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Assembly debates govt program with focus on Silk City, islands

2035 vision to create 200,000 jobs • MPs demand amnesty for Assembly stormers



By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Deputy Premier and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah said yesterday that Kuwait's 2035 vision with all the projects it includes is expected to create 200,000 jobs. The vision envisages a large number of development projects with a special focus on the Silk City and islands' mega development projects, which are expected to cost hundreds of billions of dollars. Speaking during the assembly debate of the government program, Sheikh Nasser stressed that the program also focuses on fighting corruption and protecting public funds.

The program calls for improving the business environment and for encouraging the private sector, in addition to boosting achievements in the e-government project. Secretary General of the Supreme Planning Council Khaled Al-Mahdi said the program stipulates to train government civil service staff to make them more efficient, economic development and developing the northern islands.

But MP Ali Al-Deqbasi said he doubts that the inefficient government staff will be able to carry out the development program, saying that part of the staff is "paralyzed". MP Adel Al-Damkhi said the private sector will not be able to contribute because it is monopolized by certain people. MP Saleh Ashour said after the

1991 liberation, "we have been hearing about mega projects, but it appears that nothing major has changed", adding that the private sector cannot develop projects because it is unable to develop itself. He also said that there can be no real development without guaranteeing public freedoms, which have been deteriorating in the country.

MP Saadoun Hammad said cancer is spreading rapidly in the country and the government has not built enough medical centers for treatment. He also said the stoppage of production from the neutral zone oilfields with Saudi Arabia is costing Kuwait some \$6 billion annually. MP Jamaan Al-Harbash called for changing the election system in Kuwait to adopt a multi-party system so the prime minister is elected and supported by a parliamentary majority.

Meanwhile, 24 MPs expressed their support yesterday for a draft law calling to grant amnesty to all the activists who were jailed for storming the National Assembly in Nov 2011. The lawmakers said their call is in line with the constitution, which regulates general amnesties for prisoners. The court of cassation, whose rulings are final, is due to issue its verdict in the case on May 6. The criminal court had acquitted all the 70 defendants, but the appeals court handed 67 of them harsh sentences, suspended jail terms on two and dropped the case against one because of his death.

KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah speaks during a parliamentary session at the National Assembly yesterday. — KUNA

News in brief

Violators urged to avail of amnesty

KUWAIT: The residency affairs department urged residency violators to take advantage of the remaining grace period given by Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Sheikh Khalid Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah, which ends on April 22. The amnesty allows violators to leave Kuwait without paying fines, and they can return to the country again. Violators who are allowed to leave during the remainder of the period are those who entered the country before Feb 21, 2018 and their regular or temporary residency visa expired, and those who entered before the above-mentioned date on a visit visa or transit and their legal stay ended. — Hanan Al-Saadoun

'Artificial mole' warns of cancer

TAMPA: Swiss scientists have developed an experimental skin implant that darkens like a mole when it detects subtle changes in the body that may be an early warning sign of cancer, a study said yesterday. The implant, or "biomedical tattoo", as researchers call it, has been tested in lab animals, lasts about a year and recognizes the four most common types of cancer: Prostate, lung, colon and breast cancer. It works by reacting to the level of calcium in the blood, which rises when a tumor is developing. About 40 percent of cancers could theoretically be detected this way, researchers said. If the wearer notices the spot darken, they should see a doctor to clarify the reason for the change and determine if or what treatment is warranted. — AFP

US wastes 150,000 tons of food daily

TAMPA: Americans waste nearly 150,000 tons of food per day, amounting to about one pound (422 gm) per person, and fruits and vegetables are mostly what gets tossed, said a study yesterday. The amount of land used annually to grow food that ends up in the garbage in the United States is 30 million acres, or seven percent of total US cropland. Some 4.2 trillion gallons of irrigation water gets wasted too, said the report. Fruits and vegetables made up 39 percent of total food waste, followed by dairy (17 percent), meat (14 percent) and grains (12 percent). Items least likely to be thrown out included salty snacks, table oils, egg dishes, candy and soft drinks. — AFP

Catholic cardinal meets Saudi king

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's King Salman met French cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran in Riyadh yesterday during the first visit to the kingdom by such a senior Catholic authority, Saudi state news agency SPA reported. The meeting between the king and Tauran, who heads the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, is the first between the current Saudi ruler and a Catholic official. Lebanon's Christian Maronite Patriarch visited Saudi Arabia in November. — Reuters

America mourns Barbara Bush; Amir sends condolences

WASHINGTON: Former president George W Bush thanked his mother Barbara for her "beautiful life" as tributes poured in yesterday for the much-loved political matriarch and one-time first lady following her death at the age of 92. Long seen as the pillar of one of America's most prominent families, as wife to the 41st US president and mother to the 43rd, Barbara Bush died at her home in Texas on Tuesday surrounded by her family. "As a result of her soul being comforted on her deathbed, my soul is comforted," George W Bush told Fox Business. "It's the end of a beautiful life." His father, the 93-year-old George H W Bush, was said by staff to be heartbroken to lose "his beloved Barbara," his wife of more than seven decades.

Saudi Arabia launches first new cinema

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia launched its first commercial movie theatre yesterday, ending a nearly 40-year ban on cinemas under a push by the crown prince to modernize the deeply conservative Muslim kingdom. A red carpet invitation-only gala event attracted senior government officials, foreign dignitaries and select industry figures to watch Marvel's superhero movie "Black Panther" on a 45-foot screen at a converted symphony concert hall in Riyadh. Tickets will go on sale today for the

first public viewings tomorrow, according to Adam Aron, chief executive of operator AMC Entertainment Holdings. "Saudis now are going to be able to go to a beautiful theatre and watch movies the way they're supposed to be watched: on a big screen," he told Reuters ahead of the screening. Confetti rained down through the multi-storey atrium as he and the Saudi information minister announced the official launch of the theatre and proceeded into the 450-seat movie hall.

The opening marks another milestone for reforms spearheaded by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to open the country culturally and diversify the economy. Saudi Arabia is the world's top oil exporter. The prince, 32, has already eased restrictions in the last two years



RIYADH: Saudi Information Minister Awwad Al-Awwad and AMC Entertainment's Chief Executive Adam Aron pose for a photo at an AMC cinema. — AFP

Secret CIA trip to N Korea raises odds for summit

WEST PALM BEACH, Florida: Donald Trump confirmed yesterday that his CIA chief took part in secret talks in North Korea, the most significant sign that an improbable summit between the US president and Kim Jong Un will go ahead. News of the encounter between the reclusive Kim and Mike Pompeo - Trump's pick to be America's next secretary of state - was the latest in a series of revelations from the US leader that have fuelled hopes of a major diplomatic breakthrough with Pyongyang.

"Mike Pompeo met with Kim Jong Un in North Korea last week. Meeting went very smoothly and a

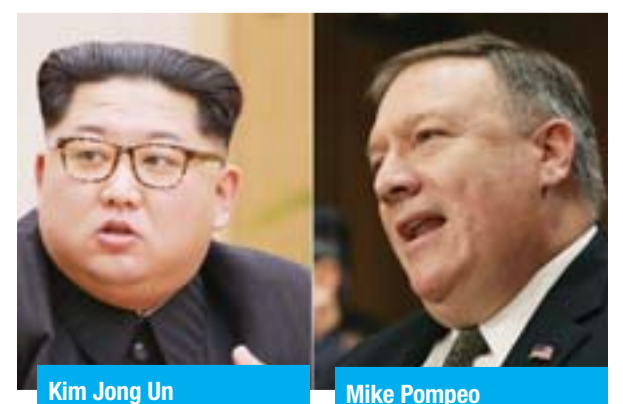
good relationship was formed," Trump tweeted, capping the latest twist in a detente in the decades old nuclear standoff. "Details of Summit are being worked out now," added the president, who is hosting Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe for two days of talks at his golf resort in Florida.

Neither Trump nor the White House offered details of what was discussed and it remains unclear if there is enough potential for an agreement to have the Trump-Kim summit, slated for early June, go ahead. Officials and outside experts say it is still not clear that Kim, who depends on the military to remain in power, is willing to give up nuclear weapons. North Korean talk of "denuclearization" - which Trump has embraced uncritically - has in the past been code for removing America's military presence on the Korean peninsula, something long unthinkable in Washington.

"Denuclearization will be a great thing for World, but also for North Korea!" Trump added in the tweet. Nonetheless, the flurry of diplomatic activity has raised



WASHINGTON: In this file photo taken on Feb 06, 1992, former US First Lady Barbara Bush prepares to throw a rugby ball. — AFP



Kim Jong Un

Mike Pompeo

hopes for a pair of upcoming and potentially historic summits. Kim is expected to meet South Korea's President Moon Jae-In at a landmark meeting next Friday where discussion of a peace declaration is now

Continued on Page 11

Local

Ivory Coast leader leaves Kuwait after talks with Amir

Foreign Minister meets Ivorian counterpart



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Cote d'Ivoire's President Alassane Ouattara are seen during President Ouattara's departure ceremony. — KUNA photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah bids farewell to Cote d'Ivoire's President Alassane Ouattara.



National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem bids farewell to Cote d'Ivoire's President Alassane Ouattara.

KUWAIT: Cote d'Ivoire's President Alassane Ouattara departed Kuwait yesterday after having held discussions with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The president was seen off at Kuwait International Airport by His Highness the Amir, Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and other senior Kuwaiti officials.

