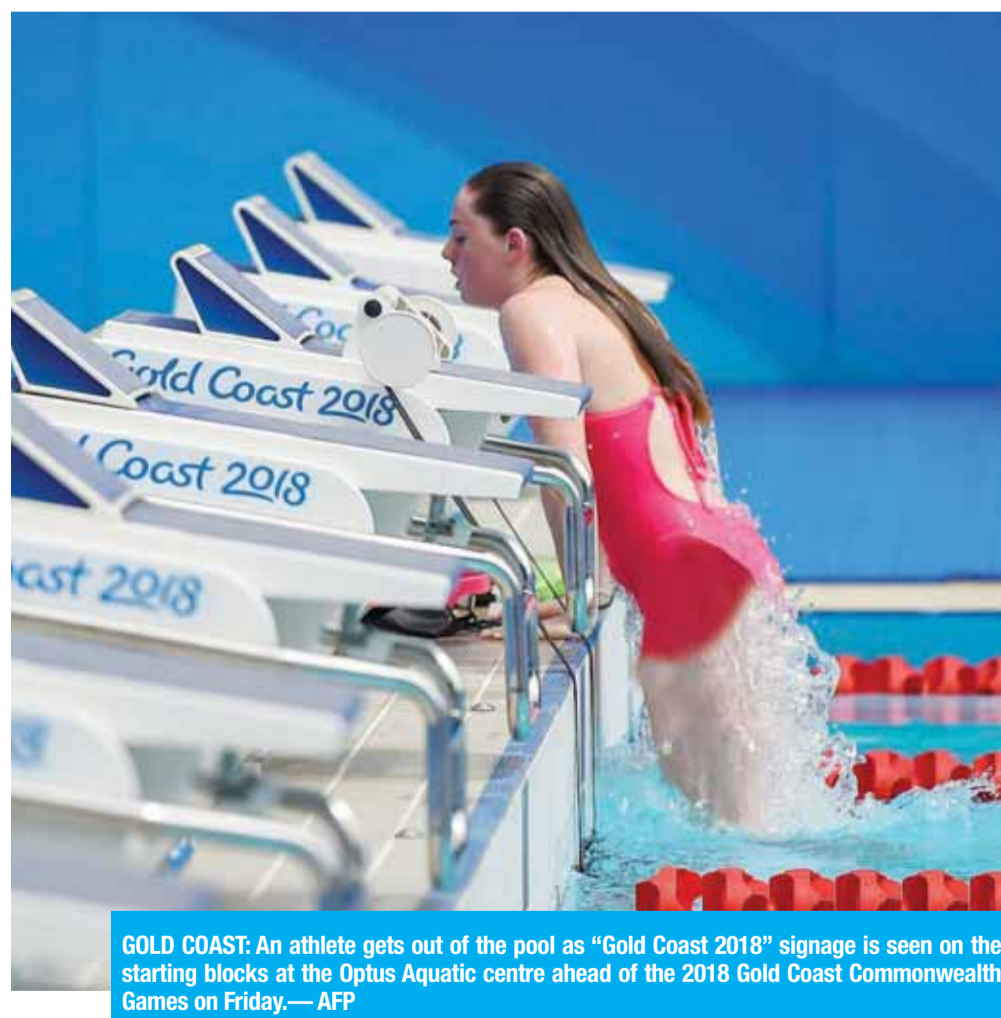
GOLD COAST: As many of the world's top swimmers go for gold at the Commonwealth Games, one shy schoolgirl from St. Lucia has a more modest goal—a photo with English hunk Adam Peaty. But 16-year-old Katie Kyle, set to compete in the 50 and 100 metres butterfly for the Caribbean island, first has to pluck up the courage to speak to the Olympic breaststroke champion.

"I don't know if I'll be brave enough to go up and be like 'hey!'" she told AFP yesterday. "But there will be some people, like Adam Peaty, I'll be like 'hey, can I get a picture with you?' "Just to meet and talk to all the guys who swim fast will be great," added Kyle, who along with Jean Luc Zephir makes up St. Lucia's Commonwealth Games swim team in Gold Coast.

"I'm still kind of shocked that I made it this far." Kyle has been based in Britain since last summer after deciding to leave St. Lucia because of a lack of training facilities. "I thought I could better my training in Britain with bigger pools, better facilities," said Kyle.

"At home it's not as developed, there's only a 25m pool outside." Such is the parlous condition of sport in St. Lucia that at a track and field meeting earlier this year, a whistle was used to start events instead of a gun, according to local media.

"Perhaps they ran out of ammo," said St. Lucia swim coach David Peterkin. "The government is not very involved in sports at that level. They do a lot of work with school kids



GOLD COAST: An athlete gets out of the pool as "Gold Coast 2018" signage is seen on the starting blocks at the Optus Aquatic centre ahead of the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games on Friday. — AFP

but not when it comes to a higher level. "We have a planned 50m pool coming and hopefully it should be there within a year and a half to two years." If Kyle gets that selfie with Peaty, she will be halfway to meeting her two swimming heroes. Kyle idolises Hungary's Katinka Hosszu, a triple gold medalist at the 2016 Rio Olympics, after a

brief crush on American legend Michael Phelps. "There was Michael Phelps but when I got kind of serious I was looking at Katinka," said Kyle, who has her heart set on competing at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. "But I'm just glad to be here. It's going to be so exciting to swim against (top racers) and to say I've swum against them." — AFP

Sports

LeBron James breaks Michael Jordan's double-digit record

Nuggets stop skid, Sixers win without Embiid

CLEVELAND: LeBron James broke the NBA record for consecutive games scoring at least 10 points and added 17 more as the Cleveland Cavaliers beat the New Orleans Pelicans, 107-102, on Friday night at Quicken Loans Arena in Cleveland. It was the 867th consecutive regular-season game in which James has scored at least 10 points, breaking a tie with Michael Jordan for the longest such streak in NBA history. The streak began Jan. 5, 2007. The record will stand for at least several years because the next closest active streak belongs to Houston's James Harden (258 after Friday's game against Phoenix). Jordan Clarkson added 23 points and Rodney Hood scored 16 for the Cavaliers, who maintained their hold on third place in the Eastern Conference. They stayed a half-game ahead of Philadelphia, which beat Atlanta, 101-91, and moved a game in front of idle Indiana. Jrue Holiday led New Orleans with 25 points, Nikola Mirotic added 20, Anthony Davis scored 16 and Darius Miller had 11.



Minnesota outlast Dallas

12-of-32 shooting for Oklahoma City. Carmelo Anthony contributed 23 points and nine rebounds, Jerami Grant added 16 points off the bench, but Paul George tallied just 13 points for the Thunder.

BUCKS 124, LAKERS 122 (OT)

Eric Bledsoe made a career-best seven 3-pointers and scored a season-high 39 points to lead Milwaukee to over Los Angeles at Staples Center. Khris Middleton contributed 28 points and four steals for the Bucks, who blew a 21-point, third-quarter lead before prevailing for the fourth time in the past five games. Giannis Antetokounmpo recorded 27 points and 16 rebounds as Milwaukee moved into a tie with the Miami Heat for seventh place in the Eastern Conference, 5 1/2 games clear of the ninth-place Detroit Pistons with six to play. Kyle Kuzma had 27 points, 12 rebounds and six assists and Brook Lopez scored 20 points for Los Angeles, which lost for the sixth time in the past eight contests.

Julius Randle recorded 18 points and 10 rebounds, Ivica Zubac scored 16 points, Josh Hart had 13 points and 13 rebounds and Brandon Ingram tallied 12 points.

TIMBERWOLVES 93, MAVERICKS 92

Karl-Anthony Towns scored 21 points and added 20 rebounds, and Jamal Crawford poured in 24 points, including two baskets in the final 50.1 seconds, as Minnesota outlasted Dallas at the American Airlines Center. The Timberwolves (44-33) are deep in the hunt for the playoffs, and the win on Friday allowed them to leapfrog New Orleans into sixth place in the Western Conference standings. Dallas (23-53) has already been eliminated from postseason consideration and is assured of having its fewest wins in a season since it won just 19 games in the strike-shortened 1998-99 campaign.

JAZZ 107, GRIZZLIES 97

Donovan Mitchell scored 22 points and Dante Exum added a season-high 21 points off the bench to lead Utah to a victory over Memphis at Vivint Smart Home Arena in Salt Lake City. Joe Ingles tallied 17 points, 10 assists and five rebounds for the Jazz. Utah snapped a two-game home losing streak and shot 40-of-74 (54.1 percent) from the field. Marc Gasol scored 28 points on 11-of-12 shooting and MarShon Brooks added 24 off



CLEVELAND: LeBron James #23 of the Cleveland Cavaliers handles the ball against Jrue Holiday #11 of the New Orleans Pelicans during the game between the two teams on Friday at Quicken Loans Arena in Cleveland, Ohio. —AFP

the bench to lead the Grizzlies. The loss to Utah snapped a two-game winning streak for Memphis.

76ERS 101, HAWKS 91

Playing without All-Star Joel Embiid, Philadelphia blew open a close game in the third quarter and coasted to a win over Atlanta at Philips Arena. Embiid didn't make the trip after suffering a concussion and an orbital fracture when he collided with teammate Markelle Fultz Wednesday night in a 118-101 win over New York. Embiid is expected to be out 2-4 weeks, meaning the earliest he could return would be for Philadelphia's playoff opener. In Embiid's absence, the 76ers turned to balanced scoring and defense to notch their 45th win. Six players finished in double figures, led by Ersan Ilyasova with 21 points and J.J. Redick with 19. Ilyasova added 16 rebounds for a double-double.

TRAIL BLAZERS 105, CLIPPERS 96

Jusuf Nurkic and Damian Lillard led the way as

Portland polished off Los Angeles at Moda Center. Nurkic scored 21 points and grabbed 12 rebounds and Damian Lillard had 17 points, 11 assists and seven boards for the Trail Blazers, who won for the 16th time in 19 games. Five players scored in double figures for Portland, including Zach Collins with a career-high 15 points, CJ McCollum with 13 and Evan Turner with 12.

BULLS 90, MAGIC 82

Lauri Markkanen and Sean Kilpatrick each scored 13 points, and Chicago snapped a seven-game losing streak with a victory over Orlando at Amway Center. Cameron Payne added 11 points, and Cristiano Felicio grabbed 16 rebounds for the Bulls, who completed the season sweep of the Magic and continued their dominance over Orlando with their 15th win in the last 21 meetings. Aaron Gordon scored 18 points, and Nikola Vucevic scored 12 points and grabbed 14 rebounds for the Magic, who went 2-5 on their seven-game homestand, which came to a close Friday. — Reuters

Park, Lindberg surge into ANA Inspiration lead

LOS ANGELES: Park Sung-hyun fired an eight-under-par 64 to thrust herself into contention at the top of the leaderboard at the ANA Inspiration on Friday as she chases a second major after a dazzling rookie season.

The 24-year-old star from South Korea shrugged off an opening bogey to card seven birdies and an eagle at Mission Hills in Rancho Mirage, California, to claim a share of the second round lead.

Park, who last year won the US Women's Open at Trump National in her first year on the LPGA Tour, heads into the weekend on 12 under alongside Sweden's Pernilla Lindberg after 36 holes, leading by three from Jessica Korda of the United States on nine under.

Lindberg, the first round leader, followed up her opening 65 with a five-under-par 67 while Korda remained in the hunt with a 68. But the day belonged to Korea's Park, who made the cut of every event she entered in her rookie LPGA season, and was also the first rookie in history to make it to world number one in the rankings. Friday's highlight was an eagle two on the par-four 15th, when she holed out from around 100 yards. "Today the shots were awesome," Park said afterwards. "I just felt really good about my driver. The shots fell in just as I wanted them to. "There were a couple things that I missed, but overall just had a great round."

Park, who has made a slow start to 2018, with three finishes outside the top 10 and a missed cut at the Kia Classic last weekend, said she had rediscovered the poise that helped her win her maiden major at the US Open last year.



RANCHO MIRAGE: Sung Hyun Park of South Korea makes a tee shot on the 17th hole during round two of the ANA Inspiration on the Dinah Shore Tournament Course at Mission Hills Country Club on Friday in Rancho Mirage, California. — AFP

"I was super focused at the US Open, and felt just as focused for today's round," she said. "It was a bummer to not make the cut last week and I felt pretty disappointed. But I feel like it was a really good comeback today." Park's rise has been all the more remarkable for the fact that she remains one of the few players on tour who does not have a permanent coach. "I really enjoy the time alone to prac-

tice alone," Park said. "If it comes to the point where I need a coach, I will consider that. But right now, I just feel really good about my game." Lindberg meanwhile was happy to be sitting alongside Park after a flawless bogey-free round which saw five birdies. The 31-year-old said she is thriving after reuniting with caddie Daniel Taylor, who is also her fiance. — AFP

Sharks thrash Blues as Waratahs down Brumbies in derby

CANBERRA: Coastal Sharks overpowered the Auckland Blues 63-40 in a high-scoring Super Rugby win as the NSW Waratahs ground out an Australian derby victory over the ACT Brumbies yesterday. The Durban-based Sharks clicked into gear in a celebration for the du Preez family in a free-scoring win in Auckland.

The Waratahs, who lost Wallaby star Israel Folau with a hamstring injury in only the fourth minute, dug in for a 24-17 win over the Brumbies in Canberra. It was the Waratahs' first win in the Australian capital since 2015 as star Wallaby forward David Pocock played his 100th Super Rugby match and his first game this season after taking a sabbatical year off in 2017. In Auckland, it was evident the Blues would be punished for their ill-discipline from the moment Robert du Preez landed his first

penalty in the third minute at Eden Park.

From the first bullocking run by his younger brother Jean-Luc de Preez, a key figure in several tries, the Sharks exposed the deficiencies in the Blues defence. Which was all good news for their father Robert de Preez, the Sharks coach, who has been under pressure with only one win from their first five matches and losses to the Brumbies and Melbourne Rebels in the past two weeks. Both sides scored six tries with the 23-point winning margin the result of seven penalties and an extra conversion landed by Robert du Preez. "We came into this game without backs against the wall and we really wanted to go out there and enjoy the game," said skipper Ruan Botha. "It hasn't been an easy start to our campaign but we're trying to get back on track."

Robert de Preez landed four penalties in the first half and also converted tries by his brother and Botha as the Sharks turned 26-7 ahead with fullback Michael Collins scoring for the Blues. The game swung sharply in the Blues' favour for 10 minutes at the start of the second half when Sharks' wing Sbu Nkosi was sin-binned for a head-high tackle. While the Blues held a one-man advantage, Akira Ioane, Patrick Tuipulotu and Stephen Perofeta all scored tries-Tuipulotu and Perofeta both

from long-range. Perofeta converted them all for the Blues to be up 28-26, but when Nkosi returned to the field the Sharks moved up several gears to score 30 unanswered points. The Blues rallied for two late tries before Curwin Bosch scored a final try for the Sharks more than three minutes into extra time.

VITAL WIN

In Canberra, two tries to giant winger Taquele Naiyaravoro helped power the Waratahs to victory over the Brumbies. But the vital win came at a cost, with Folau limping off with a hamstring injury and initial reports putting him out of action for up to four weeks. "He's a huge weapon at all times and I'm hoping Izzy is not too bad for us and himself, he's been playing some good rugby," Waratahs skipper Michael Hooper said.

The Waratahs struggled for much of the first half but Naiyaravoro's first try after the halftime siren was the turning point in the match, as he swatted away Wallaby regular Henry Speight and ran 50 metres to score and give NSW a 13-11 lead. It also helped the Waratahs climb above the Queensland Reds into second place in the Australian conference on 14 points, six behind the Rebels. — AFP

IOC chief Bach meets N Korean leader Kim

SEOUL: International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach told North Korean leader Kim Jong Un at a meeting on Friday that the IOC would cooperate with the North to prepare for its participation in the 2020 Tokyo and 2022 Beijing Olympic Games, the North's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) has reported.