Earlier on Tuesday, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah met with the Ivorian Minister of Foreign Affairs Marcel Tanoh in Bayan Palace. The talks focused on efforts to strengthen bilateral ties and exchange views over regional and international development of mutual interests. It also tackled coordination between Kuwait and Cote D'Ivoire at the UN Security Council, as two countries currently hold non-permanent seats at the most important UN organization. — KUNA



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah bids farewell to Cote d'Ivoire's President Alassane Ouattara.

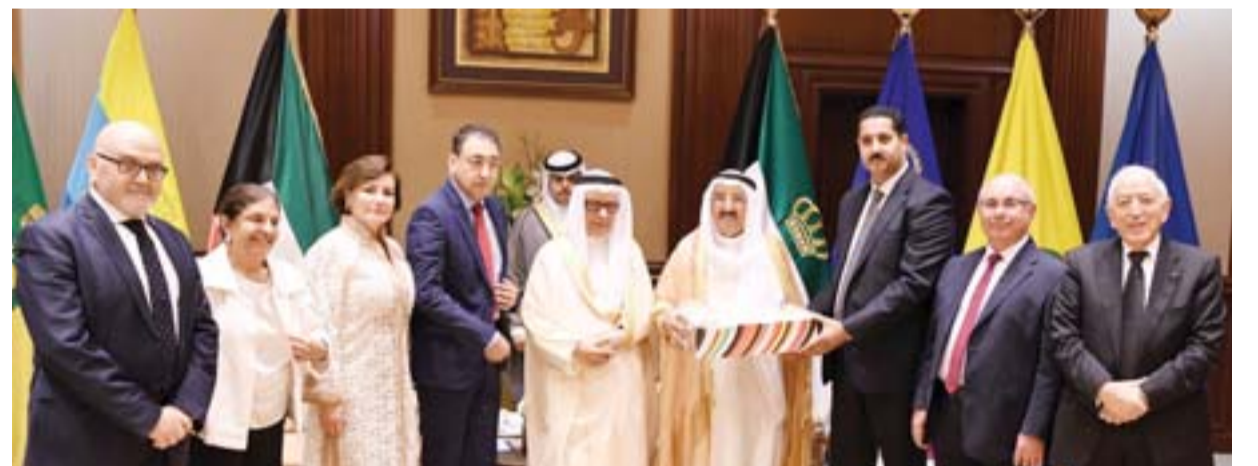


Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with Ivorian Minister of Foreign Affairs Marcel Tanoh.

Amir meets former Lebanese president



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with former Lebanese president Amine Gemayel, as well as Children's Cancer Center of Lebanon's Chairman Nora Jumblatt and its members. — KUNA photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Kuwaiti-Tunisian Cooperation Council Chairman Fahad Abdelrahman Al-Mojil and council members.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday former Lebanese president Amine Gemayel and Children's Cancer Center of Lebanon's Chairman Nora Jumblatt on the occasion of their visit to Kuwait to attend a charity

event hosted by the center.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir met with the Kuwaiti-Tunisian Cooperation Council Chairman Fahad Abdelrahman Al-Mojil and council members. The meeting was attended by Acting Minister of Amiri Diwan

Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah. Earlier yesterday, His Highness the Amir received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. — KUNA

Deputy FM receives UK, Australia envoys

KUWAIT: Kuwait Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah met yesterday with UK Ambassador to Kuwait Michael Davenport on bilateral relations and the latest regional and international developments. Jarallah then received Australian Ambassador to Kuwait Jonathan Gilbert, discussing bilateral relations and the current situations in regional and international domains. Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister for the Deputy Foreign Minister's Office Talal Al-Shatti was present in both meetings. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah meets with UK Ambassador to Kuwait Michael Davenport.



Kuwait Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah meets with Australian Ambassador to Kuwait Jonathan Gilbert.

Kuwait emphasizes need for political solution in Yemen

NEW YORK: Kuwait's Permanent Delegate to the UN Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi has stated that there was no military solution to the crisis in Yemen. In his speech at a special UN Security Council session on Yemen Tuesday, Otaibi underlined the need for a political solution to the civil conflict based on the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative, outcome of Yemeni national dialogue and the relevant UN resolutions, particularly resolution No. 2216. He reiterated Kuwait's support to efforts of the UN Special Envoy to Yemen Martin Griffiths to mediate between warring parties and help resolve the crisis.

Otaibi strongly condemned Houthi group's firing of ballistic missiles at Saudi cities and its threats to the maritime navigation in Bab-el-Mandeb Strait and the Red Sea. He expressed Kuwait's solidarity with the Kingdom of Saudi



NEW YORK: Kuwait's Permanent Delegate to the UN Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi speaks during a special UN Security Council session on Yemen. — KUNA

Arabia and its support to all measures it takes to maintain the security and stability of its territories. Otaibi welcomed the success of the UN pledging conference for Yemen in Geneva in raising aid pledges of over \$2 billion. In this conference, Kuwait pledged to provide relief and humanitarian aid to Yemen worth \$250 million, he said. He lauded the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates' joint donation of over \$1 billion to improve the humanitarian situation in Yemen during the year. — KUNA

Local

Amir sponsors Kuwait Quran contest's closing ceremony

Larger turnout compared to last year's edition



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and top state officials attend the 2018 International Holy Quran Contest's closing ceremony yesterday. — Amiri Diwan photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah gestures as he arrives to the venue.

KUWAIT: With His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and senior state officials in attendance, Kuwait yesterday brought down the curtain on the 2018 International Holy Quran Contest. Addressing a packed audience in a closing ceremony, Kuwait Minister of Justice Dr Fahad Al-Afasi thanked His Highness the Amir for sponsoring the annual contest, saying that this year's edition featured a larger turnout than previous events.

Afasi, who doubles as minister of Awqaf and Islamic affairs, said that Islamic teachings embedded in the Holy Quran are synonymous with the Kuwaiti identity, both of which stand for such virtues as tolerance and peaceful co-existence. He added that the Kuwaiti people of yesteryear and today have always embodied noble qualities such as moderation and altruism, which in essence, explains what this contest aims to promote. The minister went on to thank the Kuwaiti leadership and everyone who contributed in any way to the success of the International Holy Quran contest. — KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a memento during the ceremony.



Minister of Justice Dr Fahad Al-Afasi delivers a speech.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah honors winners during the ceremony.

Kuwait Times

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Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A tranquil sunset in Kuwait City. —KUNA photo

Ooredoo sponsors American University of the Middle East Career Fair 2018

Helping students carve the career that matches their aspirations

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait was the gold sponsor at the American University of the Middle East's (AUM) Career Fair, which took place on Tuesday and Wednesday at the main building of AUM in Egaila. Ooredoo's Human Resources Department was present at the career fair to answer students queries about job opportunities, job descriptions, career paths, and to learn about the different training and internship opportunities Ooredoo provides annually in collaboration with different entities.

In a statement to the press, Ooredoo Kuwait reiterated its belief in the major role youth play in the future of our country. Ooredoo's support for youth is deep-rooted within its strategy across the organization. This is not the first time that Ooredoo has taken part in a job fair. The company aims to

open new horizons for the ambitious youth by giving them opportunities to apply their educational knowledge to the professional world. The event, which saw the attendance of AUM CEO Fahad Al-Othman, included a special awarding ceremony for sponsors of the career fair.

Ooredoo's CSR and Social Media manager Yousef Al-Shallal received the plaque of appreciation by the organizers on behalf of the company.

The visitors at Ooredoo's booth were able to get one-on-one advice on how to enhance their CVs, in addition to getting tips on job interviews skills. This is not Ooredoo's first time participating in a career fair; the company is continuously seeking opportunities to recruit talent and welcome them into the Ooredoo family.

Ooredoo boasts a dynamic and fresh corporate culture

Deep-rooted support for youth



where new ideas are nurtured, and everyone is given a fair chance to grow and maximize their potential. Ooredoo employees are always given opportunities to develop their

skills and enhance their knowledge through extensive year-round training programs along with new challenges to develop their interests.

KRCS provides humanitarian aid to 80 countries

BAGHDAD: The Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) has offered humanitarian aid to more than 80 countries, including Iraq, Yemen and Syria, since its establishment in 1966, said a senior official of KRCS yesterday. Mosaed Al-Enezi, head of the society's legal and donors affairs department, made the statement on the sidelines of the participation of KRCS' delegation in the 10th conference of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) hosted by Baghdad.

The society is offering its assistance through donors in order to address the ongoing crises in Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Libya and Africa's countries, in addition to support to Rohingya minority refugees of Myanmar, he noted. The aid provided to Iraq over the last three years exceeded \$10 million, he said, indicating that the society has been communicating with other humanitarian organizations inside Iraq to offer humanitarian projects and relief aid to Iraqis across the country. Al-Enezi lauded the role of Kuwait Embassy in Baghdad in backing the society's action in Iraq and facilitating its humanitarian duties.

He revealed that the KRCS's participation in the conference aims to set plans of the upcoming period so as to ensure the best ways for the protection of donors and paying attention to humanitarian aspects amid conditions the region has been going through.

The conference is attracting some representatives from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the international Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the Arab Red Crescent and Red Cross Organization (ARCO) as well as a number of UN humanitarian agencies, and some regional and Arab humanitarian institutions. The two-day conference discusses some issues pertaining to the protection of donors and how to help them work during the conflicts as well as some legal and procedural topics. —KUNA

Two 300,000-bpd oil refineries to be added in coming years: KNPC

KUWIAT: Two 300,000-bpd refineries will be added in the coming years in order to meet the 2-million-bpd refining capacity target set for 2035, CEO of Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) Mohammad Ghazi Al-Mutairi said. The remarks were made during a meeting by the Oil and Gas Year (TOGY) Kuwait team this week with Mutairi and Deputy Chief Executive Office for Projects of KNPC Abdullah Fahad Al-Ajmi. Clean Fuel Project was 94 percent complete in the coun-

try, Mutairi said in a press release issued by TOGY.

The TOGY team also met this week with Kuwait Petroleum International (KPI) CEO Nabil M Bourisli, and Kuwait Gulf Oil Company (KGOC) CEO Abdulnaser Y Al-Fulaij. During the meeting Mutairi and Al-Ajmi shared that the Clean Fuel Project was 94 percent complete and highlighted the innovative technologies and methods were used. Kuwait Petroleum International (KPI) is a subsidiary of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC).

KPI's Bourisli was pleased to announce also a number of upcoming company milestones, notably the opening ceremony in Vietnam for the Nghi Son Refinery in May and the groundbreaking ceremony in Oman for the Duqm refinery and petrochemicals project later this month. He also offered insights into KPI's European and Asian strategies. Dr Bourisli indicated that the company intends to buy a stake in an Indian refinery and petrochemicals project in the coming weeks.

Fulaij said that despite the lull in activities in the

Partitioned Neutral Zone, KGOC has been active in environmental and training activities as well as sharing know-how with its sister companies, which will be particularly useful as Kuwait expands its focus to the offshore.

These and upcoming meetings with Kuwaiti oil executives are held in the context of TOGY's successful partnership with KPC, a key outcome of which will be the TOGY Kuwait 2018 edition detailing the Kuwaiti hydrocarbons industry's drive towards expansion and modernization.

The Oil and Gas Year provides business intelligence, strategic communication and networking to the global energy industry. The company produces country specific investment guides on 35 oil and gas markets worldwide and distributes to key energy and finance executives in 101 countries. Since the past 10 years of its inception, TOGY became keen on producing industry-defining books and maps on the world's emerging and established oil and gas markets. —KUNA

Kuwait's trade surplus with Japan down second month

TOKYO: Kuwait's trade surplus with Japan fell 9.5 percent from a year earlier to JPY 42.7 billion (\$398 million) in March, shrinking for the second month due to weak exports, the Finance Ministry said yes-

terday. But Kuwait stayed in black ink with Japan for 10 years and two months, the ministry said in a preliminary report.

Kuwaiti overall exports to Japan edged up 0.3 percent year-on-year to JPY 60.2 billion (\$546 million) for the second straight monthly fall, while imports from Japan jumped 36.4 percent to JPY 17.5 billion (\$163 million), up for the fifth month.

Middle East's trade surplus with Japan grew 3.6 percent to JPY 585.7 billion (\$5.5 billion) last month, with Japan-bound exports from the region increasing 5.4 percent from a year earlier. Crude oil, refined products, liquefied natural gas (LNG) and other natural resources, which accounted for 95.8 percent of the region's total exports to Japan,

expanded 5.2 percent. The region's overall imports from Japan increased 9.3 percent, thanks to robust shipments of automobile and machinery.

The world's third-biggest economy posted a global surplus of JPY 797.3 billion (\$7.5 billion) in March, marking a second straight month of black ink on sluggish shipments. Overall exports grew 2.1 percent, as shipments of hybrid cars to the US and semiconductor-related equipment to China increased. Imports declined 0.6 percent, reflecting weak demand for clothes and coal.

China remained Japan's biggest trade partner, followed by the US. The trade data are measured on a customs-cleared basis before adjustment for seasonal factors. —KUNA

Local

Zain strategic sponsor of 'One Roof' campaign

Raising awareness on domestic workers and employers' rights

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading telecommunications company in Kuwait, announced its strategic sponsorship of 'One Roof', a campaign aimed at raising awareness on domestic workers and employers' rights. The campaign is organized by the Human Line Organization (HLO) and the Social Work Society (SWS) in partnership with the Ministry of Interior (MOI) and in collaboration with several governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Zain's sponsorship of this campaign comes under the umbrella of its Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility Strategy, through which the company is keen on supporting the various efforts exerted at elevating humanitarian work in Kuwait and preserving the rights of all segments of the society. This campaign is the fruitful result of a joint collaboration between non-profit organizations along with the public and private sectors, which reflects the good nature the Kuwaiti community is known for.

During the press conference, Zain Kuwait's Corporate Communications and Relations Director Waleed Al-Khashti commented: "today we are proud to announce Zain's strategic sponsorship of 'One Roof' campaign to raise awareness on domestic workers and employers rights in partnership with HLO, SWS, and MOI. This sponsorship comes as part of our Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility Strategy, through which we aim at supporting such humanitarian initiatives that achieve equality between all members of the society."

Khashti added: "it is crucial that we see such fruitful collaborations between the various institutions in our nation from both the public and private sectors to raise

awareness on domestic work as well as introduce the laws and regulations set by the country to protect and preserve the rights of domestic workers and employers. For this, Zain was keen on supporting this campaign, being a leading national company with clear commitments towards the community in which it operates."

Khashti further explained: "Zain has a long list of programs and initiatives that serve noble causes through the support of similar efforts that adopt humanitarian work. Our participation in this campaign today is part of our duty, and Zain will always stay committed to building a better future for everyone."

The newly launched 'One Roof' campaign aims to raise awareness on domestic workers and employers rights in an effort to minimize the problems or disputes that usually arise due to the lack of knowledge and understanding of the laws governing domestic work in Kuwait.

The campaign mainly aims to inform and advise employers and domestic workers of their legal rights and duties through the creation of a legal guide available in 15 languages. This legal guide will be obtainable in primary care centers, hospitals, police stations, embassies of the countries sending domestic workers to Kuwait, labor recruitment offices, exchange companies, co-operatives, and various other facilities.

As part of its long-term vision, 'One Roof' seeks to change the culture of exclusion and discrimination that exists between some employers and domestic workers, replacing it with a culture of acceptance and tolerance. Furthermore, the campaign aims to guide society towards accepting domestic work as a job regulated by formal laws and procedures. The scope of the awareness



KUWAIT: Waleed Al-Khashti (second right) attends the press conference.

campaign includes lectures and seminars that will be held in schools, universities, and at public events to broaden the awareness among young people in the community with regards to this issue.

The Human Line Organization (HLO) was established in 2012 as a civil society organization committed to enhancing and advocating human rights. The organization works on raising awareness, providing training on human rights concepts and procedures, legal observing of human rights violations, and preparation of human rights reports. It also aims to provide solutions to these violations and further the culture of tolerance, peaceful coexistence and constructive dialogue. The Social Work Society (SWS) is a Kuwaiti civil society founded in

2005 that focuses on protecting, supporting, and providing services to victims of human rights violations and those who have been marginalized and subjected to unequal or selective applications of Kuwaiti laws. Through provision of social services, legal representation, and promoting policy reform, SWS aims to ensure that basic rights of vulnerable groups are supported and recognized in accordance with international laws and standards.

Zain takes pride in its long-list of contributions in social and humanitarian areas. This Strategic Sponsorship falls under the company's efforts in the various social, humanitarian, and charitable programs since its inception.



Part of its corporate sustainability strategy

Teen commits suicide at Sabah Al-Nasser home

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: A 17-year-old Kuwaiti boy committed suicide by hanging himself in his Sabah Al-Nasser home. Interior Ministry operations received a call about the incident, so a police patrol and an ambulance were dispatched to the house. The personnel discovered that the young man was dead. The public prosecution and detectives are working on finding the reason behind his action.

Bedoon students

Director General of the Private Education Department Adelaziz Al-Kandari issued a decision banning re-

registration of bedoon students at the start of 2018/2019 school year if their security IDs have expired. The decision is expected to affect thousands of bedoon students because of the central department's refusal to renew their security IDs.

Retirement

Municipality Minister Hussam Al-Roumi retired 32 employees who had spent 30 years and above in service to allow youth to perform supervisory jobs as per a Cabinet decision.

Leadership jobs

Oil and Electricity and Water Minister Bakheet Al-Rasheedi said the adoption of a system to preserve the advantages of those occupying leadership jobs in the oil sector, whom the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) wishes to retain for a further period, is within the authorities of the KPC board of directors, and that no decision was made by the Supreme Petroleum Council in this regard.



KUWAIT: The scene after a fire was put out at a Sabahiya house yesterday.

Fireman hurt in Sabahiya house blaze

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Firemen put out a fire in a Sabahiya house yesterday. Mangaf and Fahaheel centers responded and found out that the fire was in the basement of a three-storey building. Residents were evacuated and the fire was put out. A fireman was wounded in his hand and he had to be taken to hospital for treatment.

Swindler caught

The juvenile protection department of the criminal detectives arrested a citizen accused of several swindling cases and sentenced to six months in jail. Detectives learned that the suspect used forged seals of government departments and forged IDs to commit his crimes. The suspect was arrested and KD 143,000 in cash were found with him, along with forged cheques, printers, scanners and laminators. He was sent to concerned



Items found with a suspect arrested on forgery charges yesterday.