Bach travelled to Pyongyang on Thursday in a visit that comes after North Korea's participation in the Pyeongchang Winter Games helped ease inter-Korean relations. He told Kim in a meeting that the trip was to "express the most heartfelt thanks" to North Korea's leader for helping make February's Pyeongchang Winter Olympics a Games that were "symbolic of peace," KCNA said yesterday.

Athletes from North and South Korea marched under a unified peninsula flag at the opening ceremony in Pyeongchang and the two Koreas have experienced a significant thaw in tensions since the Feb. 9-25 Winter Olympics.

KCNA said Kim expressed thanks for the IOC's support and for cooperating with North Korea "regardless of any political climate and conditions". He said he hoped that the IOC's relationship with the North's Olympic Committee would continue to develop favourably and expected cooperation in developing and improving sport in North Korea, the report added.

An official from South Korea's Unification Ministry said it was aware of the KCNA's report but declined to comment further. Bach had accepted North Korea's invitation in February, and told Reuters at the time that he saw sports as a way to reduce political tensions.

After Kim made a surprise trip this week to Beijing to meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping, his engagement with the international community has sparked speculation he may try to meet other leaders ahead of summits with South Korean President Moon Jae-in and United States President Donald Trump.

The two Koreas have experienced a significant easing in tensions since the Winter Olympics in South Korea in February, leading them to set a date to hold their first summit in more than a decade on April 27. — Reuters

N Zealand fight back after England rip off top order

De Grandhomme, Watling fight back after terrible start

CHRISTCHURCH: BJ Watling continued to defy England as he combined with Colin de Grandhomme to resurrect New Zealand's innings and lead them to 192 for six as the second day of the second Test at Hagley Oval ended about 30 minutes early due to bad light.

Watling was 77 not out after he and de Grandhomme had come together at 36 for five and then combined for 142 runs for the sixth wicket to drag the hosts back into the match after Stuart Broad and James Anderson had blasted the top off the innings.

Tim Southee was 13 not out after de Grandhomme had been dismissed for 72 about an hour before the



CHRISTCHURCH: New Zealand's Colin de Grandhomme (R) bats watched by England's keeper Jonny Bairstow during day two of the second cricket Test match between New Zealand and England at Hagley Oval in Christchurch yesterday. — AFP

three of the first four wickets to fall, also capturing Ross Taylor for two and trapping first test centurion Henry Nicolls in front for a duck.

Anderson and Broad, however, were less effective after lunch as the ball softened and de Grandhomme and Watling were able to fight back, something Broad acknowledged with the second new ball due just 5.1 overs into the third day.

"We have to make use of that new ball tomorrow," Broad told reporters. "New Zealand are 100-some-

thing behind and with the new ball around the corner, we've seen the damage the new ball can do on this pitch."

"(De Grandhomme and Watling) played exceptionally well, but from our point of view, we held them well enough to still be ahead of this game." England need a win to stop New Zealand clinching their first series against them since 1999. The hosts won the first test at Eden Park in Auckland by an innings and 49 runs. —Reuters

SCOREBOARD

CHRISTCHURCH, New Zealand: Scoreboard at stumps on day two of the second Test between New Zealand and England in Christchurch yesterday:

England first innings (overnight 290-8)	
A. Cook b Boult	2
M. Stoneman c Latham b Southee	35
J. Vince lbw Southee	18
J. Root b Southee	37
D. Malan lbw Boult	0
B. Stokes c Watling b Boult	25
J. Bairstow c Taylor b Boult	101
S. Broad c Sodhi b Southee	5
M. Wood b Southee	52
J. Leach c Watling b Southee	16
J. Anderson not out	0
Extras: (b9, lb5, w1, nb1)	16
Total: (for 10 wickets: 96.5 overs)	307
Fall of wickets: 1-6 (Cook), 2-38 (Vince), 3-93 (Root), 4-94 (Malan), 5-94 (Stoneman), 6-151 (Stokes), 7-164 (Broad), 8-259 (Wood), 9-307 (Leach), 10-307 (Bairstow)	
Bowling: Boult 28.5-5-87-4, Southee 26-7-62-6 (1w), de Grandhomme 17-4-44-0, Wagner 20-5-69-0 (1nb), Sodhi 5-0-31-0.	

New Zealand first innings	
J. Raval c Bairstow b Anderson	5
T. Latham c Bairstow b Broad	0
K. Williamson c Bairstow b Anderson	22
R. Taylor c Cook b Broad	2
H. Nicholls lbw Broad	0
B. Watling not out	77
C. de Grandhomme c Bairstow b Broad	72
T. Southee not out	13
Extras: (lb1)	1
Total: (for 6 wickets: 74.5 overs)	192
Fall: 1-0 (Latham), 2-14 (Raval), 3-17 (Taylor), 4-17 (Nicholls), 5-36 (Williamson), 6-178 (de Grandhomme)	
To bat: Ish Sodhi, Neil Wagner, Trent Boult	
Bowling: Anderson 19-5-43-2, Broad 14-4-38-4, Wood 17.5-3-50-0, Leach 18-3-46-0, Root 1-0-9-0, Stokes 3-1-5-0.	
Series: New Zealand lead 1-0	



Broad takes four wickets, Anderson two

scheduled end of play. England had been dismissed for 307 early on Saturday at Hagley Oval after Jonny Bairstow was the last man out for a well-deserved 101.

Bairstow had rescued England's innings from 94 for five to marshal a stubborn rearguard action with the bowlers as they scored 156 runs for the final four wickets — 95 of those coming in an eighth-wicket partnership with Mark Wood (52).

Broad and Anderson then followed up Bairstow's fifth test century with four quick wickets to put England in charge as they reduced the hosts to 32 for four at lunch. The hosts lost Kane Williamson shortly after the break for 22, the home captain becoming Bairstow's third catch.

The 28-year-old had already caught Tom Latham for a duck and Jeet Raval for five before lunch as Broad and Anderson ran riot with the new ball. Broad took

Hales replaces Warner in IPL Sunrisers squad

NEW DELHI: Indian Premier League team Sunrisers Hyderabad yesterday picked England batsman Alex Hales to replace Australia's scandal-plagued former vice-captain David Warner. Warner, 31, has been banned from international cricket for a year over a ball-tampering scandal during the recent third Test against South Africa in Cape Town.

Hales was signed for 10 million rupees (\$153,700) from the available player pool for this year's IPL, the Indian cricket board said in a statement. A hard-hitting opener, Hales has scored 1,456 runs in Twenty20 internationals.

The 29-year-old is the only England batsman to score a century in T20 internationals and is seventh in the International Cricket Council's batting rankings for the format. Warner, the former Sunrisers captain, has been charged by Cricket Australia with developing the ball-tampering plot and telling teammate Cameron Bancroft to carry it out during the Cape Town Test. In a tearful apology Saturday, Warner said he had resigned himself to the fact that he may not play for Australia again.

The Sunrisers have named New Zealand's Kane Williamson as their skipper after Warner stepped down. The Australian opener, along with former captain Steve Smith, was later banned by the IPL from playing this year in the cash-rich T20 tournament. The Hyderabad side-winners of the 2016 IPL-host the Rajasthan Royals in their opening match on April 9, two days after the tournament starts. — AFP

Streak shocked by sacking as Zimbabwe coach

HARARE: Coach Heath Streak said he was shocked after Zimbabwe Cricket (ZC) sacked him in a backroom clear-out in the wake of the team's failure to qualify for the 2019 World Cup. Streak has been widely praised for improving the results of the side during his 18 months in charge, and exits along with his technical team, while captain Graeme Cremer has also reportedly been axed.

"It is with great regret and shock that I was told by ZC that myself and my coaching team must resign by 3pm yesterday (Friday), failing which we would be fired," Streak said in a statement. "I chose not to resign as I believe this to be degrading to our national players and my technical team. As a result, we have been dismissed with immediate effect."

ZC have had a clear-out of all backroom staff amid reports of financial difficulties, including batting coach Lance Klusener, Zimbabwe A coach Wayne James and Under-19 coach Stephen Mangongo, while convener of selectors Tatenda Taibu has also been axed.

"Thank you to my staff who worked tirelessly, often going for months unpaid and having had two pay-cuts during their tenure, but still had that unwavering professional commitment," Streak said. "To Graeme and all the players, thank you for your patriotism and commitment to our Chevrons team. I wish you all the very best for the future. I am deeply saddened that my journey with you ends here. Hopefully our paths will meet again in future..." — Reuters

Tearful Warner sorry for ball-tampering, may appeal ban

SYDNEY: Former Australia vice-captain David Warner apologised in tears yesterday for his role in ball-tampering but said he may appeal his 12-month ban in the latest emotional public appearance over the scandal.

A sobbing Warner said he realised he may never play for his country again. But he stonewalled questions about who was aware of the plot and whether it was the first such incident within the team. Warner, 31, told a media conference in Sydney: "I can honestly say I have only wanted to bring glory to my country through playing cricket."

"In striving to do so I have made the decision which has had the opposite effect and it's one that I will regret for as long as I live," Warner's appearance comes after similar heartfelt apologies by opening batsman Cameron Bancroft and captain Steve Smith, who broke down when he faced the media on Thursday.

Coach Darren Lehmann, convinced to step down after seeing the apologies from Bancroft and Smith, was also tearful as he announced his resignation. Smith and Warner were banned from international and domestic cricket for a year and Bancroft was suspended for nine months after the incident during the third Test in Cape Town. Bancroft was caught on camera trying to use yellow sandpaper to alter the ball, an offence which

triggered an outpouring of criticism against the hard-nosed Australian team. Warner, a dynamic batsman but a divisive figure in the game, was charged by Cricket Australia with developing the plot and telling Bancroft to carry it out.

When questioned about a possible appeal, Warner said: "That's something that I will continue to sit down with my family and weigh up all my considerations before I make any decisions." A report yesterday said Bancroft was set to lodge an appeal and had sought legal advice ahead of Thursday's appeals deadline.

'IT'S INEXCUSABLE'

Warner, who struggled to control his emotions during his 10-minute media conference, apologised to both teams, their fans, Cricket Australia and his family, including his wife Candice who was also crying as she watched from the media seats.

But when asked for further details of the plot, such as whether it was his idea, who else was aware and whether it had happened before, he avoided the question. "I am here today to accept my responsibility for my part and my involvement for what happened in Cape Town," Warner said.

"It's inexcusable. I am deeply sorry. I will do everything I can to earn back the respect of the Australian public." Warner, who has played 74 Test since his debut in 2011, said he would be seeking ways to make character changes. Warner, who has been described as the team's "attack dog", was also banned in 2013 after punching England's Joe Root in a bar.

"I suppose there is a tiny ray of hope that I may one day be given the privilege of playing for my country again, but I am resigned to the fact that may never hap-

Pakistan pioneers hail reverse swing as 'art' not 'cheating'

KARACHI: Pakistan's masters of reverse-swinging a cricket ball have unanimously defended it as an "art" which can be achieved without the tampering that ended in shameful bans for three Australian players. Steve Smith had to step down as Australia captain and David Warner as vice captain after they orchestrated ball-tampering through batsman Cameron Bancroft in the Cape Town Test against South Africa last week.

Bancroft was found to have used a piece of sandpaper in an attempt to alter the condition of the ball while on the field to create swing for Australia's bowlers and deceive the South African batsmen. Cricket Australia came down hard, handing a one-year ban each to Smith and Warner and nine months to Bancroft for sully the country's sporting image.

In Pakistan, an internet meme swept social media appearing to show legendary paceman Imran Khan, Wasim Akram and Waqar Younis smiling over the incident with a caption that accused the Australians of being "amateurs" in their efforts to create reverse swing.

Former Pakistan fast bowler Sarfraz Nawaz — widely regarded as a pioneer of reverse swing — refused to accept the implication that the skill

requires ball-tampering. "This is ridiculous to say reverse swing is cheating," Sarfraz told AFP.

"You can achieve reverse swing without tampering with the ball. "There is a conventional swing which is done with the new ball and then there is reverse swing which is achieved with an old ball and it has been proved in laboratories that reverse swing is a scientific phenomenon." Sarfraz took 177 wickets in 55 Tests, including an amazing nine for 86 against Australia at Melbourne in 1979 that included a spell of seven wickets for a mere one run in 33 balls.

'IT WAS AND WILL REMAIN AN ART'

"When I passed the art to Imran Khan he developed it and then taught Wasim Akram and Waqar Younis, and in those times everyone called it cheating but when the Englishmen started to reverse swing it became an art," said Sarfraz.

"It was and will remain an art, but resorting to tampering is cheating and that was what Australians did to beat South Africa and were deservedly punished."

"Conventional swing is simple—if the seam is angled toward the slip fielders it will swing away from the right-handed batsman, and if the seam is angled towards the leg side it will swing into the batsman," explained Sarfraz. "Reverse swing is totally opposite."

Sarfraz passed the art to Imran, who achieved more success than his master but also confessed to ball-tampering by using a bottle top to roughen one side of the ball. Asked in a 1994 television interview whether he would have got 362 Test wickets had he not tampered with the ball, Imran replied: "Yes, it's a misconception that whoever



SYDNEY: Australian cricketer David Warner listens to a question at a press conference at the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG) in Sydney yesterday. — AFP

pen," he said. "But in the coming weeks and months I am going to look at what has happened and who I am as a man. "To be honest, I am not sure right now how I will do this, I will seek out advice and expertise to make serious changes." Warner called it a "horrible" decision, adding: "I failed in my responsibilities as vice-captain of the Australian cricket team." The fallout from the crisis has seen Warner dumped by sponsors ASICS and LG. Along with Smith, he has also been ejected from this year's Indian Premier League, losing contracts worth nearly US\$2 million each. —AFP

scratches the ball can get wickets.

"The whole Sussex team knew I could reverse swing and I would swing at one end while other bowlers could not swing it," said Imran, who played for the English county.

'SULTAN OF SWING'

Imran passed the torch to Wasim and Waqar — regarded as one of international cricket's most destructive new-ball pairings. The two ripped through England's batsmen on Pakistan's 1992 tour, but were also alleged by British media to have tampered with the ball. Wasim excelled for English county Lancashire for a decade while Waqar starred for Glamorgan and Surrey.

"Those allegations were hurtful," recalled Waqar. "Of course, reverse swing can be achieved without cheating. Nowadays most of the bowlers do that and get wickets and help their teams win."

While Wasim-nicknamed the "Sultan of Swing" — was never caught tampering, Waqar was slapped with a one-match suspension and fined 50 percent of his match fee in a tri-series in Sri Lanka in 2000.

Waqar suggested only one brand of cricket ball should be used in international cricket, saying it would lead to a fairer contest. "Why do we use different brand of balls in different countries?" Waqar asked. "In my opinion the Duke ball is the best and the SG comes close to it."

They are the best balls for swing so in order to have uniformity and better swing these balls should be used everywhere. "This will help bowlers and this will also produce better batsmen. We should solve the problem and not indulge in the blame game." — AFP

Sports

Zverev rolls into Miami final, will battle Isner

Isner will be top-ranked American

MIAMI: German fourth seed Alexander Zverev beat Spaniard Pablo Carreno Busta 7-6(4) 6-2 on Friday to set up a Miami Open final showdown against big-serving American John Isner, who earlier overwhelmed Juan Martin del Potro.

Carreno Busta gave as good as he got in the opening set but Zverev took over the rest of the way, sprinting through a second set in which he dominated on serve and broke his 16th-seeded opponent twice.

"I didn't feel I was playing my best in the beginning of the first set, a lot of errors," Zverev said in an on-court interview. "I was down in the tiebreak and I was like, I'm losing anyway I might as well be aggressive. So that's what I did, I hit a few winners, very fortunate to win the first set and then found my game in the second." In the opening set tiebreak, Zverev sent a crushing backhand winner up the line to earn a set point. And at 6-4, with Carreno Busta serving, Zverev forced his opponent into a forehand error.