Municipality campaign

The public cleanliness and road occupancy team at Mubarak Al-Kabeer Municipality confiscated and destroyed 50 kg of watermelons and 12 kg of cantaloupes, removed two abandoned cars and replaced 15 dumpsters.



KUWAIT: Kuwait National Guards Undersecretary Lieutenant General Hashim Abdul Razzaq Al-Refaie recently received a delegation from UAE's Armed Forces College of Command and Staff headed by Deputy Commander Brigadier Sultan Muftah Sultan. Both sides discussed means of boosting bilateral relations.

15% power from renewable energy by 2030: Minister

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Housing Welfare is working hard to ensure that 15 percent of Kuwait's local power demand is met through renewable energy sources by 2030, a senior official said yesterday. The plans, which have been set in motion since 2017, are part of the New Vision 2035, a set of goals proposed by His Highness the Amir aimed at sustainability and diversification away from oil dependence, State Minister for Housing and Services Jenan Boushehri said.

The state body responsible for providing subsidized housing to nationals is overseeing the construction of its first 'smart home' at the newly-developed Jaber Al-Ahmad Residential City - a project that is being undertaken by several local firms. If found to be successful, the structure, currently in its experimen-



Minister for Housing and Services Jenan Boushehri

tation and research phase, will be applied to others commissioned by the state body, she told a local forum on sustainable development. The eventual housing units will limit electricity consumption and save public funds through a shift to wind and solar-powered generators, said the minister. The structure's trial and error period will continue until the authority reaches an "ideal result," she explained. — KUNA

Kuwait, Ukraine introduce e-visa system

KUWAIT: Kuwait and Ukraine have started implementing a mutual e-visa system to be issued online or upon arrival at the airport, a Kuwaiti diplomat said yesterday. The initiative is based on

a reciprocal basis, Assistant Foreign Minister for European Affairs Waleed Al-Khubaizi said against the backdrop of the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two nations. He cited Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko's recent visit to Kuwait, which resulted in a number of deals signed, including the aforementioned e-visa system. The Kuwaiti diplomat spoke highly of his country's ties with the eastern European nation, saying that tremendous progress has been made in recent years. — KUNA

National company to help achieve food security

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs and Labor and Minister of State for Economic Affairs Hind Al-Sabeeh said that the ministry is studying a proposal made by the co-ops union to establish a state-owned company to supply all co-ops with fruits and vegetables. "If the proposal proves vital to achieve food security and provide consumers with reasonably priced goods, it will be put into practice," she stressed. Speaking on the sidelines of a ceremony held to sign an agreement of Kuwait Center for Students Cooperative programs, which was attended by her undersecretary Saad Al-Kharraz, Ministry of Education (MoE) Undersecretary Hailtham Al-Athari, Environment Public Authority (EPA) Director Sheikh Abdullah Al-Ahmed and MILSET deputy chairman Adnan Al-Mair, Sabeeh expressed happiness to take part in the event. She added that after the cooperative national projects committee succeeded in several projects, including health and disability projects funded by co-ops, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MSAL) is now starting to cooperate with MoE in a project that will help students spend their free time usefully. Sabeeh added that the project's total cost will be KD 2.35 million and that it will be executed within 24 months.



Hind Al-Sabeeh

Kharraz said the center aims at spreading culture and science as well as holding student forums and activities in collaboration with similar Arab and international centers. He added that the project will annually serve around 28,500 students and that it will be built near the Jahra Nature Reserve. Sheikh Abdullah expressed joy over signing the project's agreement, since it aims at protecting the youth and helping them spend their free time usefully. Athari said the center will be an edutainment one where students will be able to spend useful educational and recreational time.

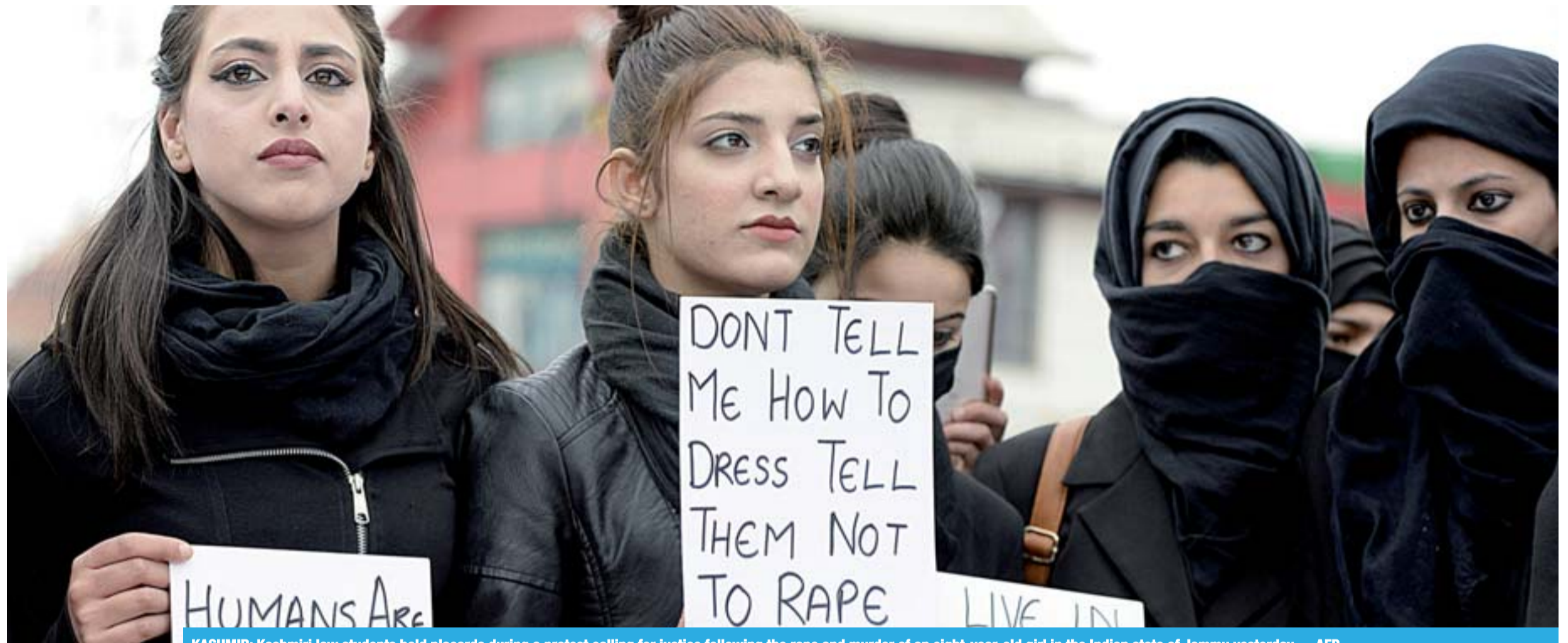
Prostate diseases

Urinary tract surgery consultant and the head of the urinary tract unit at Jaber Hospital for armed forces Dr Mohammed Al-Ghanem warned of prostate enlargement resulting from patients' negligence of periodic checkups, taking medications or postponing urgently needed surgeries. Ghanem added that prostate diseases common in Kuwait included inflammations, which is more common amongst men aged 20 to 40, and prostate enlargement, which is more common amongst men aged over 55.



Election fever hits Lebanon

Finance bureaucrat, governor quit as sex scandals hit Japan



KASHMIR: Kashmiri law students hold placards during a protest calling for justice following the rape and murder of an eight-year-old girl in the Indian state of Jammu yesterday. —AFP

Muslims flee village at the centre of rape crisis

Indian PM confronted by angry protests in London

RASANA: There are no Muslims left in the village of Rasana, which has become a symbol of India's rape crisis after the brutal murder of an eight-year-old Muslim girl blamed on Hindu men. Police say the girl was raped and killed as part of an attempt by some of the village's majority Hindus to evict Bakarwal Muslim nomads, who graze their cattle in the hills in the summer months. It seems to have worked: the girl's family has headed for the Kashmir hills under police protection. Other Muslim families in the community of around 100 people all left after the rape in January. At the empty home of the dead girl's family, five armed police kept guard half asleep in chairs outside. Police say the child was drugged, held captive in a Hindu temple for five days, and repeatedly raped before being beaten to death.

Her anonymous grave in orange earth partially covered by weeds is in a nearby village in Kathua district, about 60 kilometers from the region's main city Jammu. Media reports said Hindus in Rasana refused to allow the girl to be buried there. Jammu and Kashmir is India's only Muslim-majority state, but the Jammu region in the south is dominated by Hindus. Hindus and Muslims had lived together relatively peacefully in Rasana until the killing, though each side had made sporadic police complaints about the other, according to official documents.

The rape went virtually unnoticed in India until Hindu lawyers staged protests outside a Jammu court last week trying to stop police registering the charge sheet. Hindu right-wing groups say the investigation is biased. The release of horrific details of the murder of the girl, whose identity cannot be disclosed by law, made national headlines and sparked protests against the lack of action on sexual violence in India. The eruption of anger has reminded many of

the outrage and demonstrations triggered by the fatal gang-rape of a Delhi student on a bus in 2012 that also made headlines around the world.