Zverev used a stinging crosscourt backhand for a break in the third game of the second set and broke his opponent again in the seventh before going on to serve out a match that took 88 minutes at Crandon Park.

The 20-year-old German will now set his sights on collecting his seventh career ATP Tour title and third Masters 1000 crown when he faces 14th-seed Isner in today's final. Zverev is 3-0 in head-to-head meetings with Isner, his most recent victory coming in last year's Italian Open semi-final.

Earlier, Isner ended Indian Wells champion del Potro's 15-match winning streak with a 6-1 7-6(2) victory over the fifth-seeded Argentine to reach his first Miami final.

Punishing a tired del Potro with his serve and groundstrokes, the lanky American breezed through the first set in 27 minutes after securing an early break. The players held serve in a much-tighter second set until Isner claimed the tiebreak. Isner, who will become the top-ranked American tomorrow, brought up match point with a backhand winner down the line and then clinched with a sublime dropshot.

"I've just continued to keep playing better," said Isner, who lost only 11 points on serve in the match. "I think today was even my best match. Very, very encouraging. 'Physically, I'm super-fresh and I'm ready to go for the finals.'" — Reuters



KEY BISCAYNE: Alexander Zverev of Germany plays a backhand against Pablo Carreno Busta of Spain in their semifinal match during the Miami Open Presented by Itaú at Crandon Park Tennis Center in Key Biscayne, Florida. — AFP

“I didn't feel I was playing my best”

”

Football legends rally around former Chelsea great Wilkins

LONDON: Two-time African player of the year Didier Drogba was amongst the football stars who sent messages of support to former Chelsea and Manchester United great Ray Wilkins who is seriously ill in hospital.

The 61-year-old-who was capped 84 times by England captaining them 10 times-is in an induced coma after suffering a heart attack at home. "He's in hospital, he's had a cardiac arrest and is in intensive care," his wife Jackie told the Daily Mirror yesterday.

"He's critically ill. The cardiac arrest led to a fall which has meant he has had to be put in an induced coma," added Mrs Wilkins, who according to the paper is along with other members of the family keeping a bedside vigil.

Ivory Coast legend Drogba, who scored the winning penalty for Chelsea in the 2012 Champions League final shootout against Bayern

Munich said the club's 'family' had him firmly in their thoughts. "Just found out about the news, be strong Ray Wilkins and family. We blue army are sending you our prayers on this religious day," said the 40-year-old former Ivory Coast skipper. Former Chelsea skipper Frank Lampard went on Instagram to send a message of support to Wilkins-who according to his wife is due to undergo another scan on Tuesday.

"All thoughts and strength with this man and his family tonight. An absolute gentleman," wrote Lampard. Gary Lineker, who was a team-mate of Wilkins's at the 1986 World Cup which ended ignominiously for the midfielder as he became the first England player to be sent off at the finals, also wished him well.

"Thoughts are with Ray Wilkins and his family. Rooting for you, Butch (his nickname in his playing days)," tweeted Lineker. Wilkins had a stellar playing career, although in terms of trophies he only won the 1983 FA Cup with Manchester United after a replay with Brighton-he scored a sublime goal in the first match-and the Scottish league title and League Cup in 1989.

His playing career also took him to Italian side AC Milan-prior to their years of dominating domestic and European competition-a brief spell at Paris Saint Germain and Queen's Park Rangers.

He coached QPR, Fulham and Jordan as well as becoming caretaker manager at Chelsea when Luiz Felipe Scolari was sacked in 2009. Wilkins, who has



Ray Wilkins

been employed as a TV pundit, also worked alongside Guus Hiddink at Stamford Bridge and was assistant when Carlo Ancelotti took over with the club going on to achieve the domestic double in their first season together in 2009/10. "The thoughts of everybody at Chelsea Football Club are with Ray Wilkins and his family tonight (Friday). Keep fighting Ray, you have our love and support," said a statement on the Chelsea Twitter feed. — AFP

Late Defoe goal earns Bournemouth draw at Watford

WATFORD: Substitute Jermain Defoe's stoppage-time equaliser helped Bournemouth come from behind to hold Watford to a 2-2 draw in an entertaining Premier League clash at Vicarage Road yesterday. Watford took the lead against the run of play in the 13th minute. Jose Holebas crossed into Bournemouth's box from a short corner and defender Kiko Femenia's shot flew past goalkeeper Asmir Begovic after a deflection off striker Joshua King.

A moment of madness from Holebas at the other end brought the visitors level. The Greek international handled the ball out of play after Watford goalkeeper Orestis Karnezis parried Junior Stanislas' effort and King stepped up to score from the penalty spot.

Pereyra put Watford back in front four minutes into the second half, stroking the ball in from close range after being set up by midfielder Will Hughes. Bournemouth striker Defoe then came off the bench to tuck the ball in with seconds remaining.

Meanwhile, Newcastle United playmaker Ayoze Perez struck the only goal of a tense game to give his side a valuable 1-0 Premier League win over Huddersfield Town at St James's Park yesterday. Striker Dwight Gayle had several good chances in a first half dominated by Newcastle but he failed to find the back of the net.

With the home fans growing increasingly restless in a scrappy second half, Perez eased their nerves by sweeping the ball home from close range 10 minutes from time after Huddersfield keeper Jonas Loessl failed to gather a cross.

The win lifted Newcastle to 12th place, seven points above the relegation places, while Huddersfield remained 15th. — Reuters

Australia new boys flop as SA turn screw

JOHANNESBURG: Australia's ball-tampering scandal came back to bite them when three replacement batsmen failed on a disastrous day for the tourists in the fourth Test against South Africa at the Wanderers Stadium yesterday.

South Africa moved closer to a series win as Australia slumped to 110 for six at the end of the second day in reply to the imposing first-innings total of 488 made by the hosts. South Africa, leading the series 2-1, need only to draw to beat Australia in a home series for the first time since 1969/70. Opening batsmen Joe Burns and Matt Renshaw were out for four and eight respectively while Peter Handscomb was out first ball for nought to leave Australia reeling at 38 for three. The trio were playing in place of Cameron Bancroft, David Warner and captain Steve Smith, who were all banned and sent home in disgrace after the ball-tampering scandal which rocked the third Test in Cape Town last weekend. Usman Khawaja made a stroke-filled 53 as he and Shaun Marsh delayed South Africa's progress with a fourth-wicket stand of 52. But wicketkeeper Quinton de Kock, standing up to the wicket, made an outstanding leg-side catch off the bowling of Vernon Philander to dismiss Khawaja.

Philander finished the day with three for 17 off 12 overs. Shaun Marsh survived a stumping chance off Keshav Maharaj in the over after Khawaja's dismissal but both Marsh brothers fell before the close to leave Australia with a monumental task over the remaining three days. Mitchell Marsh edged an extravagant drive against Morne Morkel into his stumps and three balls later Shaun Marsh was caught at slip by AB de Villiers off Maharaj.

It was South Africa's day from the time Temba Bavuma and De Kock weathered a tricky period against a ball that was almost new after resuming at 313 for six.

Bavuma made 95 not out and shared partnerships of 85 with De Kock (39) and 76 with Maharaj, who hit a cavalier career-best 45 off 51 balls. Bavuma was within sight of his second Test century when Australian fast bowler Pat Cummins took two wickets with successive balls to finish off the innings. Cummins was easily Australia's most impressive bowler, finishing with five for 83. — AFP



CARSON: Zlatan Ibrahimovic #9 of the Los Angeles Galaxy holds his jersey as he stands with head coach Sigi Schmid, team president Chris Klein and President and CEO of AEG Dan Beckerman during a press conference at StubHub Center on Friday. — AFP

Zlatan adds spice to first meeting of LA teams

CARSON: Zlatan Ibrahimovic's debut with LA Galaxy will add extra spice to their highly-anticipated first meeting with crosstown rivals Los Angeles FC, players and coaches said on Friday.

News that the 36-year-old Swedish striker would leave Manchester United for the Galaxy sent shockwaves through LA last week and throngs of the Major League Soccer side's fans showed up to greet him at the airport late on Thursday. Yesterday's sold-out fixture pits the Galaxy, one of the league's original 10 teams, against expansion club LAFC, whose ownership group includes sports figures and celebrities such as Will Ferrell and Magic Johnson.

"It's a big start to something here," Galaxy defender Daniel Steres said on Friday after Ibrahimovic's first

practice with the team at the StubHub Center. "It's going to be a huge crowd, very energetic. It's going to be loud and it's going to be exciting.

"(Ibrahimovic) adds a little extra bonus into it but I think even before, everyone in Los Angeles was pretty excited for this one. They've been looking forward to it all year." Galaxy coach Sigi Schmid said Ibrahimovic, who is still working his way back from a knee injury, was available for the game but did not say whether he would play.

Schmid added that it was difficult to gauge the intensity of the rivalry between the sides at this stage, although if vandals defacing murals of each other's teams in LA is any indication it is already smouldering.

"It means a lot to our fans and our fans are very important to us, so we want to put forth our best effort for them," he said. Galaxy defender Ashley Cole, who played in several derbies with Arsenal and Chelsea in the English Premier League, said it would take time for the rivalry to build up between the LA teams. "We have not yet played against them yet. I think it will take a few games to get into the spirit of it," he said. "But having a new team in LA is good for the city, good for the MLS and I'm looking forward to it." — Reuters

Live		Matches on TV
		(Local Timings)
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE		
Arsenal v Stoke City	15:30	beIN SPORTS HD 2
Chelsea v Tottenham Hotspur	18:00	beIN SPORTS HD 2
SPANISH LEAGUE PRIMERA		
Espanyol v Deportivo Alaves	13:00	beIN SPORTS HD 3
Leganes v Valencia	17:15	beIN SPORTS HD 3
Malaga v Villarreal	19:30	beIN SPORTS HD 3
Eibar v Real Sociedad	19:30	beIN SPORTS HD 4
Atletico de Madrid v Deportivo La Coruna	21:45	beIN SPORTS HD 3
GERMAN BUNDESLIGA		
Werder Bremen v Eintracht Frankfurt	16:30	beIN SPORTS HD 5
Mainz 05 v Borussia Monchengladbach	19:30	beIN SPORTS HD 5
FRENCH LEAGUE		
Guingamp v Girondins de Bordeaux	16:00	beIN SPORTS HD 6
Troyes v OGC Nice	18:00	beIN SPORTS HD 6
Nantes v Saint Etienne	18:00	beIN SPORTS HD 1
Strasbourg v Metz	18:00	beIN SPORTS MAX 6 FR
Caen v Montpellier HSC	18:00	beIN SPORTS HD 12 EN
LOSC Lille v Amiens	18:00	beIN SPORTS HD 7
Olympique Lyonnais v Toulouse	22:00	beIN SPORTS HD 6

12 World champ Pearson battles injury to make Games hurdles



14 N Zealand fight back after England rip off top order



15 Football legends rally around former Chelsea great Wilkins



OLD TRAFFORD: Manchester United's Chilean striker Alexis Sanchez celebrates scoring the team's second goal (C) during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Swansea at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England, yesterday. — AFP

Man Utd's Sanchez ends goal drought

Salah strikes again as Liverpool beat Palace

LONDON: Mohamed Salah was Liverpool's hero yet again as the Egypt star clinched a dramatic 2-1 win at Crystal Palace, while Alexis Sanchez ended his Manchester United goal drought in a 2-0 victory over Swansea yesterday.

Despite the huge Champions League quarter-final first leg against Manchester City looming on Wednesday, Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp named his strongest side for the Premier League trip to south London.

Luka Milivojevic drove struggling Palace into a 13th minute lead from the penalty spot after Loris Karius fouled Wilfried Zaha. But Senegal winger Sadio Mane levelled four minutes after the break with a close-range finish.

Despite having one of his quieter games of an incredible debut season at Liverpool, Salah proved the match winner as he smashed home in the 84th minute. Salah, who has 37 goals in 42 games in all competitions this term, has scored in the joint-most

Premier League matches (21) in a single 38-match season. That ties the mark set by Robin van Persie in 2012-13 and Cristiano Ronaldo in 2007-08. "I think the moment you see it is Mo (on the ball) you feel good. It was a very cool finish and long may that form continue," Klopp said.

"It is usual for us that we need to fight here, especially after a difficult start, but it makes it more special at the end." Liverpool were unable to hold onto second place as United moved two points ahead of them at Old Trafford.

Following on from his recent 12-minute press conference rant in defence of his reign, United manager Jose Mourinho wrote in his

programme notes that United are a club "in a moment of transition".

United responded to Mourinho's words as out-of-form midfielder Paul Pogba returned for the first time in four matches. Romelu Lukaku scored for United with a deflected strike from Sanchez's pass in the fifth minute.

Former Chelsea and Everton star Lukaku, who has netted in five times in his last six appearances, now has 100 career Premier League goals. Chile forward Sanchez bagged just his second goal since joining United from Arsenal in January in the 20th minute. The Premier League's highest paid player had gone seven

games without a goal until he finished off Jesse Lingard's pass. Later Saturday, Manchester City can restore their 16-point lead with victory at Everton which would then set up the chance to wrap up the title by defeating United next weekend.

Marko Arnautovic lifted the gloom at West Ham as his double inspired a crucial 3-0 victory against relegation rivals Southampton.

Hundreds of fans staged a march against West Ham's co-owners David Gold and David Sullivan before kick-off in the aftermath of the crowd protests that marred their recent home defeat against Burnley.

Amid a tense atmosphere that saw extra security measures to protect the owners, on-loan Inter Milan midfielder Joao Mario eased the anxiety with a 13th minute opener for David Moyes' side.

Four minutes later, Arnautovic doubled West Ham's lead and celebrated by shouting angrily towards Saints boss Mark Hughes, who fell out with the Austrian when they were together at Stoke. — AFP

“It is usual for us that we need to fight here”

Icardi double as Inter, Lazio close in on Roma

MILAN: Mauro Icardi scored a brace in a 3-0 Serie A win over Verona as Inter Milan closed in on third-placed Roma who were held 1-1 by Bologna yesterday ahead of their Champions League clash against Barcelona.

Substitute Edin Dzeko rescued a point for the side from the capital who were also hit by a Radja Nainggolan injury that could compromise their quarter-final in Spain midweek.

Eusebio Di Francesco's Roma have 60 points from 30 games, but their grip on third is now threatened by Inter who edged two points behind. Lazio are a further point back just outside the Champions League places for next season in fifth after surviving a scare to see off rock bottom Benevento 6-2.

Dzeko headed in after 76 minutes at the Stadio

Dall'Ara after Erick Pulgar had given Bologna the lead on 18 minutes. And the Bosnian forward admitted their trip to the Camp Nou for the first leg of their quarter-final clash was already on Roma's minds. "We are going into a very important match, we all had our thoughts on Barcelona a little bit, but even then we had chances and could have scored more," said Dzeko.

"It's difficult to explain what went wrong." Roma lacked speed against a Bologna side which included Di Francesco's winger son Federico, with third-choice goalkeeper Antonio Santurro proving the unlikely hero for the home side.

Santurro was appearing in first Serie A game with Antonio Mirante suspended and understudy Angelo Da Costa injured. And the 26-year-old did well on his debut keeping out an early Patrik Schick strike, followed by a Daniele De Rossi header from the resulting corner. Nainggolan limped off after just 16 minutes with a muscular problem, and looks in doubt to face Barcelona.

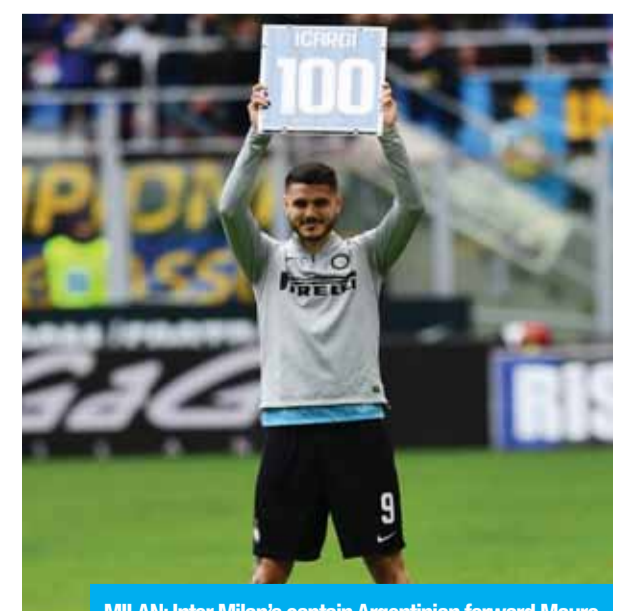
Two minutes later Bologna were ahead, Pulgar picking up a poor clearance on the edge of the box to fire past Alisson. Santurro denied Stephan El Shaarawy, with Kevin Strootman missing the chance to equalise when alone in front of goal.

But Dzeko replaced El Shaarawy with half an hour to go and got his head to Argentine winger Diego Perotti's cross to fire past Santurro.

"We know that if we play like that against Barcelona, it won't be enough," said Di Francesco. "But we also know that Barca will attack. It will be a totally different match." Icardi, meanwhile, earned a standing ovation from the 60,000 crowd at the San Siro after bringing his tally of Serie A goals to 105. The Argentine—who scored four in a 5-0 win over Sampdoria last time out—continued where he left off bagging the first after 38 seconds off an Ivan Perisic throw-in.

Perisic added a second on 13 minutes, with Icardi sliding in the third after the restart for a confidence boost ahead of next Wednesday's Milan derby against AC Milan. "I'm happy for my fastest goal in my career," said Icardi. "It was the perfect day, not for goals, but because the team won. We go into the derby with the right frame of mind.

"We're aware that we have to do well because there is little time to reach the goal of going to the Champions League." Serie A top scorer Ciro Immobile also scored a double as Lazio fought back after going 2-1 behind to 10-man Benevento, nabbing five goals in the last half hour. —AFP



MILAN: Inter Milan's captain Argentinian forward Mauro Icardi celebrates his 100th goal before the Italian Serie A football match Inter Milan vs Hellas Verona at the San Siro stadium in Milan yesterday. — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, APRIL 1, 2018

19 Al-Sayer advances focus on customer service one by one**21** Nissan Al-Babtain celebrates the 9th Annual Aftersales Award Ceremony**22** AUB's AGM approves a dividend of 18% in cash and 5% in bonus shares

KUWAIT: The Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) Chairman Ali Al-Mousa addresses the annual general meeting yesterday meeting. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

CBK witnesses healthy growth in 2017

Al-Mousa sees substantial transformation in Kuwait banking industry

KUWAIT: The Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) reported a net profit of KD 55.4 million in 2017 compared to KD 50.4 million in 2016, a growth of 10.0 percent, said Chairman Ali Mousa Al-Mousa in a message yesterday. "These results have reflected positively on the financial performance ratios, where return on average equity reached 9.5 percent and the return on average assets reached 1.3 percent. The earnings per share are 33.9 fils (compared to 30.8 fils for the last year). The Bank witnessed a healthy growth in all the key areas of its business. Net interest income grew by 10.4 percent and fee income grew by 7.8 percent. The Bank's balance sheet reached KD 4,395 million with a growth of KD 269 million (6.5 percent). Shareholders' equity reached KD 625 million with a growth of 7.6 percent. A strong bond and quality loan portfolio helped to improve the assets' yield. Cost of funds was maintained at a reasonably low level. The cost/income ratio is 30.8 percent for year-ending 31 December 2017, which is amongst the lowest in Kuwaiti banks, he said in his statement.

Chairman's message

"In the name of Allah the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. Our valued shareholders, I have the pleasure to present today a significant turnaround in Commercial Bank of Kuwait's performance which is crowned by outstanding success achieved by the Bank despite the challenges and difficulties the Bank has faced. The global banking industry, as we all know, undergoes major changes whether in the banking products or the methodologies of delivering services to customers," he said in the message.

As such, the Bank was very proactive and realized the importance of rapidly adapting to such changes. The Bank started, some time back, to introduce the self-service approach and was able to develop self-service related platforms internally. It was expected that some of our customers will not be much enthusiastic to adopt self-service technique for banking with us, while the majority of our customers particularly our corporate segment have opted for this service and commended it. The Bank may be among the forerunners in introducing it in Kuwait but we endeavor to follow and catch up with the worldwide financial institutions which were ahead of us specifically in the advanced countries.

The issue is not much complicated and we believe that Kuwaiti banking sector will take the lead in employing the self-service tools and in very short time we will see substantial transformation in Kuwait banking industry in form and substance. However, the changes seen in the banking industry, and to which the

Bank was highly responsive, have left over positive impact on the Bank's financial results that truly reflect the position of any banking institution. The Bank is now among the best local banks in profitability ratios," he said.

A concentrated effort to recover the previously written-off loans yielded results: KD 33 million were recovered during 2017, while cumulative recovery during the last six years has been KD 138 million.

The Bank's Management's focus extended to cover other issues as well. As such and out of its corporate social responsibility, the Bank has taken an initiative to safeguard the funds of orphans and minors. This was illustrated with the Bank's endeavors to maintain and safeguard the funds and savings of customers while they are alive and money of their heirs.



Bank reports a net profit of KD 55.4m in 2017

The Bank initiated proactive procedures to prevent illegal access to such funds through the direct linkage with the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI), along with obtaining the daily list of the Departed customers. The Bank's dedicated Systems Development team managed to develop full-fledged program which enables the Bank to have daily access to such lists along with matching and comparing the same with the Bank's customers' base. In case the data of any of the Bank's customers is corresponding with the data included in the said list, the system will automatically deactivate the accounts of this customer and related power of attorney. The system also dispatches notifications to the concerned areas to verify the validity of the procedure and take the necessary action. In this regard, it is worthwhile to hail and highlight the Public Authority for Civil Information's ongoing cooperation with the banking sector where PACI became a platform and a basic element of any integrated technical work that requires access to accurate and secured data.

Future outlook

The considerable developments seen in banking industry pave the way to new horizons for this industry. The banking industry will continue benefiting from the successive technological advances in the short and long term. It goes without saying that Kuwait banking sector is positioned to satisfy the

prospective customer expectations. It is hoped that the development of government legislations & instructions will be attuned to such variables so that the customers can benefit from such developments seen in the banking industry. As a clear manifestation of the development the banking industry has undergone, tools & systems are now in place that can be used by customers to pay for low-value purchases (lower than KD 10) without the need to insert ATM card in the POS terminal e.g. the contactless cards (NFC) which became available for customers to pay for their purchases without the need to insert card in the POS terminal in addition to the e-wallets. Accordingly, the Bank endeavored to cope with such developments and to plan for the future by issuing contactless cards to all its customers. We look forward to apply the e-wallets system and other tools. The Bank's ambition and endeavors to keep up with the prospective developments are reflected in other services and systems applied at the Bank including for example:

- Upgrading the Smart Queue system where customer's transaction is processed once it becomes ready for processing without the need for customer to wait until serving customer who reached and requested services before him changing the concept of service from First In First Out (FIFO) to First Ready First Out (FRFO).

- Account opening process and issuance of cards & prepaid cards by communicating with Contact Centre agents via Kiosks in addition to other services that are available via kiosks.

The Bank will continue its efforts to upgrade its service and product offering as a number of innovative e-services are still in the pipeline. This will include Smart ATMs & Deposit Machines. Undoubtedly, the cooperation between banks and regulatory authorities will help to streamline & accelerate the development process of banking business, thus positioning Kuwait banking sector at the forefront of regional markets and add more related advantages to this vital sector that will place it within the advanced banking sectors.

Thanks for supporters

"In conclusion, I would like to extend my thanks and appreciation to our valued customers for choosing Commercial Bank of Kuwait as a source of their banking services and we promise them to continue our concerted efforts to earn the trust they have in the Bank to process their daily banking transactions and achieve more progress in the future. I would also like to extend my thanks to the Bank's shareholders for their continued support which mainly helped the Bank to considerably increase the volume of



Ali Mousa Al-Mousa (second right)

its assets and net profitability over the previous years and promise them to continue enhancing the shareholders' value, Executive Management Team and all staff members who are the mainstay of the Bank's success

and its most important assets and the regulatory authorities represented in the Central Bank of Kuwait for its sincere efforts in safeguarding the banking & financial sector in the state of Kuwait," he concluded.

Tesla says autopilot was engaged during crash

WASHINGTON: Electric car maker Tesla has confirmed the autopilot was engaged during a fatal crash last week, a development set to exacerbate concerns over the safety of autonomous vehicles.

A Tesla Model X collided with a highway barrier near the town of Mountain View in California on March 23, catching fire before it was struck by two other cars. The driver, who was identified by The Mercury News as a 38-year-old man, Wei Huang, later died in hospital.

Tesla issued a blog post late Friday saying he had activated the autopilot but ignored several warnings. "In the moments before the collision... autopilot was engaged with the adaptive cruise control follow-distance set to minimum," Tesla said.

"The driver had received several visual and one audible hands-on warning earlier in the drive and the driver's hands were not detected on the wheel for six seconds prior to the collision.

"The driver had about five seconds

and 150 meters of unobstructed view of the concrete divider with the crushed crash attenuator, but the vehicle loss show that no action was taken."

Tesla added that the reason the car sustained such great damage was because a highway barrier "had been crushed in a prior accident without being replaced". "We have never seen this level of damage to a Model X in any other crash," it added. The company also sought to downplay fears over its technology. "Over a year ago, our first iteration of Autopilot was found by the US government to reduce crash rates by as much as 40 percent," it said. The fatal Tesla crash came the same week a collision involving an autonomous Uber vehicle in Arizona killed a pedestrian and caused that company to halt its self-driving car program.

In January last year, the US Transportation Department closed an investigation into the fatal 2016 crash in Florida of a Tesla on autopilot, finding that no "safety-related defect" had caused that accident. Founded 15 years ago by South African-born serial entrepreneur Elon Musk, Tesla has gained fans and acclaim as a company steering toward a world of self-driving cars running on clean energy. But, Tesla's future is clouded by worries about its ability to efficiently mass produce cars as well as whether disruptive technology used is reliable and safe. — AFP

Business

Al-Sayer advances focus on customer service one by one

Building on team efforts for better customer satisfaction



Winners with board of directors



Attendees at the event



Audience

KUWAIT: Al-Sayer Holding, one of the leading conglomerates in the region recently held an event to honor outstanding customer service efforts across its non-trading and trading business units including Mohamed Naser Al-Sayer for Toyota and Lexus Sales Service and Parts Division, Bahrah Trading Company for HINO, Bobcat, Doosan heavy equipment, Al-Sayer Engineering for Motul Oil, Yokohama tires, Cofran oil and Nexa Auto Paint, Al-Sayer Medical Company, Car rental, Insurance, Litmus Advertising, KAFF for animal feed, Al-Dhow for IT services and Tristar overseas trading division.

The event was attended by Faisal Bader Al-Sayer Chairman, Mubarak Naser Al-Sayer CEO representing Board of Directors along with Top Management Team, Managers and 3000+ employees of the Group. According to Faisal Bader Al-Sayer Chairman, "This is the new era of customer engagement! We need a new mind set, a new approach of deal-

ing with our customers in terms of what we offer them and the way we treat them. This is the new mind set we as a group want to adopt for the future: we must stop dealing with customers as a group, but deal with each customer as a single important entity."

the way we deliver customer care and outstanding quality products & services. Key elements of success in the future is digital way of reaching our customers through continued automation and customer experience focused strategies."

It's all about the customer and their experiences

Al-Sayer's heritage is built on one simple promise: to provide nothing but the best products paired with an outstanding customer experience. The aim is not only to satisfy customers, but also to promote excitement in the work place, create possibilities to grow and develop as one strong team. Group Management thanked and appreciated the team work to tackle numerous challenges without losing focus on customers.

In this super-connected time, every experience is important: a negative experience is known by more people, much faster than before. But a positive experience, especially if organic, can really boost the image of



the company. Al-Sayer will continue being one of the most important brands of Kuwait and Board of Directors encouraged all employees to create positive experience across the Holding. In order to continuously improve the performance Al-Sayer continues

to focus on employee development initiatives. The Group is keen on pushing digitalization of services further through number of options available on SAP platforms in order to create better user services and avail them to all customers as well as staffs.



Outstanding customer service efforts honored

Mubarak Naser Al-Sayer CEO said "Going forward as explained earlier, we must face the challenges of the changes of time by moving up our level through innovative initiatives in

This Easter, Jet Airways offers special fares to India and beyond

KUWAIT: Jet Airways, India's premier, full service international airline has announced special fares on the festive occasion of 'Easter'. The four-day sale will provide an opportunity for guests to spend the festive weekend with their family and friends, which is in line with the airline's 'Guest First' philosophy.

Commencing from March 30, the four-day sale until April 02, will offer guests discounts of up to 20 percent* on fares for

their Premiere and Economy travel. The special fares can be availed for bookings on select destinations in India as well as travel to Bangladesh, Hong Kong, Nepal, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

The special fares are available for one-way and return journey travel of guests. Guests can proceed with their travel immediately as the tickets are valid from the moment of purchase and also applicable to travel beyond the festive weekend.

Shakir Kantawala, Vice President - Gulf, Middle East & Africa, Jet Airways, said, "Festive occasions are priceless moments when family and friends create memories which are cherished for a lifetime. Helping our guests spend quality time with their loved ones brings joy to us as an airline and these special fares provide an opportunity to do so. We would love to extend festive greetings on the occasion of Easter and are sure that guests would avail these special fares."

AUB announces KD 250,000 Hassad account grand prize winner

KUWAIT: On 28th March 2018, Ahli United Bank held its Lifetime Salary annual grand prize draw as part of the Al-Hassad Islamic Savings Account program, which is the largest prize draw in Kuwait. It was a momentous occasion Motlaq Hashaf Al-Mutairi who won KD 250,000 as a lifetime salary over 250 months.

Ahli United Bank congratulates Motlaq Hashaf Al-Mutairi who is now able to achieve his dream of acquiring a house or her favorite car, to travel abroad, establish a new business or any dream he might have along with his aspirations - and all this, simply by having an account with



AUB in Kuwait. The Al-Hassad Islamic Savings Account program is the largest in Kuwait with a total annual prize draw of KD 3,400,000 aimed at realizing the dreams and ambitions of customers since inception. The program also provides 26 weekly prizes, which represents the biggest number of weekly winners.

To qualify for the Al-Hassad Islamic Savings Account prizes, customers only need to open a saving account with a minimum of KD 100. For every KD 50 of quarterly balance in the account, customers earn one chance to enter the quarterly draw. Moreover, customers earn one chance to enter the weekly draws for every KD 50 of balance. This means the more deposits made, the higher the chances of winning. The Al-Hassad Islamic Savings Account's customers in Kuwait and Bahrain are eligible to participate in the draw in line with the account's terms and conditions.

KIB attains ISO certificate for information security management systems

KUWAIT: In recognition of the Bank's steadfast commitment to the highest standards of information security, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) once again received the ISO 27001:2013 certificate for information security management systems for three years. Previously, the Bank received this certification from GMS Intercert Services, a leading certification and auditing organization that delivers assurance with best international standards-based solutions set by the American International Accreditation Organization (AIAO-BAR). The AIAO-BAR is a non-profit corporation that accredits conformity assessment bodies in accordance with internationally recognized guides and standards.

Receiving this prestigious certificate for the second time in a row - and for a period of three years - came as a testament to KIB's commitment to best practice in information security across all IT, operational and support functions, as well as the Bank's business continuity and crisis management unit.