'Sick mentality'

In Rasana, the village's few remaining inhabitants are reluctant to speak to outsiders. "Since all this happened, the village has emptied," according to 39-year-old Yash Paul Sharma, a rare resident willing to talk. He said Rasana had gone through a "nightmare" as the place of the killing and the intense scrutiny it has faced since.

The main accused in the case is Sanji Ram, a leader of the rustic pink temple in Rasana where the girl was allegedly held captive. A minor and a local police constable are among those charged with the killing, while three police officials have been charged with accepting bribes to cover up the case. Outside the temple, a group of six Muslims had driven six hours from Punjab state in an effort to donate money to the girl's family. The killing reflects the hostility encouraged by the Hindu nationalist government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, said Mubeen Farooqi, head of the group. "But now India's mind is changing with this episode and everyone stands against this sick mentality," he said.



Indian court fines media for naming rape victim

Modi arrived for talks with Prime Minister Theresa May. Sexual violence against women is a highly charged political issue in India, where protests regularly erupt about entrenched violence against women and the failure to protect them. "The Indian government are doing nothing, and you feel sorry for the families because of the total injustice of it all," said Navindra Singh, an Indian-born lawyer who lives in

Modi confronted

Meanwhile, hundreds of noisy protesters greeted Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi when he arrived in London yesterday, demonstrating over a rising tide of sexual violence at home including two particularly brutal rapes. Holding placards reading "Modi go home" and "we stand against Modi's agenda of hate and greed," they gathered outside Downing Street and parliament as

Britain. "He has been in power for four years now and there has been no policy change to help protect women and children." Protests have erupted across India after the latest rape cases were reported. Police officers and a politician are under investigation in two of the unrelated cases. Nearly 40 percent of India's rape victims are children and the 40,000 reported rapes in 2016 marked a 60 percent increase over the level in 2012. But women's rights groups say the figures are still gross underestimates.

Naming rape victim

In another development, an Indian court yesterday ordered 12 media companies to pay \$15,000 each to a compensation fund for victims of sexual violence after they published the name of an eight-year-old girl who was gang raped and murdered. Indian law prohibits the naming of rape victims, even after they have died, because of the stigma attached to the crime. The New Delhi High Court ordered each firm to pay one million rupees within a week to be used for a compensation scheme for sexual assault victims. The law provides for a jail term of two years along with a fine in case of violations.

The name of the child, who was killed in Jammu and Kashmir state and has since become the focus of national protests over rape cases in India, was used by several media outlets before a court ordered a clampdown last Friday. Lawyers for the media firms told the court the mistake happened due to their ignorance of the law and a misconception that they could name her as she was dead. Press Trust of India reported. The girl, who belonged to a Muslim nomadic community, was kidnapped, drugged and raped over five days at a Hindu temple before being bludgeoned to death in January. —Agencies

Barbara Bush: America's 'First grandmother'

WASHINGTON: Barbara Bush cast herself as an enthralled spectator of her husband's rise to the presidency, but once in the White House, it was America's "First Grandmother" who stole the public's heart. White haired and matronly, Bush, who died Tuesday at the age of 92, was decidedly unfashionable, her signature large pearls notwithstanding. But she honed that staid image shrewdly during George HW Bush's tenure in Washington, and reveled in it again when their son George W won the White House. After leaving Washington she emerged as the matriarch of a hyper-powerful American clan.

"She's an enforcer," granddaughter Jenna Bush Hager said only Monday. But even as the United States grew increasingly polarized, Barbara Bush commanded affection across the political spectrum. Her 73-year marriage to George, the longest of any US presidential couple, was one of the great love affairs in American public life. When Barbara Bush had open-heart surgery in 2009, her husband said he was a "nervous wreck." After she regained consciousness, in poignant comments that highlighted their dedication to one another, he choked back tears telling reporters "it was just a reunion of two people who love each other."

"She's in command-she's in control of our whole family," Bush said. While her motherliness was genuine-her five children warmly attuned to that-the first lady had a sharp tongue and a steely side which surfaced in her fierce loyalty to her husband. Among the better-known "Barbara barbs" was one thrown when Bush described her husband's 1984 rival for the vice presidency, Geraldine Ferraro, as something that "rhymes with rich." Bush graciously apologized later, polishing her credentials as the consummate political wife.

'Enough Bushes'

In that role, Bush propelled her husband though his two terms as a US congressman, to his posts as ambassador to China and head of the CIA, his eight years as Ronald Reagan's vice president and then

four as his successor. But after serving her role as wife and mother to two presidents, Bush flinched at the prospect of a third, son Jeb Bush, running for the White House in 2016.

"There are other people out there that are very qualified," she said. "We've had enough Bushes." Barbara Pierce was born on June 8, 1925 in Rye, an affluent New York suburb, one of four children in a privileged family whose lineage included US president Franklin Pierce. She idolized her father, president of the McCall's publishing company, but admitted in her memoirs she was never close to her society mother who died in an auto accident in 1949.

George Bush spotted his prospective bride when Barbara was 16 at a dance while both attended exclusive East Coast boarding schools. They married three years later in 1945, while he was on leave from wartime service. "I married the first man I ever kissed," she was often quoted as saying. Bush attended Smith College, but left after only a year and happily wrapped herself in her husband and family. Though she vehemently defended the decision throughout her public life, she once admitted that at a rare low point in the 1970s, she had second thoughts. "Suddenly, women's lib had made me feel that my life had been wasted," she said in 1989.

'Extraordinary family'

But Bush's 1994 "A Memoir" generally describes a life of smooth sailing for the blue-blooded couple despite multiple moves beginning in 1948, when they headed west to make their fortune in the oil business. The darkest hour came in 1953, when Bush's infant daughter died of leukemia after seven harrowing months which were said to have caused her hair to turn white in her early thirties. Their public life began when George Bush was elected to the US House of Representatives in 1966 and then was appointed UN ambassador when he lost his seat in 1971. Barbara contentedly entertained dignitaries and did charitable work-always for non-controversial causes-but said she was happiest in 1974 when her husband was head of the liaison office in China.

Upon their return to Washington, George Bush took over as CIA chief, and the transition to that confidential post was difficult for his wife, who was used to sharing every aspect of her husband's career. In her ceremonial White House role, Barbara



Former US first lady Barbara Bush

Bush contrasted sharply with that of her chilly fashion-plate predecessor, Nancy Reagan, and career woman successor Hillary Clinton. Clinton thanked Bush for the "many kindnesses" shown to her and her family. "Thinking about Barbara Bush's legacy of service to our country and the extraordinary family she raised," Clinton tweeted.

Bush attributed her phenomenal popularity to having kept in her place. "It was because I threatened no one. I was old, white-headed and large," she said in 1990, adding the key element: "I stayed out of my husband's affairs." Bush hinted at a pro-choice stand while her husband sided with abortion foes, and she once let it slip that semi-automatic weapons should be outlawed while he opposed gun control. But she mostly kept her views to herself. She appeared to blossom in her return to private life, enjoying her brood of grandchildren and her summers at their vacation home in Maine. For the past 25 years she was deeply involved in her charitable Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy, which raised millions to support literacy programs nationwide. —AFP

21 dead; truck en route to wedding crashes in India



SIDHI: Indian accident survivors receive medical care at Sidhi's Civil hospital yesterday, after a truck carrying wedding revelers plunged, when crossing Jogdha bridge over Son river. —AFP

NEW DELHI: At least 21 revelers were killed en route to a wedding when their truck flew off a bridge, police said yesterday, the latest horrific crash on India's accident-prone roads. The truck, carrying more than 40 passengers, smashed through a protective railing in central Madhya Pradesh state late Tuesday and plunged nearly 20 meters to a dry riverbed below. Police in Sidhi district said 21 people were injured, most of them critically, in the accident some 560 kilometers (350 miles) from the state capital Bhopal. "Several teams of police and emergency services were rushed to rescue the injured. Most of the injured were in a critical condition," local police officer Vishal Sharma said. The immediate cause of the accident was unknown but Sharma said the driver was likely speeding.

India has some of the world's deadliest roads with more than 200,000 fatalities annually, according to the World Health Organization. Last week, at least 30 people, including 27 children, were killed in northern Himachal Pradesh state when a school bus plunged off a cliff. The next day, 18 people were killed when a truck packed with laborers overturned on a highway in western India. Most accidents are blamed on poor roads, badly-maintained vehicles and reckless driving. Commercial drivers are largely unregulated, meaning many work long hours through the night, raising the danger of them falling asleep at the wheel, campaigners say. —AFP

International

Iraq's courts sentence more than 300 to death for IS links

103 foreign nationals condemned to death

BAGHDAD: Iraqi courts have sentenced to death a total of more than 300 people, including dozens of foreigners, for belonging to the Islamic State group, judicial sources said yesterday. The suspects are being tried by two courts, one near the former jihadist stronghold of Mosul in northern Iraq and another in Baghdad which is dealing notably with foreigners and women. Since January in the capital, 103 foreign nationals have been condemned to death—including six Turks sentenced yesterday—and 185 to life in prison, according to a judicial source. Most of the women sentenced were from Turkey and republics of the former Soviet Union.