On this occasion, Sheikh Mohammed Jarrah Al-Sabah, Chairman of KIB, expressed his pride at the Bank once again receiving this prestigious international certification.

Al-Jarrah added: "This achievement underscores KIB's leadership in the area of information security, as we continue to regulate and protect administrative and customer data in accordance with the highest industry standards of confidentiality and privacy. This also reflects the Bank's unwavering dedication to adhering to the best practices in data protection and information security within the banking sector, in an effort to meet our customers' expectations of top-level banking service."

Furthermore, Al-Jarrah noted that KIB received the ISO 27001 certification based on a number of key areas of strength, including: the efficiency and dedication of its ISMS teams, its top-notch data authentication and documentation system, its diligence in implementing stringent control protocols, its strong risk awareness and its effective implementation of preventative actions.

Al-Jarrah concluded his statement by lauding KIB's senior management for its ongoing efforts to support and empower the Information Security Unit. He also



expressed his gratitude to all KIB employees who participated in the auditing process and their combined effort in ensuring the security of confidential information. It serves to

note that KIB became the first bank in Kuwait to obtain the ISO 27001 certification in its latest edition, after receiving the accreditation for the first time in 2015.

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Nissan Al-Babtain celebrates the 9th Annual Aftersales Award Ceremony

Annual celebration honors trusted customers and clients



KUWAIT: Ruwan Wickramasinghe, Laurent Pernet, David Graves and Rauf Mohamad during the celebration.

KUWAIT: Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al-Babtain Co, the sole authorized dealer of Nissan in the State of Kuwait recently celebrated the growing partnership of one of the most trusted brands in Kuwait with its key clientele during the "Nissan 9th Annual Aftersales Award Ceremony" held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, on March 27th, 2018.

A yearly event, the "Nissan 9th Annual Aftersales Award ceremony" was held to honor the customers and clients who drove the Nissan brand to its full potential and aided in the creation of an inspirational success story in Kuwait.

The "Nissan 9th Annual Aftersales Award ceremony" was attended by General Manager Automotive Division - Laurent Pernet, Nissan Gulf (NGF) Aftersales Director - David Graves along with his team, as well as Al-Babtain top management in the Sales and Aftersales, Business community leaders from different industries, senior officials, government officers and Nissan vehicle owners.

Al-Babtain Automotive GM - Laurent Pernet said, "We are proud of the trust and confidence placed on the Nissan brand over the years. Thanks to the overwhelming support of both our loyal customers and partners in the constantly evolving range of products, services and

personnel, Nissan Al-Babtain maintains its leadership and credibility in a highly competitive market. One of our main focus is to provide Nissan Aftersales services at a very competitive, affordable prices with quality, reliability for peace of mind driving. This is our daily job and our commitment."

In addition, Nissan Gulf (NGF) Aftersales Director - David Graves, expressed his pride for being here with Nissan family this year again, and congratulated Al-Babtain for the record results during Nissan regional skills contest. Also he extended the full support to Nissan Al-Babtain customers making sure they get the best aftersales experience and service.

Several awards representing different categories were distributed, namely Best Vehicle Sales Fleet Customers, Best Service & Parts Fleet Customers, Best Insurance Companies, and Best Garage Customer who contributed to the growth and success in the market.

In 2017, Nissan aftersales took the lead on many national initiatives as part of its mission to safeguard people on the road and ran impactful campaigns to benefit its loyal patrons. One such campaign proudly held by Nissan Al-Babtain was 'Brand Trust', which stressed on safety

through authenticity of car parts. It highlighted the importance quality assurance and emphasized on safety implications by exposing harms of imitators and counterfeit products. Additionally, regional and international educational seminars through comprehensive PR efforts and nationwide online campaigns, in collaboration with General Administration of Kuwait Customs were executed. Therefore, all vehicle owners should always support the purchase of genuine parts and ensure that their vehicles are serviced at authorized Service Centers.

Presently, Nissan Kuwait has the largest Aftersales Service and Parts Network in the State of Kuwait with 9 Service Centers and 14 Parts Outlets established in strategic locations for easier accessibility. The latest addition to the wide network is a designated Nissan Patrol Quick Service Center that will be launched soon, enabling swift and efficient customer service for Patrol owners.

Nissan Al-Babtain also acknowledged the superior caliber of its sales and aftersales staff at the Nissan Regional Skills Contests 2017 in Dubai who bagged three medals and a best performance award.



Business

AUB's AGM approves a dividend of 18% in cash and 5% in bonus shares

Shareholders elect 11 members of the new Board of Directors

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank B.S.C yesterday held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) and its Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) at the Bank's Head Office in Seef District, Kingdom of Bahrain. The meetings were presided over by AUB's Chairman Hamad Al-Humaidhi.

The AUB AGM approved the distribution of a cash dividend of 18 percent (\$4.5 cents per share), amounting to \$341.6 million, together with a bonus share issue of 5 percent (five shares per 100 ordinary shares) to shareholders registered as at 29 March 2018.

AUB's shareholders also approved the repurchase by the Bank of its own shares up to a maximum of 10 percent of its issued shares in accordance with the terms and conditions set by regulators.

AUB's shareholders then proceeded to elect/appoint eleven members for a new three-year term for the Board of Directors:

1. Hamad M Al-Humaidhi, representing Wafra Interinvest Corporation (Kuwait)
2. Mohamed J Al-Marzouq
3. Rashid I Al-Meer, representing Social Insurance Organization (Bahrain)
4. Mohamed F. Al-Ghanim
5. Adnan A Al-Marzouq
6. Abdulghani M Behbehani
7. Ahmed G. Al-Abduljalil, representing the Public Institution for Social Security (Kuwait)
8. Abdullah M. Al-Mudhaf
9. Jamal A. Al-Naif
10. Mahmoud Difrawi
11. Adel A. El-Labban.

At their EGM held on the same day, AUB's shareholders resolved to extend, for a further two years, their standing authorization for the Board of Directors to decide on the timing, pricing and other terms of the issuance of up to \$4 billion in bonds, loans or other similar subordinated financial instruments, as necessary to support the



Hamad Al-Humaidhi

Deputy Chairman
M J Al-Marzouq

growth plans of the Bank.

The Bank's EGM also authorized the issuing of up to an additional 150 million AUB ordinary shares, with a nominal value of 25 cents per share, as required for the purposes of the Bank's Mandatory Share Plan (MSP) and the Employee Share Purchase Plan (ESPP), subject to all regulatory approvals and in accordance with the provisions of the Bahrain Commercial Companies Law and of the Articles of Association of the Bank.

AUB's shareholders also approved amendments to the Memorandum and Articles of Association of Ahli United Bank B.S.C., pursuant to the recently amended Commercial Companies Law.

Following shareholders' meetings, the newly elected directors met and unanimously reelected Mr. Hamad Al-Humaidhi as Chairman and Messrs. Mohammad Al-Marzouq and Rashed Al-Meer as Deputy Chairmen of the AUB Group.

AUB's Chairman Al-Humaidhi commented: "It is my pleasure to congratulate my fellow board members on their reelection and to welcome the newly elected colleagues to the Board. On behalf of them all, we are grateful to our shareholders for their continued trust and confidence and for their unstinting support over the years which



MANAMA: AUB's Chairman Hamad Al-Humaidhi presides over the Annual General Meeting (AGM) and the Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) of Ahli United Bank B.S.C yesterday at the Bank's Head Office in Seef District, Bahrain.

enabled AUB to go from strength to strength. I would also like to express my deep thanks and appreciation to our departing Directors, Messrs. Abdulla Al-Sumait, Michael Essex and David Hodgkinson who have contributed immensely to the growth and development of AUB over the past years".

"2017 proved a challenging yet very suc-

cessful year for AUB. We delivered record results, grew our footprint across sectors and geographies, and set the Bank on a more robust course for the future. Particularly gratifying is our exceptional track record in delivering market-leading returns for our shareholders year on year, culminating in a record 16.5 percent return on average equity for 2017. Over the past 10

years, we delivered over \$2.1 billion in cash dividends for our shareholders, including \$944 million in the past three years alone. Such consistently strong performance is the product of the able efforts and vision of our management team, the professionalism and dedication of our staff and the strong underlying loyalty and support of our customers across the region and beyond".

Warba Bank approves amendments to Articles of Association

KUWAIT: Warba Bank, the Best Investment and Best Corporate Bank in Kuwait, announced that it held its extra ordinary general meeting for the year ended 31/12/2017 on Tuesday 27/3/2018, at 11.30 am at Warba Tower, Sharq Area in the presence of Abdul Wahab Al-Houti, the Board Chairman, Shaheen Hamad Alghanem, the Chief Executive Officer and shareholders of the Bank. The agenda of the extraordinary general meeting was discussed including approval on amending the memorandum and/or articles of association as follows:

Amendments

Without prejudice to the provisions of commercial companies Law No. 2012 /25 as amended and its executive regulations, the objectives for which the Company has been established are to exercise all banking business activities, in accordance with the provisions of the Decree No. 30/2003 for adding Section for Islamic Banks to Law No. 32 of 1968 concerning Currency, the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Regulation of the Banking Business and the Trade Law, as dictated by the applicable banking practices, all in conformity with the Islamic sharia provisions and in accordance with the regulations laid down by the Central Bank of Kuwait. The Company may not directly or indirectly exercise any banking or financial activities in breach of the Islamic sharia provisions. The Company for this purpose may exercise the following businesses:

1. Carry out banking services and operations to its account and to the account of third parties in conformity with the Islamic sharia provisions.
2. Carry out financial investment businesses directly to its account and to the account of third parties, and the Company shall exercise the following banking businesses and services, for example not for limitation
 - a. Accept cash deposits in all their types, in the form of current accounts, saving accounts and investment deposit accounts for definite or indefinite purposes.
 - b. Exercise finance operations in their various terms and forms, using Islamic sharia-compliant contracts, e.g. Murabaha, Musharaka, Mudaraba, Istisna'a, Ijara, on local and world arenas.
 - c. Provide banking and financial services in all their forms without prejudice to the Islamic sharia provisions.
 - d. Deal in shares and sukuk and all securities without prejudice to the Islamic sharia provisions.
 - e. Sale and purchase of gold bullions and perform foreign currency exchange transactions and deal in drafts relevant to foreign currency



KUWAIT: Warba Bank holds its extra ordinary general meeting

exchange.

f. Open letters of credit and the banking businesses relevant thereto.

g. Issue banking guarantees without prejudice to the Islamic sharia provisions.

h. Collect receipts from drafts, promissory notes, sukuk, bills of lading, and other instruments in consideration of commission to the account of the bank permanent and non-permanent customers.

i. Receive subscriptions for incorporation of new shareholding companies and corporate capital increases and assume the duty of underwriter.

j. Extend financing for the purchase of shares, investment certificates and their equivalent of securities to the account of the Company and to the account of third parties without prejudice to the provisions of Islamic sharia provisions.

k. Safe-keeping of all kinds of currencies, precious metals, jewelry, instruments and packages and parcels by way of leasing safes according to the rules laid down by the Bank in this regard.

l. Carry out all banking businesses within the limits of the law in accordance with Islamic Shari'ah provisions.

J. Sale and purchase of real estates without prejudice to the rules of Law and Islamic Sharia;

K. Sale, purchase and lease of vehicles, light and heavy equipment and machinery without prejudice to the rules of Law and Islamic Sharia;

The Company may undertake the abovementioned activities in the State of Kuwait or abroad in principal or under proxy. The Company may also undertake similar, complementary, necessary or associated business related to the said objectives. The company may have interest or participate in whatsoever form with entities, institutions or companies exercising similar businesses, or that may assist the Company for realizing its objectives in Kuwait and abroad, and may acquire these institutions or companies as subsidiaries or affiliates or merge them to it, provided such entities, institutions or companies shall exercise their businesses in compliance with the Islamic sharia provisions and the rules and regulations of the Central Bank of Kuwait in this regard.

Article (4)

Without prejudice to the provisions of Companies Law No. 1/2016 as amended and its

executive regulations, the objectives for which the Company has been established are to exercise all banking business activities, in accordance with the provisions of the Decree No. 30/2003 for adding Section for Islamic Banks to Law No. 32 of 1968 concerning Currency, the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Regulation of the Banking Business and the Trade Law, as dictated by the applicable banking practices, all in conformity with the Islamic sharia provisions and in accordance with the regulations laid down by the Central Bank of Kuwait. The Company may not directly or indirectly exercise any banking or financial activities in breach of the Islamic sharia provisions. The Company for this purpose may exercise the following businesses:

Purchased shares shall not be considered in the total shares of the company in cases that require shareholders to own a certain percentage of capital and in all cases related to calculating the quorum for the General Assembly Meeting, voting on the resolutions of the General Assembly as regulated by instructions of the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Capital Markets Authority. The Ordinary General Meeting authorizes the Board of Directors to purchase, sell or dispose of the Bank's shares not exceeding 10 percent of the number of shares in accordance with the provisions of the law."

Al-Houti expressed sincerest thanks and gratitude to His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah the Amir of the State of Kuwait, May Allah bless him, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Crown Prince and His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, the Prime Minister, May Allah bless them for their continuing support to the banking sector in the State of Kuwait. He highly praised the role of regulators and relevant government agencies for their positive and effective role in supporting the Bank. He also thanked Warba Bank's customers and shareholders for their confidence.

Alghanem expressed that the Bank is proud of its shareholders' confidence and promised more achievements in the coming period, especially that the Bank has managed over the past years to consolidate its position and expand its operations. The Bank will build up on this success for its strategy in the coming stage.

Gulf Bank announces winner of Al-Danah's first quarterly draw

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank announced that the winner of its first quarterly Al-Danah draw, for a cash prize of KD 200,000, was Sami Salem Abdulrazzeq. The announcement was aired live on the "Diwanat Al-Yaqout & Al-Ansari" program on Kuwait Pulse (88.8 FM).

In addition to announcing the winner of the first KD 200,000 prize, Gulf Bank announced the five winners from the Al-Danah social media contest. Contestants answered a question on social media, and a correct answer entered the participants in a raffle, which the five winners won.

The Al-Danah draw, which celebrated its tenth anniversary of the one million KD grand prize earlier this year, is internationally recognized by the Guinness Book of World Records as the acclaimed largest prize linked to a bank account in the world. The grand prize of this internationally renowned draw was claimed last year by the draw's youngest winner, 11-year old Obaid Saad Al-Rashidi.

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah second quarterly draw for the prize of KD 250,000 will be held on 27 June 2018 and the third quarterly draw for the prize of KD 500,000 on 26 September 2018. The final Al-Danah draw for KD 1 million - the Guinness World Record acclaimed largest prize linked to a bank account in the world - will be held on 10 January 2019, when the Al-Danah millionaire will be announced.

Gulf Bank encourages you to increase your chances of winning with Al-Danah by depositing more into your Gulf Bank account using the new ePay (Self-Pay) service, which is available on Gulf Bank's Online and Mobile Banking.

Al-Danah also offers many unique services including the Al-Danah Deposit Only ATM card, which helps account holders deposit their money at their convenience; as well as the Al-Danah calculator to help customers calculate their chances of becoming an Al-Danah winner.

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is open to Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. Customers require a minimum of KD200 to open an account and the same amount must be maintained as for customers to be eligible for the upcoming Al-Danah draws. If the customer's account balance falls below KD 200 at any given time, a KD 2 charge will be made monthly to the account until the minimum balance is met. Customers who open an account and/ or deposit more will enter the daily draw within two days.



Health

Family, friends bid farewell to Stephen Hawking

Six college porters carried Hawking's coffin

CAMBRIDGE: Friends, family and colleagues of Stephen Hawking gathered yesterday to pay their respects at his private funeral in Cambridge, where the British science great spent most of his extraordinary life. Hawking, who died on March 14 at the age of 76, was famously an atheist but his children Lucy, Robert and Tim chose St Mary the Great, the church of Cambridge's prestigious university, to say their farewell.

"Our father's life and work meant many things to many people, both religious and non-religious. So, the service will be both inclusive and traditional, reflecting the breadth and diversity of his life," they said. Tributes poured in from around the world upon Hawking's death, from Queen Elizabeth II to NASA, reflecting his huge impact as a physicist and an inspiration, in his refusal to give up in the face of his crippling motor neurone disease.

The funeral service—being held a short distance from Gonville and Caius College where Hawking worked for more than 50 years—was only open to around 500 guests who knew him. A private reception was to follow at Trinity College. A wider audience will attend a thanksgiving service at Westminster Abbey in London on June 15, when Hawking's remains will be buried near the grave of another legendary scientist, Isaac Newton.

Actor Eddie Redmayne, who played Hawking in the 2014 biographical drama "The Theory of Everything", was to give a reading from the Bible, followed by a reading by Martin Rees, Britain's astronomer royal. Eulogies were to be delivered by Robert Hawking, the physicist's eldest child, and Professor Fay Dowker, one of Hawking's former students. An arrangement of white lilies, to represent the universe, and another of white roses as the polar star were to be placed on Hawking's solid oak coffin. The church bell was to toll 76 times, once for each year of Hawking's life, when his coffin arrives.

New photographs revealed

Ahead of the funeral, Gonville and Caius College released new black and white photographs of Hawking taken in 1961 at a summer school for young astrophysicists at a castle in Sussex, southern England, when he



UNITED KINGDOM: This handout photograph shows British scientist Stephen Hawking, right, with Goeran Akerblad and Brian King, as a 19 year-old student playing croquet at a summer school for young astrophysicists, run annually by the Royal Greenwich Observatory at its headquarters at Herstmonceux Castle in Sussex. — AFP

was 19. They showed him playing croquet and in a sailing dinghy, two years before he began experiencing the first symptoms of the motor neurone disease that would later leave him almost completely paralyzed.

Fellow students contacted by the college recalled his left-wing views and his mischievous sense of humor. Hawking defied predictions that he would only live for a few years, although his rare condition—amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) — gradually robbed him of mobility. He was confined to a wheelchair, almost completely paralyzed and unable to speak except through his trademark voice synthesizer.

But the illness did nothing to dull his mind, and Hawking became one of the world's best-known and most inspiring scientists, known for his brilliance and

his wit. His work focused on bringing together relativity—the nature of space and time—and quantum theory—how the smallest particles behave—to explain the creation of the Universe and how it is governed.

But he was also a global star—his 1988 book "A Brief History of Time" was an unlikely worldwide bestseller, and he appeared as himself in television shows from "The Simpsons" to "Star Trek: The Next Generation". Born on January 8, 1942, Hawking died in his home in Cambridge. After taking his undergraduate degree at the University of Oxford, he moved to Cambridge for his doctorate and stayed there for the rest of his career. Hawking's family has asked six college porters, many of whom provided support for Hawking when he visited for dinners and other events, to carry his coffin. — AFP

New frog species found in Venezuela and Colombia

CARACAS: Venezuelan and Colombian scientists have identified a new species of frog in the Perija mountain range shared by both countries that is home to unusual species like this small amphibian. With multi-colored skin and a distinctive song, the *Hyloscirtus japreria* was discovered during expeditions over the past decade living in rivers and cascades at altitudes above 1,000 meters.

It was named in honor of the Japreria, a disappearing indigenous ethnic group in the Perija in the northwestern Venezuelan state of Zulia. The frog's discovery—published in February in the peer-reviewed scientific journal *Zootaxa*—brings to 37 the number of species identified as belonging to the *Hyloscirtus* genus. Small in size, the males measure between 2.8 and 3.2 centimeters (up to 1.25 inches) in length and the females from 3.5 to 3.9 centimeters.

The journey that led to their discovery began in 2008. "Several years went by before we found enough evidence that it was a new species," biologist Fernando Rojas-Runjaic, the coordinator of the study, said. Once they determined it was a "stream frog, we had to verify that it wasn't a *Hyloscirtus platydactylus*, another species found in the Perija in 1994," he added.

The scientists recorded the find with cameras and high-definition sound recorders to capture its distinctive coloring and analyze its song. The sounds emitted by the frog, which can be heard from 15 meters (yards) away, is one of its most distinctive characteristics, said expedition member Edwin Infante. The *H. japreria* is also characterized by a pale yellow dorsal area with tiny dark brown spots and small reddish brown smudges.

It also has whitish stripes in certain parts of its eyes, ears, thighs and feet. The frog's iris is grey with a slender black reticulation. Working with Rojas-Runjaic, of the Caracas-based La Salle Natural History Museum, were Colombian biologist Fabio Meza-Joya and Venezuelans Infante and Patricia Salerno. Reaching the frog's habitats required expeditions of several days on foot and mule into the Perija mountains. Access to the mountain range from Colombia was restricted for decades because of a conflict with leftist guerrillas, "which produced information vacuums," said Meza-Joya, adding that a 2016 peace agreement with the main rebel group should open the way for new discoveries. — AFP

CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times

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What's On

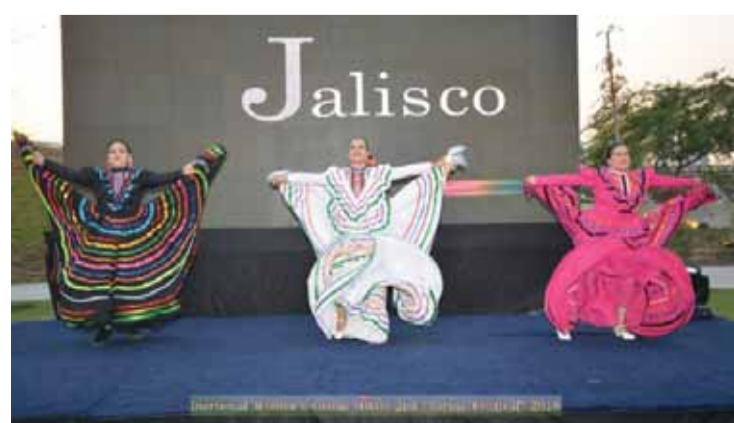


International Women Group celebrates spring festivities



The International Women Group (IWG) recently organized a major festival on celebrating spring festivities including Mother's and Nowruz days. With participation of representatives of 40 embassies designated in Kuwait, the festival was held under auspices of IWG chairperson Sheikha Anwar Faisal Soud Al-Sabah. Participating embassies had special booths where they displayed their cultural, artistic and social heritage, crafts, cuisine and costumes.

— Photos by Joseph Shagra

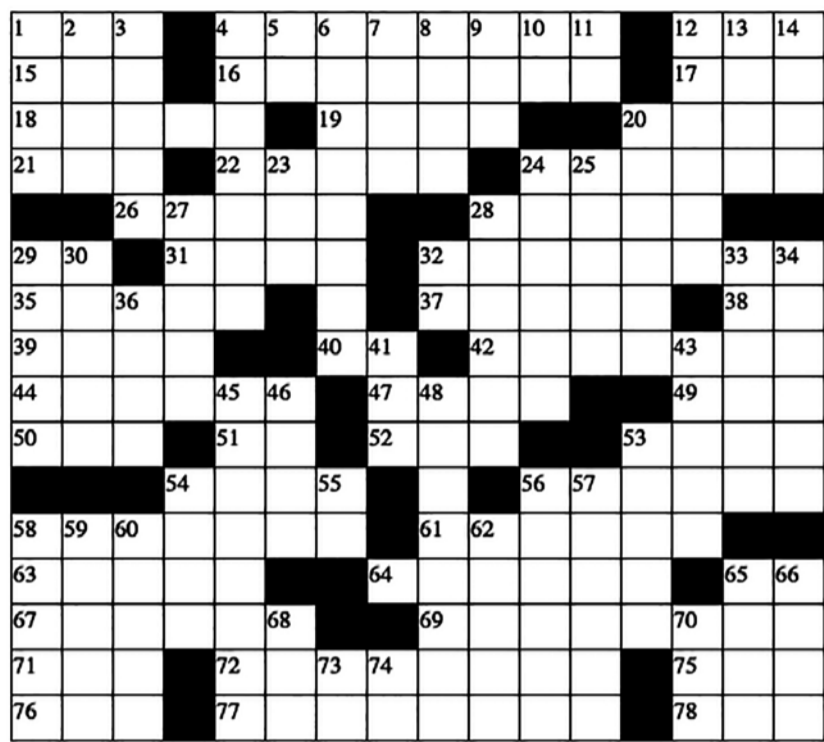


South African Embassy

On the occasion of Easter Sunday, the South African Embassy will be closed today. The Embassy will resume its normal working hours tomorrow. Please note that official office hours from 8h00 to 16h00 and the Consular Section operation hours will be from 8h30 to 12h30. For emergency calls please contact: 94924895.

Stars

CROSSWORD 1872



ACROSS

- 1. A proportion multiplied by 100. 4. Weaponry used by military or naval force. 12. A vinyl polymer used especially in paints or adhesives. 15. American prizefighter who won the world heavyweight championship three times (born in 1942).

Friday's Solution

Table containing the solution to the crossword puzzle, with words like DOWNSIDE, BATTLE, and STANDS written into the grid.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Every new leaf you look under brings newer and more important knowledge. You have findings that could help now and into the future; your plans are about to manifest.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Friendships with those who have done well and live in a certain way makes you happy. You're rattled when you aren't surrounded by lovely things and peaceful vibrations.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Your true appreciation lies in the every day things in life: being able to go to the grocery store, having a roof over your head and a healthy life.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

There's hesitation when a nice opportunity for a new job appears; turning this down may not make sense to anyone but you.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Your relationships, whether professional or personal, are your most important concerns at this time. If you lose sight of the nice things in life you become restless and dissatisfied.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Low energy is indicated throughout the day but you have the opportunity to take care of this and recharge. Using this time to examine what's at the root of being downhearted helps you focus on changing this vibration.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

You may be asked to send out a message via social media on behalf of your company, family or organization. This could indicate a career or job change that brings you before, or in touch with, the public.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Those you love grow more precious to you; this could indicate people or animals. The overall energy of this period of time is peaceful and productive; remember, positive energy can be disrupted by certain behaviors you're currently working to change.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Becoming a better version of you is a priority just now. Not that you're vain in any way, you simply strive to create a healthier appearance; health steps into center stage during the new phase you have entered.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Feeling better about yourself is at the top of your priority list. Because you want to get better, doing whatever it takes is actually enjoyable.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

Your thoughts aren't on your work. Daydreaming is impossible to escape! You may feel disconnected and distant from people and duties today; pull your thoughts together and finish what's in front of you.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You are seen as beautiful, or handsome, and intelligent. Your mind grasps different concepts regarding spirituality and mystic situations. There is high regard for your ability to make things happen for a certain project that becomes very important.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Songs From the Year 2003

Find and circle all of the songs from 2003 that are hidden in the grid. The remaining 22 letters spell an additional song title from 2003.

A word search grid with letters and a list of 22 words including ALL I HAVE, ANGEL, BABY BOY, BEAUTIFUL, CLOCKS, etc.

Songs From the Year 2002

A word search grid with letters and a list of 12 words including ADDICTIVE, AERIALS, ALL MY LIFE, BABY, BLURRY, etc.

The hidden song title is: CAN'T GET YOU OUT OF MY HEAD

Daily SuDoku

A 9x9 grid for a daily Sudoku puzzle with some numbers pre-filled.

Friday's Solution

A 9x9 grid containing the solution to the previous Sudoku puzzle.



South Korea's Culture, Sports and Tourism Minister Do Jong-whan, center, and singers pose for a photo session before departing for Pyongyang International Airport in Seoul. — AFP photos



Members of K-pop girlband 'Red Velvet' pose for a photo before departing for Pyongyang.

SOUTH KOREAN MUSICIANS ARRIVE IN PYONGYANG FOR CONCERTS

K-pop stars led a group of South Korean musicians arrived in Pyongyang yesterday to take part in the latest set of cross-border cultural performances ahead of next month's rare inter-Korean summit. The 120-member group including top girl band Red Velvet flew from Seoul's Gimpo airport aboard a chartered civilian flight to Pyongyang via the rarely used direct air route between the two Koreas, as a rapprochement on the peninsula gathers pace.

"This performance in Pyongyang will add momentum to inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation that resumed with the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics" in the South, said Culture Minister Do Jong-hwan, who led the group. They were greeted on arrival at Pyongyang airport by Do's counterpart Pak Chunnam as well as Hyon Song-wol, founder of the North's popular all-female Moranbong band, the South's Yonhap agency reported.

Under the theme title "Spring is Coming", the South Korean musicians will perform a concert in Pyongyang today before a joint show with North Korean artists at the capital's

12,000-seat Ryugyong Jong Ju Yong Gymnasium on Tuesday. While in Pyongyang, Do said, he will meet with North Korean officials to discuss further cultural and sports exchanges between the two Koreas that have restarted after a decade-long hiatus.

The two rivals on Friday agreed a date for next month's inter-Korean summit the third ever of its kind following 2000 and 2007 meetings at Panmunjom truce village on the heavily-fortified border on April 27. Following the meeting between the North's leader Kim Jong Un and the South's president Moon Jae-in, landmark talks are planned between Kim and US President Donald Trump, which could come by the end of May.

The rapid rapprochement was kicked off by last month's Winter Olympics in the South and comes after a year of heightened tensions over the North's nuclear and missile programs, which saw Kim and Trump engage in a fiery war of words. Together with athletes and cheerleaders, the North sent musicians led by Hyon Song Wol to the South to celebrate the Games. The shows in the North—the first of which will take place at the 1,500-seat East

Pyongyang Grand Theatre on Sunday—will be taped and edited by a South Korean video crew to be made into a joint TV program for both countries, Yonhap news agency said.

Love Maze

The South Korean musicians taking part include singers and bands from a variety of genres, ranging from traditional folk songs to trendier K-pop, while some 20 taekwondo performers have also travelled. Among those due to perform are Cho Yong-pil, the influential 68-year-old singer who performed a solo concert in Pyongyang in 2005, and Choi Jin-hee, 61, who took to the stage in the North in 1999, 2002 and 2005.

Her 1984 mega hit "Love Maze" was reported to be late North Korean leader Kim Jong Il's favorite song, and is credited with helping South Korean pop culture gain a following in the socialist state. Love Maze is often heard playing in Pyongyang restaurants, with its romantic lyrics altered to adulation of their leader. Members of top K-pop girl band Red Velvet will also perform in Pyongyang, venturing onto stages more traditionally occupied by North Korea's own mega girl group the Moranbong band, who are famous for their fast-paced patriotic songs.

Joy, one of the five members of Red Velvet, will miss the trip to Pyongyang due to her TV drama shooting schedule, their agency SM Entertainment said. Seohyun, a 26-year-old star



South Korean singer Choi Jin-hee, center, speaks to the media.



South Korea's chief delegate Yoon Sang speaks to the media.



South Korean actress and singer Seohyun speaks to the media.

from K-pop group Girl's Generation, will act as a master of ceremony for the events in Pyongyang. She made a surprise appearance alongside a North Korean classical music ensemble during their performance in Seoul last month. Many North Korean defectors say they have seen South Korean TV dramas and heard K-pop music through black market USB drives in the North despite an official ban on the "decadent capitalist culture". —AFP



French ballet dancer and choreographer, Principal dancer at the Paris Opera Ballet, Marie-Agnes Gillot poses during a photo session at the Opera Garnier in Paris. — AFP

Ballet's most unlikely star takes her final bow

Everything was against Marie-Agnes Gillot becoming a ballerina—never mind a great one. She was too tall, broad-shouldered and most of all, she had a double scoliosis, which sometimes gives her a hump when her back is swollen. Yet the hump disappears as if by magic when Gillot takes to the stage. "I have a limited time to stay standing, carried by my muscles and myself," said the star, who accepts "that with time passing I'll be going back into my corset, unless I accept the operation, the metal rod in my back".