In January, an Iraqi court condemned a German woman to death after finding her guilty of belonging to IS while on Tuesday a French woman was sentenced to life in prison. At the court in Tel Keif near Mosul, 212 people have been sentenced to death, 150 to life in prison and 341 to other jails terms, Supreme Judicial Council spokesman Abdel Sattar Bayraqdar said in a statement. "It has been proven that they carried out criminal actions at public hearings conducted in accordance with the law during which the convicts' rights were guaranteed," he said. Iraq declared victory in December against IS—also known as ISIS—which at one point controlled a third of the country.

On Monday the justice ministry said 11 people convicted of terrorism-related charges had been executed in Iraq, which according to New York-based Human Rights Watch is the world's number four executioner. "These executions follow rushed trials of ISIS suspects which are riddled with due process violations, including convictions based solely

on confessions which are sometimes extracted by torture," said HRW senior Iraq researcher Belkis Wille. "Iraq's mishandling of the ISIS trials not only denies victims real justice, but also risks sending innocent Iraqis to their deaths."

American 'IS fighter'

Meanwhile, US government intends to hand over to a third country an American citizen captured in Syria allegedly fighting for the Islamic State group, rather than present him to the US justice system, a court filing showed Tuesday. In the Trump administration's first decision on how to deal with citizens caught fighting for a designated terror group, the US military plans to turn over the man, a dual US-Saudi citizen born in the United States and now held in Iraq, to an unnamed country as early as late Thursday.

The American Civil Liberties Union, which has been representing the man, known in court documents only as "John Doe", said it plans to ask the court to block the transfer, arguing that he has not been charged with a crime and has the right to due process under US laws. "The Trump administration has been detaining this American citizen unlawfully for more than seven months, and forcibly rendering him to another country would be an unconscionable violation of his constitutional rights," said ACLU attorney Jonathan Hafetz. "He should either be charged or freed, not handed over to an unnamed foreign government."

The notice was made in a sealed two-page filing to the federal district court in Washington DC late Monday. A heavily redacted version of the filing was released

US plans to send American 'IS fighter' to third country



BAGHDAD: Members of the Russian diplomatic corps attend the trial of two Russian nationals at the Central penal Court in Baghdad. Two Russian women were sentenced to life in prison for belonging to the Islamic State group - the latest in a series of court judgments against jihadists. —AFP

Tuesday, saying the government had bowed to the court's requirement that it give a 72 hour notification before it intends to transfer the detainee. The country he will be transferred to was blacked out in the public document. The government has earlier said it has two countries he could be sent to: one is widely presumed to be Saudi Arabia, the second could be Iraq.

The man is the only known US citizen held as an alleged enemy combatant from the battlefields of Iraq and Syria. On September 14 the Pentagon confirmed that they were holding him, saying he had been fighting for

the Islamic State group and surrendered to the allied Syrian Democratic Forces in Syria days earlier. He was moved to Iraq where he has been interrogated by military and FBI investigators. The International Committee of the Red Cross was given access to him, and the ACLU sued to be able to represent him. In subsequent discussions with him, the ACLU says he asserted his habeas corpus rights to be charged under US law or be freed. It's not clear why the government refuses to hand him over to the US justice system, as other Americans accused of terrorism have been. —Agencies

Israel marks 70 years as nation as new and old challenges lurk

JERUSALEM: Israel readied to mark 70 years since the country's creation yesterday while celebrating its improbable economic success and military prowess, but facing a range of political and security challenges. The anniversary of the proclamation of the state of Israel by founding father David Ben-Gurion began at sundown yesterday under the Hebrew calendar, but falls on May 14 according to the Western calendar.

The country came to a halt on Tuesday evening to begin marking Memorial Day, dedicated to its fallen soldiers and those killed in attacks, while celebrations will begin later as what Israelis call Independence Day kicks off. It enters the holiday with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu boosting his warnings over Iran, particularly related to its presence in neighboring Syria. Netanyahu has said Israel cannot accept its main enemy Iran entrenching itself militarily in the war-torn country, where Tehran is backing President Bashar Al-Assad's regime.

An air strike attributed to Israel on April 9 at Syria's T-4 airbase left 14 people dead, including seven Iranian personnel. Ali Akbar Velayati, foreign policy advisor to Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, threatened a response. Israel has refused to confirm or deny the strike, though satellite photographs were distributed this week through Israeli media purporting to show Iranian drones at airfields in Syria. Some Israeli analysts interpreted the move as a message to Iran that Israel could strike its positions if it carries out an attack against the Jewish state. Israel also alleges that a drone which penetrated its airspace in February was sent by Iran "armed with explosives and was tasked to attack."

It was shot down by an Israeli helicopter, and Israel in retaliation attacked what it said were the drone's Iranian



JERUSALEM: Jews stand on the Mount of Olives looking out over Jerusalem's Old City and the Dome of the Rock as they observe two minutes of silence to mark Remembrance Day which commemorates Israel's fallen soldiers yesterday. —AFP

control systems in Syria. "The Israeli defense establishment understands that the (Iranian) Revolutionary Guard is most likely to be the designated unit that will try to wage an attack against Israel," an Israeli security source said this week, declining to comment further. Israel has also reduced its air force's participation in an exercise in the United States next month, with army radio reporting the decision was due to the tensions.

Gaza protests

But beyond its concerns over Iran, Israel is also facing

protests and clashes along its border with the Gaza Strip that have led to intense scrutiny of its open-fire rules. Israeli forces have killed 34 Palestinians and wounded hundreds of others since the protests began on March 30. There have been no Israeli casualties. Tens of thousands have taken part in the main protests, but a smaller number of Gazans have approached the border fence, throwing stones and rolling burning tyres at Israeli forces. Israel says firebombs and explosive devices have also been used. It has pledged to stop infiltrations, attacks and damage to the fence, and alleges there have been attempts at all three. —AFP

Tehran bans state bodies from using Telegram app

LONDON: Iran banned government bodies yesterday from using the popular Telegram instant messaging app as Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's office said his account would shut down to protect national security, Iranian media reported. ISNA news agency did not give a reason for the government ban on the service which lets people send encrypted messages and has an estimated 40 million users in the Islamic Republic. The order came days after Russia - Iran's ally in the Syrian war - started blocking the app in its territory following the company's repeated refusal to give Russian state security services access to users' secret messages.

Iran's government banned "all state bodies from using the foreign messaging app," according to ISNA. Khamenei stopped using Telegram yesterday "in line with safeguarding national interests and removing the monopoly of the Telegram messaging app," state media reported. The Supreme Leader has a strong presence on social media, even on Twitter and Facebook that are blocked in Iran. His office updates the accounts with photos and his latest speeches. Telegram, set up by a Russian entrepreneur and ranked the world's ninth most popular mobile messaging app, has been widely used by Iranian state media, politicians and companies.

A judicial official said this week that Telegram and other foreign messaging services could only operate in Iran if they got permission from the government and saved users' data inside the country. Iran temporarily blocked the service in January as security forces sought to contain anti-government protests in more than 80 cities. Many Iranians kept accessing Telegram then, using virtual private networks (VPNs) and other tools to bypass government filtering. —Reuters

Election fever hits Lebanon

BEIRUT: As its first parliamentary vote in nearly a decade approaches, Lebanon has been swept into campaign fever: posters on every corner, televised debates, and neighbors bickering over new electoral procedures. Stakes are high in the long-awaited May 6 poll, the first test of Lebanon's 2017 voting law, that will carve out the country's political and economic trajectory for years to come. Voters and candidates alike are eager for polling to start, nearly 10 years after the last parliamentary elections in June 2009.

The 128 lawmakers elected back then have extended their mandate three times, citing potential spillover from the war in neighboring Syria and an unsatisfactory voting law. But after years of deadlock, Lebanon's politicians agreed to elect a president, form a government and move towards a complex new ballot system, paving the way for next month's historic vote. "It's a new electoral experience for Lebanon," said Imad Salamey, a professor of political science at Beirut's Lebanese American University.

The next parliament will select Lebanon's future prime minister and legislate on major social and economic issues, while attempting to keep sectarian tensions in check. "The stakes in this election are quite high due to the delicate balance of power between the different sectarian groups in the country," Salamey said. The country of just over four million is gov-

erned by a power-sharing agreement that leaves little to chance, with parliament equally divided between Muslims and Christians then further split among different sects.

Lebanon 'needs change'

But the new electoral system, the frustration of young voters and the candidacy of scores of independents have sparked hope for something different. "This country needs a change. I've been complaining about it for years, so not doing anything is not a solution," said Ingrid Hag, 25. The communications consultant, who will be casting her ballot for the first time, said she had yet to decide how she will vote, but wants a government that cares about environmental issues, women's rights and reliable public services.

Across the country, 597 candidates running on 77 lists have launched their campaigns with Oscars-style ceremonies and huge billboards dominating highways. In every neighborhood, images of the incumbent political elite, like Prime Minister Saad Hariri, stare down first-time hopefuls. Television channels are offering candidates pricey media packages for up to \$6,000 per minute of airtime and have launched slick shows to explain the new ballot-casting process. In the past, voters could individually pick candidates for each seat in their district. Under the new law, they choose among the lists, but can also cast an extra preferential vote for a specific candidate. The law replaces a majoritarian system with a proportional one and allows Lebanese expatriates to vote abroad for the first time—some 82,000 have registered to do so.