On Saturday night Gillot will close an extraordinary chapter in modern French ballet when she takes her final bow at the Paris Opera Ballet in "Orpheus and Eurydice". The last great French ballerina of her generation, she hid her problem from her teachers after leaving home at nine to go to ballet's elite school in the French capital. "When I arrived I thought, who are these nasty skinny ladies?" Not wanting to be thought of as "handicapped", only her roommates knew her secret.

'Nobody gave me free pass'

"Nobody gave me a free pass" in her long rise to the top, the dancer told AFP. In fact it was the opposite. She did not make principal dancer until relatively late at 28 by which time even the great choreographer Maurice Bejart had become exasperated, declaring, "she was the best they have, and finally they decided". Unlike her predecessor, the legendary Sylvie Guillem whose passage she said was eased by Rudolf Nureyev, she had no such powerful mentor.

When Gillot was eventually named as a prima ballerina she made history as the first ever to be promoted in Paris for a modern piece. "I think we have a hard time managing exceptional people in France who have a lot of energy, who have strong minds, who have abnormal abilities. And not just in ballet," she said. Gillot was no doubt that it was because she was "too talented that they would not

accept any mistakes from me. They were super tough with me but with the middling types they said, 'Don't worry, we will let you through'.

Ran away to New York

"People before me who fell (during their final test) and people after too went on to be principal dancers while I could not make the smallest error." Only when she "ran away to New York" at 18 was she freed from "sweeping the floor" and given the roles she felt she deserved. "I've been described with adjectives like athletic, tall, atypical, rebel and punk since I was very little. But I don't see it!" she laughed. "I see myself as a good soldier with a lot of discipline who has embraced all types of dance and never given classical or contemporary priority."

Gillot, 42, has been branching out into film, fashion-working with Chanel, Hermes and Repetto—and art in recent years, even saving her sweat in little jars for one project. She also has a collection of poems in the pipeline. But as the only female French choreographer to have her work staged at the Paris Opera, dance still fires her. She is passionate about righting wrongs in dance education, telling AFP that some elite schools "stifle" young dancers' creativity.

"I would develop children's curiosity by bringing them to the theatre to see great actors... or even to fashion shows where they've made clothes out of bin bags so that they have creativity in them instead of just commands and orders all the time," she said. "We cannot break 10,000 children for one little prodigy. We have to cherish their imagination and not rein it in," she told Paris Match magazine earlier.

Critics' gripes about the lack of great charismatic dancers may be because of the way dancers are drilled. "You can be a great dancer but without personality," she said. With her warm, throaty laugh, personality is not something Gillot lacks. — AFP

Spielberg revisits 1980s heyday in 'Ready Player One'

He tugged at heartstrings with "E.T." and "War Horse," played on our deepest fears in "Jaws" and amped up the Cold War paranoia in "Bridge of Spies." Now Steven Spielberg is returning to his favorite target—the adrenal gland—with the release of "Ready Player One," a high-octane love letter to the thrilling family films of the 1980s that made his fame. Starring Tye Sheridan, the movie is based on a 2011 novel about a teenager on a treasure hunt in a virtual reality game, in a world torn apart by an energy crisis.

Sheridan plays teenage gamer Wade Watts, who finds himself inside an addictive virtual reality world called Oasis in the year 2045. Hoping to escape the squalor of his trailer park in a futuristic Columbus, Ohio, Wade puts on the Oasis headset and gloves and is transported into the body of an avatar named Parzival. Within the program he discovers clues to a game embedded by its mysterious creator, played by Oscar-winner Mark Rylance, that promises the winner full ownership of the Oasis.

The all-star support cast also features Olivia Cooke, Ben Mendelsohn, T.J. Miller and Simon Pegg, who said at the world premiere in Hollywood on Monday that shooting the movie felt like experiencing the future. "We had a VR set that we could go into. We could put the mask on and actually have a look at the set that we were gonna be in," he said. "Because you know, when you're in the grey room, you're like 'what am I looking at?' so we could have a little look at it before we start acting, which was a real treat."

'You can do anything'

In the world of Oasis, Wade encounters 1980s pop culture icons such as Freddy

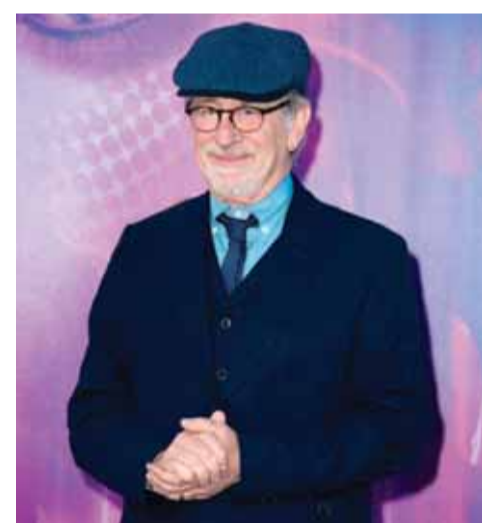
Krueger and the Iron Giant, and gets to race the DeLorean from "Back to the Future" as he weaves to avoid huge wrecking balls. King Kong, R2-D2, the Joker and Mechagodzilla all get screen time while the classic 1960s Batmobile whizzes through the streets—and there is even a glimpse of the Overlook Hotel from Stanley Kubrick's "The Shining" (1980). "I was born in 2025, but I wish I'd grown up in the 1980s, like all my heroes," Wade says in voiceover.

Spielberg told the Comic-Con crowd in San Diego, where the movie was previewed last year, that the source novel by Ernie Cline was "the most amazing flash-forward and flashback at the same time about a decade I was very involved in—the 1980s." The veteran filmmaker said he had relished directing a sci-fi feature about the dystopian world people would be living in almost 30 years in the future.

"People are leaving the country and all of a sudden virtual reality gives you a choice, gives you another world to exist in," he said. "And you can do anything in that world—anything you can possibly imagine." Spielberg actually cut most of the novel's references to his own movies, but this hasn't stopped critics suggesting that the big-screen "Ready Player One" is a kind of cinematic autobiography.

Sweetly nostalgic

The critics have been mainly positive, yielding a 79 percent "fresh" rating from more than 200 reviews collated by Rotten Tomatoes, which described it as "a sweetly nostalgic thrill ride" that played to Spielberg's strengths. Not everyone is on board, of course. The Chicago Reader described the sci-fi epic as an empty



Director/Producer Steven Spielberg attends the Warner Bros Pictures World Premiere of 'Ready Player One' at the Dolby Theater in Hollywood, California. — AFP

"special-effects maelstrom" in which a taciturn Sheridan is in constant danger of "being outacted by his own avatar."

Wednesday preview screenings gave the production, scripted by Cline with Zak Penn ("The Avengers"), its first \$3.8 million, and it is expected to come out of the four-day Easter weekend atop the domestic box office with \$45-\$50 million. Penn remembers the 1980s as a decade of technological breakthroughs in the arts, pointing to the Walkman personal stereo, video consoles and the advent of the personal computer in people's homes.

"And also films: the move towards blockbusters... really changed the way people went to the movies," he said. "I think a lot of stuff happened in those 10 years that really has had some lasting impact." Universal's "Pacific Rim Uprising," Marvel's "Black Panther" and Lionsgate's "I Can Only Imagine" are expected to vie for second place over the holiday weekend. The also-rans will include Lionsgate thriller "Tyler Perry's Acrimony"—starring Taraji P. Henson as a vengeful wife—and Pure Flix's "God's Not Dead: A Light in Darkness." —AFP

Hollywood's first blockchain movie: An end to piracy?

A few years behind Wall Street, Hollywood is turning to the technology behind cryptocurrency bitcoin to distribute movies in a development hailed as the beginning of the end for piracy. Leading the charge is "No Postage Necessary," a romantic indie comedy about a luckless hacker that is being distributed via peer-to-peer video network app Vevee, running on Qtum, the most advanced blockchain in the world.

Jeremy Culver ("An Evergreen Christmas") wrote, directed and produced the release from US production house Two Roads Picture Co., shot on 35 mm film.

The movie gets its US theatrical release and worldwide blockchain debut in June and will also be available to buy online using cryptocurrency. "We are thrilled to provide movie lovers

around the world a brand new way to experience their entertainment by turning the blockchain into a feature film distribution channel," Culver said in a statement.

"Although this is a first for the industry, we hope it will signal a shift in the way content is shared and consumed." A blockchain is essentially a shared, encrypted "ledger" that cannot be manipulated, offering the promise of secure transactions that allow anyone to get an accurate accounting of money, property or other assets. The technology publicly records the unique alphanumeric strings that identify buyers and sellers, allowing more transparent and secure peer-to-peer payment systems.

Blockchain debuted in 2009 as a ledger for the leading cryptocurrency bitcoin and is already used in food safety, finance and sea

freight. Its advantages, according to Culver, include immutable proof of intellectual property rights, transparent royalty payments, and, since all blockchain data is resistant to duplication, a future in which movies are "no longer pirated."

"No Postage Necessary" tells the story of cynical, single computer hacker Sam—played by "Vikings" and "Black Mirror" actor George Blagden—who makes ends meet by stealing mail while disguised as a postal worker. He happens upon a letter written by a heartsick Josie (Charleene Closshey) to her late husband and fallen marine, and the tender missive awakens something in Sam. He conspires to meet the beautiful, young war widow and she warms to the idea of a new chance at love—but not before Sam's past comes knocking in the form of an FBI agent looking for missing bitcoins. —AFP

Lifestyle | Fashion

Animals rights groups
scent blood as fashion
labels go fur-free



In this file photo models present creations for Givenchy during the women's 2018/2019 fall/winter collection fashion show in Paris. — AFP

Is this the beginning of the end for fur? With more and more fashion houses going fur-free, San Francisco banning fur sales in the city and British MPs considering outlawing all imports of pelts after Brexit, the signs do not seem good for the industry. After decades of hard-hitting campaigning against fur, animal rights activists believe they scent victory. Last week Donna Karan and DKNY became the latest in a flood of luxury brands to say they were planning to go fur free, following similar announcements by Gucci, Versace, Furla, Michael Kors, Armani and Hugo Boss in recent months.

US-based animal rights group PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), which is famous for its spectacular anti-fur protests, declared that "2018 is the year that everyone is saying goodbye to fur."

"Times are changing and the end of fur farming is within reach!" it told its 687,000 Instagram followers. The British-based Humane Society International said the tide turned when Gucci declared it was going fur-free in October.

Another hammer blow came this month when Donatella Versace said that "I don't want to kill animals to make fashion. It doesn't feel right." "Such influential brands turning their backs on cruel fur makes the few designers like Fendi and Burberry who are still peddling fur look increasingly out of touch and isolated," said the society's president Kitty Block. Fendi's Karl Lagerfeld shows little sign of second thoughts, however, and has said he will use real fur as long as "people eat meat and wear leather".

Leather is next

But PETA, which also campaigns for veganism, has warned the leather industry that is also in its sights, saying "You are next..." And Professor Nathalie Ruelle, of the French Fashion Institute, told AFP that it was telling that the new fur-free brands "did not say anything about exotic leathers (such as crocodile, lizard and snakeskin)." Of the big designers, Stella McCartney, a vegetarian and animal rights activist herself, has pushed the ethical envelope the furthest, refusing to use fur, leather or feathers.

But vegans want to go further still, with a ban on all animal products, which for some also means wool. But the fur industry is not taking this lying down and has become much more vocal in its bid to counter animal rights groups' social media campaigns. The International Fur Federation (IFF) took Gucci to task when it went fur-free, asking if it "really wanted to choke the world with fake plastic fur..."

Philippe Beaulieu, of the French fur federation claimed fur-free was a marketing gimmick "trying to surf on emotion" to please millennials. Fake fur, he said, was the real danger to the environment. "Brands who stop fur push synthetic fur which comes from plastic, a byproduct of the petrol industry, with all the pollution and harm to the planet that that entails."

China's passion for fur

In contrast, fur is natural and more and more durable and traceable, he said. Arnaud Brunois, of the Faux Fur Institute, which he set up to counter the IFF, disputes this. He insisted that "from an ecological point of view it was better to use a waste product from oil... than farm 150 million of animals then skin them and finally treat the pelts with chemicals." "It is part of the real fur industry's marketing campaign to denigrate faux fur," he added.

These days imitation can sometimes pass for the real thing as the British designer Clare Waight Keller proved in her fake fur-heavy Givenchy show at Paris fashion week earlier this month. Luxury brand expert Serge Carreira at Sciences Po university in Paris said "fur was marginal for most of the fashion houses who have stopped using it." For instance, it only accounted for 10 million euros of Gucci's six-billion turnover in 2017, or 0.16 percent.

While fur coats are now rarer on the streets of cities in the West, coats with fur collars—either fake or real, and sometimes a mixture of both, activists claim—are everywhere. In China, however, the picture is very different. Fur sales grew "phenomenally" there over the last decade, said IFF CEO Mark Oaten, and despite leveling off still dwarfs all those elsewhere combined. The world's biggest fur consumer is now also far by its largest producer in an industry worth \$30 billion globally in 2017. — AFP

Guests wearing hats arrive at the Meydan Racecourse to attend the Dubai World Cup day horse racing event in Dubai. — AFP photos



Ackermann in new shock departure at top of men's fashion

Designer Haider Ackermann parted ways with Berluti Friday, the French brand said, in the latest twist in the frenetic game of musical chairs at the top of men's fashion. The Colombian had led the label for only 18 months, and his surprise departure sparked speculation he will be replaced by Kris Van Assche, the Belgian designer who left Dior Homme last week after 11 years at the helm. Ackermann, 46, who is best known for his

richly-colored bohemian designs for women, created only three collections for Berluti, but was already giving it a softer, more feminine feel. Van Assche is known for a harder tailored edge and more street-influenced styling. Berluti boss Antoine Arnault praised Ackermann's "feel for materials, colors, and his wonderful shows will always be linked to the history of the house." Arnault, the son of French luxury goods

tycoon Bernard Arnault, has overseen Berluti's transformation from an elite cobbler which once counted artist Andy Warhol and European royalty among its loyal clients, to a luxury lifestyle label for men. He said Ackermann's successor would be announced shortly.

The men's arm of the LVMH group to which Berluti belongs has seen dramatic change in recent weeks with Hedi Slimane arriving as artistic director of Celine and British designer

Kim Jones leaving Louis Vuitton for Dior Homme and being replaced by DJ, designer and Off-White founder Virgil Abloh.

Ackermann, who has his own highly-rated women's label, said he was "immensely proud to have been able to put my creativity at the service of this house." A product of the famous Antwerp fashion school in Belgium alongside Dries Van Noten and Anne Demeulemeester, he replaced Alexandro Sartori in September 2016. — AFP



In this file photo, French fashion designer Haider Ackermann, acknowledges the public at the end of the Berluti show during men's Fashion Week for the Fall/Winter 2017/2018 collection in Paris. — AFP

Lifestyle | Art



A man passes 'Ursa Major' by Mr. and Mrs. Ferguson which is part of the Smithsonian's Renwick Gallery's outdoors exhibit of Burning Man sculptures in Washington, DC. — AFP photos

“

We build the world that we want to live in.

”



Untitled by Jack Champion



Golden Spike by HYBYCOZO



Maya's Mind by Mischell Riley

COUNTERCULTURE 'BURNING MAN' ART TAKES WASHINGTON BY STORM

Immersive art from a famed desert festival in the American West has swept into Washington, infusing the buttoned-up US Capitol with countercultural spirit. "No Spectators: The Art of Burning Man," which opens Friday at the Smithsonian's Renwick Gallery, celebrates the annual late-summer gathering that sees a temporary city of some 75,000 people spring up in Nevada's Black Rock Desert.