BEIRUT: An employee of the electoral monitoring committee watches a televised speech of a Lebanese parliamentary candidate and records the time of his speech at the headquarters of the committee in Beirut. —AFP

'Pragmatic' list-making

The new list system has further ruptured Lebanon's bipolar political class, long split between the pro-Iran March 8 and pro-Saudi March 14 alliances. Now parties are being "pragmatic," said Salamey, reaching across the aisle to form mutually-beneficial electoral blocs in some districts whilst opposing each other elsewhere.

"It's based on each candidate, how many votes he or she can get to the list and accordingly alliances are formulated," he said. The only party not to ally with rivals is the powerful Tehran-backed Hezbollah, popular across Lebanon's south and centre but considered a "terror" group by the US.

"From a western perspective, there is a concern that Hezbollah may sweep electoral seats and turn the balance in its favor, making any government to be formed after the election a 'Hezbollah' government," said Salamey. But the new law has also prompted candidates outside Lebanon's traditional political class to join forces, and attracted a record number of women—including writer and activist Joumana Haddad. Running on the Libaladi (For My Country) list, Haddad pledges to end religion's influence on issues like marriage and inheritance. "With the civil status law, there will be more justice, less sectarianism and more equality," she told AFP. —AFP

Armenia protesters pile pressure on PM

YEREVAN: Thousands of people rallied in Armenia's capital yesterday to protest the election of former president Serzh Sargsian as prime minister, viewed by the opposition as a power grab. Shouting "Armenia without Serzh", protesters marched through central Yerevan and staged rallies across the city in opposition to the Kremlin-backed Sargsian who was on Tuesday elected to the post of prime minister after a decade serving as president.

During a rally outside Yerevan State University opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan called on students to join the protests in the impoverished ex-Soviet nation. "You are young people, you are not prisoners, go out and join us!" he said, calling for a new major rally yesterday evening. Earlier in the day protesters sought to block one of Yerevan's major thoroughfares and briefly massed outside Sargsian's residence. "People are so angry, they can no longer stand Sargsian's rule," a 26-year-old protester who only released his first name, Atom said.

"The youth must stand up against Sargsian's regime." Authorities said that more than 70 demonstrators were detained and urged the protesters to disperse. "We call on protest organizers to stop illegal actions," the interior ministry said in a statement. Protesters have held rallies over recent days to denounce a change in the political system that they say is a bid to ensure Sargsian, 63, can remain in power under a new parliamentary system of government. Constitutional amendments approved in 2015 has transferred governing powers from the presidency to the premier. —AFP

International

With Jews largely gone from Iraq, memories survive in Israel

Some 120,000 Iraqi Jews airlifted to Israel in the 1950s

BAGHDAD: Behind the high concrete walls of Baghdad's Jewish cemetery, Violette Saul lies at rest under a weathered and cracked tombstone, one of the last memorials to an ancient community that is now all but extinct. The Iraqi nurse was buried a decade ago alongside thousands of others in the sands of a country where her community thrived for more than 2,500 years. Drive west to the shores of the Mediterranean - just a day's journey geographically but a world away politically - and there is a lament inscribed at the entrance to the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Centre in Israel - "The Jewish community in Iraq is no more".

It is no accident that such a somber epitaph to Iraq's Jews should be found in Israel, where tens of thousands of them fled after 1948 amid the violent spasms that accompanied the birth of that state. That transplanting of an educated, vibrant and creative community unquestionably enriched Israel, which celebrates its 70th anniversary on Wednesday. But it also denuded Iraq of a minority that had long contributed to its political, economic and cultural identity.

In 1947, a year before Israel's birth, Iraq's Jewish community numbered around 150,000. Now their numbers are in single figures. And they are missed. Ziyad Al-Bayati, an Iraqi Muslim who looks after the rarely visited graveyard near the East Baghdad neighborhood Sadr City, said his father used to reminisce about an Iraq in which ethnic communities lived together. It was a time, Bayati said, that predated the turmoil around Israel's creation, the wars of later years, and the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein and unleashed years of sectarian bloodshed.

"My father used to say it was the good times when people lived peacefully side by side," said Bayati, 48. "There is no concern shown for the cemetery, (even if) the culture of people here is to respect the dead and their graves." The chronology of Jews in Iraq stretches back some 4,000 years to the biblical patriarch Abraham of Ur, and to the Babylonian monarch Nebuchadnezzar, who sent Jews into exile there more than 2,500 years ago. Key figures in that story are buried in the Baghdad cemetery, including Sassoon Effendi Eskell, Iraq's first finance minister.

Old land to new land

The creation of Israel in 1948 and its successive defeats of Arab armies caused further bursts of popular anger and violence against Jews, an episode of history that is written in graves in the cemetery, where five Iraqi Jews accused of spying for Israel now lie side by side. Between 1950 and 1952 about 125,000 Iraqi Jews were airlifted to Israel. Each came with one suitcase, and all had to give up their Iraqi citizenship. For one of them, Aharon Ben Hur, memories of Iraq are bitter. Now 84 and the owner of two falafel restaurants in Tel Aviv, he recalled the 1941 Farhud pogrom that killed more than 180 Jews during the

Jewish festival of Shavuot. His father and younger brother were among them. "They were thrown from the second floor. My father died ten days later and the boy almost immediately. He held him in his hands, and they threw them down 100 stairs. I was saved," Ben Hur said.

He left early, in 1951. Some hung on much longer. Emad Levy, 52, was the last of Baghdad's Jews to immigrate to Israel, in 2010. "We kept our tradition, the holidays, the synagogue," he told Reuters during the build-up to Israel's Independence Day. "But it's not the joy you feel here during a holiday, walking down the street where most people are Jewish." Levy is among perhaps 600,000 Israelis, out of a population of some 8.8 million, who can claim a measure of Iraqi ancestry, according to the heritage centre in the town of Or Yehuda near Tel Aviv.

Inside a building built in the style of a traditional two-storey Jewish home in Baghdad, there are displays of religious and cultural artefacts of Jewish life in Iraq through the centuries. Visitors walk through the reconstructed crooked alleys of Baghdad's Jewish quarter and view a scaled-down replica of the city's Great Synagogue. Exhibits at the museum depict a hard landing for the Iraqi immigrants in the early years of Israel,

where Ashkenazim, or Jews of European descent, were the ruling elite and Sephardim, Jews with roots in the Middle East, faced prejudice.

One photo shows Iraqi newcomers being sprayed with DDT pesticide. A tent has been erected on the floor, showing how the immigrants were initially housed. But it also records how Iraqi Jews have gone on to become generals in the Israeli military, cabinet ministers, legislators, business executives, entertainers and celebrated writers. Few expect ever to go back, amid the violent turmoil that still envelops Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and other countries which once had thriving Jewish communities. Now aged 90, Zevulun Hareli joined a Jewish self-defence underground movement in Iraq, and recalls the fate of some of his fellow Zionists in 1948. "They were children, 14 or 15. They were tortured. They were hanged. Their genitals were burned," said Hareli, who immigrated to Israel in 1949. "Iraq said Zionism is a crime."

Some still harbor more positive sentiments. Edwin Shuker, who was born in Iraq, has made several visits to the Baghdad cemetery in recent years, sometimes bringing people who want to say Kaddish - the Jewish prayer for the dead - over the graves. He says he is welcomed by Iraqis when he goes back, and encounters nostalgia for a time when Iraq included a "mosaic" of minorities. "No-one is going to move back," concedes Shuker, 62, who had to escape Iraq in 1971. "However there are many who would be very receptive to visiting their shrines and where their ancestors are buried. The Iraqi Jewish community is the most ardent Jewish community, probably anywhere, that is so attached to its birthplace, because of its history." —Reuters



Babylonian past recreated in heritage centre in Israel

two-storey Jewish home in Baghdad, there are displays of religious and cultural artefacts of Jewish life in Iraq through the centuries. Visitors walk through the reconstructed crooked alleys of Baghdad's Jewish quarter and view a scaled-down replica of the city's Great Synagogue. Exhibits at the museum depict a hard landing for the Iraqi immigrants in the early years of Israel,

News in brief

Migrants face rape, torture

DUBAI: Men, women and children fleeing the Horn of Africa have faced torture and sexual violence in conflict-ravaged Yemen at the hands of government officials, Human Rights Watch said yesterday. The watchdog said researchers interviewed eight migrants at a detention facility in the southern city of Aden and Yemeni government officials. The United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) published a parallel report yesterday corroborating the findings and calling for "unhindered access" to detainees. Last year, more than 87,000 people arrived in Yemen from the Horn of Africa, according to UNHCR. Human Rights Watch said migrants who end up in Aden's Buraika detention facility - in use since early 2017 - have faced beatings with steel bars, sexual violence and dire sanitary conditions. Detainees, notably boys, were raped by guards, according to the report. —AFP

Egypt kills jihadist leader

CAIRO: Egypt's military said yesterday it had killed a jihadist leader in the Sinai Peninsula, where the Islamic State group is carrying out an insurgency. During an operation in mountainous areas, Egyptian forces "killed Nasser Abu Zaql, the central Sinai commander of the terrorist group, after significant exchanges of fire," the army said in a statement. The military said it found a rifle, two grenades and a large quantity of ammunition with the slain insurgent leader. Egypt's army launched a major offensive against the jihadists on February 9 in the northern Sinai Peninsula, in an attempt to neutralize a local branch of IS. More than 100 of the rebels and at least 30 government troops have been killed since the operation, dubbed "Sinai 2018," was launched, according to official figures. —AFP