For a single week, massive experiential art installations tower over the dusty metropolis before Burning Man participants torch many of the works, including a giant wooden statue of a man, as a ritual embracing deconstruction and temporality. Thought it is perhaps best known for its bacchanalian atmosphere favoring sex and drugs, the annual event that started small in 1986 has evolved into a serious cultural and artistic movement, said the Renwick's crafts curator Nora Atkinson, who spearheaded the show.

She pushed to welcome the radical art of the desert to the rarefied environment of the museum because "it really stands out from a lot of the work being done in the contemporary art world," she said. She also highlighted

the freewheeling show's location just steps from the White House. "I think it's really important at times like this—when the world is so cynical, when people are so at odds—that we have this kind of healing force," she said. "It's all about empowering people." "We build the world that we want to live in."

Visual hedonism

Though it drew comparisons to predecessors including the anarchic Dadaists and large-scale land art movement, Burning Man is a choice destination for techies from neighboring Silicon Valley looking to unwind. That's no coincidence, according to Atkinson, who attended her first Burning Man last year. "The further we get into our digital sphere the more we sort of strive for that humanity around us," she said at an exhibition preview, standing in the massive, intricate wooden "Temple" installation that encompasses the museum's cavernous Grand Salon hall.

The show—which follows "The Art of Burning Man" exhibition that went on display at a Virginia museum last year—includes both surviving pieces from past festivals

and newly commissioned works. The visually decadent installations — 14 in the 19th-century era Renwick building and six spilling outdoors into the surrounding neighborhood—featured in the show bridge the worlds of fine art and craft, with a focus on works that make use of reclaimed materials.

"Tin Pan Dragon," for example, is a dragon-esque vehicle crafted from reclaimed aluminum cookware. And the 14-foot "Ursa Major" sculpture—one of the several public art pieces installed in the surrounding streets where politicians and lawyers roam—is a grizzly bear fashioned from 170,000 pennies.

Major cultural movement

Yelena Filipchuk of the duo behind the "HYBYCOZO" installation of large-scale glowing polyhedrons with elaborate laser cut-outs praised the Renwick's move "to go full on with the interactivity" in line with Burning Man's participatory ethos. Translating works from a festival in the expansive, inhospitable desert to a museum setting also offered artists the chance to "create a totally immersive environment" she said, as shad-

ows generated from her geometric sculptures danced on the gallery walls.

For Filipchuk, the show underscores Burning Man's status as a cultural petri dish but also as an "American institution." "It really represents American values, like creativity, freedom, innovation," she said. Acclaimed artist Leo Villareal, whose mirrored light installation glitters above the museum's staircase, sees the normally ephemeral Burning Man's entrance into the museum world as part of a "major worldwide cultural movement that has taken on a life of its own."

"I think people are responding in a huge way," said Villareal, who is working on a large-scale piece in London to light up more than a dozen bridges over the Thames River. "For the Smithsonian to get behind the ideas of Burning Man and put it in a show like 'No Spectators' is truly remarkable."—AFP



A man stands next to Pablo Picasso's 'Femme au chat assise dans un fauteuil' during a media preview of Christie's Hong Kong Spring Sales in Hong Kong. — AFP photos



Conor Jordan, deputy chairman of impressionist and modern art at Christie's, looks to Pablo Picasso's 'Le Marin.'



A woman looks at Japanese artist Yoshitomo Nara's 'In the Pinky Lake.'



A woman looks at Pablo Picasso's 'Buste d'homme,' left, and 'Tete de femme,' right.

Rare Picasso self-portrait expected to fetch \$70 million

A rare Picasso believed to be a self-portrait created when he was under threat of deportation to a Nazi concentration camp is expected to fetch US\$70 million at auction, Christie's said Friday as the work went on view in Hong Kong. The oil painting "Le Marin" depicts a sad-looking man dressed in a blue and white striped sailor's shirt sitting on a chair.

"You have... a slightly dark sense around the picture. It's nervous, it's on edge and slightly gloomy," said Conor Jordan, deputy chairman of impressionist and modern art at Christie's. The 130 by 81-centimetre vertical painting shows the man resting his head against his right hand, while his legs are crossed with his left hand on his knee. "That's a traditional symbol of melancholy," Jordan added.

Created in 1943, during the Nazi occupation of France, the painting reflects the distress and anxiety of the Spanish painter who was under threat of being sent to a concentration camp in Germany. Le Marin's last

appearance was 21 years ago at an auction of works from the collection of New York art collectors Victor and Sally Ganz. The painting will be on view in Hong Kong until April 3. It will go under the hammer in New York on May 15 as part of a sale of Impressionist and Modern Art by Christie's.

Le Marin is set to fetch "one of the five highest prices" for a Picasso piece at auction, according to Christie's. Last November, a series of 100 Picasso etchings which deal with his erotic obsessions and marital strife, as well as political turmoil in the 1930s, sold for 1.9 million euros in Paris to an unnamed American collector. Picasso's "The Women of Algiers (Version O)" set a world record as the most expensive piece of art sold at auction when it fetched \$179.4 million at Christie's in New York in 2015.—AFP

Home Centre launches exclusive catalogue for nursery, kids and teens

Home Centre, the largest home retailer in the Middle East, has launched its first exclusive catalogue for children that introduces over 1,200 inspiring designs for the youngest members of the family. Carefully collated to blend elements of fun and functionality, the 68-page catalogue showcases 23 exquisitely appointed rooms for children of all ages - from infants to teenagers. A full digitised version of the catalogue will also be available online, featuring interactive elements and a mobile responsive design.

Designed to appeal to Home Centre's diverse customer base, the catalogue caters to every style and budget, helping parents create spaces children can call their own. Brimming with creative interior ideas for nurseries, children's bedrooms, playrooms and study rooms, the catalogue reinforces the brand's focus on unparalleled quality, internationally sourced materials and eco-friendly, child-safe materials that constitute the best product offering in the market.

Home Centre's new ensemble for kids offers a wide assortment of furniture and accessories ranging from soft furnishing to lighting options, storage solu-

tions and wall art, offering something endearing for every child. One of the highlights is the popular Kid it collection, a line of flexible children's furniture solutions exclusively designed by Home Centre to adapt to children as they grow. The collection features a vibrant, playful melange of themes inspired by the limitless imagination of children across seven creative ranges - princess, dinosaur, pirate, car, safari, dollhouse and surfer.

Sleep is essential for a child's growth and development owing to which Home Centre has collaborated with industry experts, on a new line of mattresses, Growing Child that help support children's wellbeing at every age. In line with its commitment to providing great value, Home Centre offers a warranty of up to 5 years on furniture and up to two years on home accessories. The catalogue is available across all Home Centre stores located at Al Rai, Shuwaikh, The Avenues, Kuwait City, Fahaheel and Sama Mall (Fintas), and online on www.homecentre.com. So, shop the collection and surprise your children with a room of their dreams.



Lifestyle | Art



Visitors take photographs of French artist Louise Bourgeois's 'Femme' at Art Basel in Hong Kong. — AFP photos



A woman, center, interacts with Chinese artist Hu Yun's 'Journey without A Destination.'



A woman poses for a photograph behind artist Julio Le Parc's 'Sphere bleue.'

Performance art comes clean at Hong Kong's Art Basel

The gigantic bowls and chopsticks strewn across the floor at Hong Kong's Art Basel looked so squeaky clean it seemed pointless for the cleaner to keep wiping them, dwarfed by the oversized tableware. A few meters away, a robot vacuum cleaner buzzed about as the gazes of onlookers followed its mechanical and almost playful movements. Looking like a scene out of

Alice in Wonderland, it was in fact part of a performance art piece by Taiwanese artist Chou Yu-cheng.

On the other side of the bowls stand three tall sculptures shaped like Dyson's signature air purifiers—the robot cleaner is also provided by the technology company, which is a sponsor of the installation. Here, a smartly dressed male performer recites a "product description"

rewritten by a poet. "I feel my work is comparatively modern, or should I say, it has a sense of cleanliness," said Chou.

The conceptual artist said his penchant and even enjoyment for "keeping things clean" had translated into his work as he meditated on a kind of division of labor between human and machine. "There are some things that robots cannot replace. For example, in this work, the only platform the robot can clean is the floor. People are still needed for many other things," he said. "So even though there is technology and new inventions, people and humanity is still a core issue."

The installation attracted curious spectators this week, in a city where domestic labor is heavily dependent on migrant women from Southeast Asia who live in to perform the work. Performance art has become more prominent at Hong Kong's edition of Art Basel this year. Among the exhibits, local artist Kwok Mang-ho, better known as "Frog King", set up a replica of his 1992 exhibition in New York, "The Art Mall".

Sitting inside his cluttered calligraphy shop, the artist executed his whimsical calligraphy for visitors for HK\$1,000 (\$127) a piece during the fair's private preview on Tuesday. Danish artist Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen's performance, entitled "Re-inventing Domesticity and the Decomposing of the Self", also drew others to tread carefully around her body as she lay down in an open container.

"Now, hopefully, the performance aspect of art is coming back, because it's all about life. Because I think we are all living a virtual world now, that everything is online," Kary Kwok, an art director visiting Art Basel, said. "But it's so nice to see something real in front of you and I think it should be encouraged."—AFP



A woman, left, stands in front of Japanese artist Masaru Shichinohe's 'Recording Girl II' & 'Midnight Grasshopper.'



Subodh Gupta's 'Cosmic Void.'



A performer, right, interacts with Austrian artist Erwin Wurm's 'One Minute Sculptures.'

Artist Jeff Koons on money, risk and acceptance

To his critics his work is overrated, overpriced and obvious. To his fans, he is a living legend—the incarnation of the Pop Art movement. Either way, at 63, Jeff Koons says he just wants to focus on creating the art he wants to make. Koons' works are brash, voluptuous and carry astronomical price tags but that hasn't dimmed appetite for his pieces in Asia, where he is presenting at Hong Kong's edition of Art Basel—a top event for wealthy collectors looking to snap up new status symbols.

having some relevant value. But the beauty to have impact with real individuals, that they can come across their own potential, that's what really brings me joy," he tells AFP, impeccably dressed in a sharp dark blue suit. His work is polarizing.

In January, artists, gallery owners and officials in Paris signed an open letter objecting to a planned 12-metre tall "Bouquet of Tulips" memorial designed by Koons as a tribute to the victims of the terror attacks on the city in

of controversy—he gained notoriety for a series portraying himself and his porn star ex-wife Ilona Staller in explicit poses. Today Koons is relaxed and lively at Hong Kong's David Zwirner gallery where some of his Gazing Ball pieces are on display, their glazed surfaces reflecting every corner of the exhibition space. "Reflected surface affirms the viewer, affirms you, right here, right now, but it also affirms everything else in the world," says Koons.

He describes the sapphire-colored spheres as "objects trying to communicate with the viewers". His balloon animals are inspired by what it means to be a living, breathing organism, he says, with art a process of accepting oneself and others. Koons says surrealist art has been a means for self-exploration since he was a teenager. "Once you can go inward and find where you accept yourself, automatically you want to go outside, and you want to go to the external world. That's the journey that art can take you (on)," he says.

Koons describes technology as a "wonderful tool" and recently partnered with Snapchat to create a Pokemon-Go type game in which users hunt virtual Koons sculptures around the world. He says he is working on a virtual reality project to be released in a year's time but warns young artists not to see tech as a quick creative fix, rather a means to express something "metaphysical". Most importantly, he says they must believe in themselves, recalling how when he started out there was no audience for his art and he had to move back in with his parents.

"I've always been a risk taker, because I believe in going for something, I believe in the excitement, the stimulation, of trying to achieve something," he says. "If there was failure, I really didn't have any option other than to go for it."—AFP

November 2015. The letter described Koons as an "emblem of industrial art which is spectacular and speculative". Koons would not comment on controversy, but when asked how he deals with criticism, he said he tries to focus on his work. "I think that people always find honesty very shocking. So when you are honest and just make the things that you want, it reveals something about human nature," he said.

Facing failure

Pennsylvania-born Koons' works are bright, extravagant and large-scale. He seems unafraid



Dachshunds arrive for the second day of the Crufts Dog Show in Birmingham. — Reuters

"The world needs a sausage dog museum", so German owners provide one

A museum dedicated to the dachshund, Germany's short-legged, long-bodied "sausage dog", opens next week in the southern city of Passau, and will show more than 2,000 exhibits from dog-shaped bread to a giant golden statuette. Two proud sausage dog owners and former florists gave up their jobs to open the museum in Bavaria, which they say is the world's first devoted to the "dackel" and built it up from nothing in just three months.

"The world needs a sausage dog museum... No other dog in the world enjoys the same kind of recognition or popularity as the symbol of Bavaria, the sausage dog," said founder Seppi Kueblbeck. The exhibits in the more than 80 square-metre museum cater for all tastes. Visitors will see canine stamps, artistic prints with sausage dog motifs, handmade puppets and porcelain figurines.

"We wanted to give this dog a home where people can come and share their joy. Its popularity is increasing because the sausage dog, with its so-called sausage dog look, has conquered the hearts of

many people," said Kueblbeck. Prominent dackel fans include artist Pablo Picasso, actor Marlon Brando, former US President John F. Kennedy, scientist Albert Einstein and even Napoleon.

One of Germany's oldest breeds, the dachshund can be long-, short- or wire-haired and is one of the country's most popular dogs. Bred for hunting since the Middle Ages, dachshund translates literally as "badger dog" and their long snouts allow them to burrow into holes to catch small animals. Kueblbeck and his museum partner Oliver Storz said they have a further 2,000 sausage dog exhibits at home.

The owners have diligently collected pieces over the years and can call a substantial amount of the dackel paraphernalia their own. However, their breakthrough came with the lucrative purchase of a Belgian punk rocker's extensive collection. The museum opens its doors tomorrow.—Reuters



In this photo taken, US artist Jeff Koons poses in front of his piece 'Gazing Ball (Velazquez Triumph of Bacchus)', 2015-2017, during an interview with AFP in Hong Kong. — AFP

The American pioneer has brought some of his signature mirror-polished steel sculptures to the fair as well as his Gazing Ball series, in which shiny blue spheres are inserted into reproductions of classic European masterpieces, including works by Rembrandt and Tintoretto. Koons set an auction record for the highest price paid for any work by a living artist in 2013 when his orange "Balloon Dog" fetched US\$58.4 million at Christie's in New York.

But he insists the monetary value attached to his art is just an "abstraction" to him. "I'm flattered that my works are perceived by society as

Lifestyle

SUNDAY, APRIL 1, 2018



Egyptian pop sensation Tamer Hosny performs on stage in the western Saudi city of Jeddah. — AFP



GHANA LIFEGUARDS TRAIN BEFORE HOLIDAYS

A young woman hangs limp in the arms of men bringing her from the ocean to the sand as part of their lifeguard training in Accra, the capital of Ghana. While restaurants and hotels are bracing for the wave of Easter weekend tourists coming to the white sandy beaches along the Atlantic ocean, about 50 volunteers participated in the Ghana National Aquatic Rescue Unit (GNARU) training.

Set up in 2016, the unit prepares for responding to drownings and heart attacks. Without official statistics, it's difficult to know how many people die each year from drowning in Ghana. But the waters of the Gulf of Guinea are strong, the currents deadly—and many people don't know how to swim.

A former lifeguard in Britain, Felix Uzor decided to create GNARU after witnessing

the fatal drowning of a three-year-old girl on Labadi beach, one of the most popular beaches in Accra. "The country doesn't provide a state rescue system," Uzor explains. "Most swimming areas... record high levels of drowning, especially during holidays."

Today the unit is mostly comprised of employees from Ghana's national disaster management organization, soldiers from the navy and firefighters. "Although there is no salary for this job, I'm motivated," said Danso Oteng Prince, a volunteer whose day job is with the navy. "Because if I can swim and others can't, then it's good to help save lives." —AFP



“ The country doesn't provide a state rescue system ”



Members of the Ghana National Aquatic Rescue Unit (GNARU) take part in a rescue and first aid training at Labadi Beach in Accra. — AFP photos