'Porn star conning media'

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump lashed out yesterday at porn star Stormy Daniels in his first substantive comments over the scandal surrounding the woman who says she slept with him and was paid to keep quiet. A day after Daniels released an artist's sketch of a man she said threatened her years ago in a Las Vegas parking lot and told her not to talk about the alleged affair, Trump tweeted: "A sketch years later about a nonexistent man." He added: "A total con job, playing the Fake News Media for Fools (but they know it!)." Daniels, 39, and her lawyer, Michael Avenatti, also offered a \$100,000 reward for any information about the unidentified man. Daniels, in an interview on ABC's "The View," said she is pursuing legal action against the president because she is tired of being "bullied." —AFP

Zimbabwe sacks nurses

HARARE: Zimbabwe has fired all nurses who went on strike to demand higher salaries, in a hardline response by the country's new leadership to growing labor unrest. Several thousand nurses were sacked in a terse statement issued on Tuesday evening by Vice President Constantino Chiwenga, who accused the strikers of being "politically motivated". Patients were turned away from major hospitals after the nurses began their industrial action on Monday, shortly after doctors ended their own weeks-long strike earlier in the month. "Government has decided in the interest of patients and of saving lives to discharge all the striking nurses with immediate effect," Chiwenga said in a statement. He said unemployed and retired nurses would be hired to replace those fired. Chiwenga was the military general who led the ousting of Robert Mugabe in November when the army briefly took control and ushered Emmerson Mnangagwa into the presidency. —AFP

Erdogan calls snap elections June 24

ANKARA: President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday called snap elections in Turkey for June 24, bringing the polls forward by over a year-and-a-half to sharply accelerate the transition to a new presidential system. Erdogan's announcement upended the political timetable in Turkey, which had been set to vote in simultaneous presidential and parliamentary elections on November 3, 2019.

The elections are especially significant as afterwards a new executive presidency-agreed in a 2017 referendum and denounced by critics as giving the president authoritarian powers-will come into force. The new timetable means that Turkey will also vote in the polls under the state of emergency imposed since the July 15, 2016 failed coup aimed at ousting Erdogan. The authorities agreed this week the emergency should stay in place for another three months.

Quiet no more, French village becomes centre of anti-nuclear protest

BURE: The 82 residents of the French village of Bure lived a quiet life until the government began testing the feasibility of storing nuclear waste there. Now Bure is rocked by protests as a final decision on the project looms. For the past 20 years, French nuclear waste agency Andra has tested the stability of the clay of the northeastern village to see if it could hold radioactive waste for hundreds of thousands of years. Andra is preparing a formal request for next year to build the 25 billion euro (\$31 billion) facility to hold waste from the reactors of state-owned utility EDF.

French nuclear regulator ASN has already said the plan is sound and deep geological storage is the safest way to protect future generations from radioactive waste. But a police van at the main square is testimony to rising tensions and demonstrations that have at times blocked the area where Andra wants to dig. "Life will become unbearable here with the nuclear waste

Woman killed after catastrophic engine failure on NY flight

PHILADELPHIA: Catastrophic engine failure on a Southwest Airlines flight from New York to Dallas killed a mother-of-two and forced an emergency landing Tuesday, the first fatal incident in US commercial aviation for nearly a decade. The Boeing 737-700 took off without incident but minutes into the flight, passengers heard an explosion in the left engine, which sent shrapnel flying through the window, shattering the glass and leading oxygen masks to drop, witnesses said. "We believe there were parts coming out of this engine," Robert Sumwalt, chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board, told a news conference, confirming engine failure but no fire. "There is one fatality," Sumwalt said.

'Overcome the uncertainties'

Erdogan made the announcement in an address at his presidential palace after meeting Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) chief Devlet Bahceli who the day earlier had urged early elections. "As a result of consultations with Mr Bahceli, we decided to hold elections on June 24, 2018, a Sunday," said Erdogan. Bahceli stunned Turkish political observers on Tuesday when he urged the government not to wait for November 2019 to hold the presidential and parliamentary elections, suggesting the polls be held on August 26, 2018.

But the date announced by Erdogan is even earlier and will precipitate an intense election campaign as opposition parties seek to challenge his grip. The MHP chief's intervention surprised commentators since the government led by Erdogan has repeatedly insisted there will be no early elections. Erdogan said the authorities would have preferred to "grit our teeth" and wait until November 2019 but the situation in neighboring Iraq and Syria "made it essential for Turkey to overcome the uncertainties ahead as soon as possible."

Turkey is pursuing a cross-border operation inside neighboring Syria, which has

and all the demonstrators," said Bure mayor Gerard Antoine, who breeds beef cattle. Antoine approved the installation of Andra research facilities two decades ago but said he now regrets that decision and would say no if he were asked today. Hundreds of demonstrators who built a camp nearby were kicked out by police in February but say they are there for the long run and will fight the project until the government changes its plans. "We are heading straight for ... a nuclear disaster, that's why we're against it," said Jean-Marc Fleury, a local elected official with an environmentalist party. Police are maintaining a heavy presence while protesters have regrouped in and around a house in the Bure village centre. The future Cigeo site is designed to cover an area of 600 hectares and have 250 kilometers of underground galleries where nuclear waste would be buried in huge rust-proof cylinders.

Deep burial

Andra, which carried out research work via a research laboratory 500 meters underground, wants to start work on the site in 2022 and complete it by 2030. "We're not going to do deep burial of (nuclear) waste if we had any doubt that it would leak or contaminate the environment," said Andra spokesman Mathieu Saint Louis. "The ultimate goal with an underground installation such as this one is precisely to protect ourselves from the danger of (nuclear) waste." For now, spent fuel from French nuclear reactors is stored in pools next to the reactors before it is shipped to state-



ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan gestures during a press conference at the Presidential Complex in Ankara yesterday. —AFP

owned nuclear fuel group Orano's recycling plant in La Hague, western France.



BURE: Members of a French parliamentary investigative committee on safety and security of nuclear installations visit the laboratory of a future nuclear waste burial site in Bure, eastern France. —AFP

But La Hague is not designed for long-term storage and France does not have a solution 40 years after investing heavily in nuclear energy. Other countries that use nuclear power face the same problem. The Bure site is designed so that nuclear waste could be retrieved for the first 100 years if

scientists find a better solution than burying it. Otherwise, the underground galleries will be permanently sealed with concrete. Anti-nuclear activists say deep geological storage does not offer perfect guarantees against radiation leakage in ground water. They want the waste moved to underground facilities that are just a few meters deep, to monitor it better. —Reuters



PHILADELPHIA: Photo taken from inside a Southwest airplane sitting on the runway at the Philadelphia airport shows damage to the left engine. —AFP

International

Japan finance bureaucrat, anti-nuke governor resign amid sex scandals

Latest blow for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe

TOKYO: Japan's top finance bureaucrat resigned yesterday after a weekly magazine said he had sexually harassed several female reporters, the latest blow for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe whose ratings have been hit by a series of scandals. Finance Minister Taro Aso told reporters that he had accepted Administrative Vice Finance Minister Junichi Fukuda's resignation. It is the latest in a number of headaches for Aso and Abe. A steady trickle of allegations about suspected cronyism and cover-ups has raised doubts about how long Abe can stay in power.

Fukuda denies the allegations against him but told reporters he resigned because he could not further disrupt work at the ministry. He said he still intended to sue the magazine, Shincho. "I am to blame for causing the media report about myself while the finance ministry faces a severe situation," he said. "Given that the situation after the report has made it difficult for me to fulfill my duty as administrative vice minister, I tendered my resignation to finance minister Aso just now." He added that he did not recall having the "terrible conversation" reported in the magazine.

Japan has had few reported "#MeToo" cases about sexual harassment involving public figures. Victims are often reluctant to speak out for fear of being blamed. The identity of the female reporters in Fukuda's case has not been disclosed. The Finance Ministry said in a statement on Tuesday that it would continue to investigate the allegations surrounding Fukuda through an external law firm, given that the initial internal fact-finding had been conducted by Fukuda's subordinate. It called on female reporters to come forward and

contact the law firm if they were willing to cooperate with the investigation, drawing fire from several cabinet ministers including Seiko Noda, one of only two women in the cabinet.

While Abe has made his "Womenomics" programs to mobilize women in the workforce part of his policies to boost growth, big gender gaps persist at companies and in politics. Abe is currently in the United States for talks with US President Donald Trump, and Aso is set to leave on Thursday for an international meeting of finance ministers and central bank governors in Washington DC.

Governor resigns

Meanwhile, an anti-nuclear Japanese governor stepped down yesterday after a magazine alleged he paid university students for sex, a resignation that could boost the government's plan to restart the country's mothballed reactors. Ryuichi Yoneyama was elected governor of Niigata prefecture in 2016 on a pledge to prevent the restarting of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa power station, the world's biggest nuclear plant, about 200 kilometers northwest of Tokyo. His unexpected victory, in which he narrowly beat a government-supported candidate, posed a challenge for the pro-nuclear policy of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Yoneyama, a 50-year-old unmarried doctor and lawyer, paid women in their 20s to have sex, according to the Shukan Bunshun weekly magazine. "I decided to step down to avoid further turmoil and to take responsibility for my actions," he told reporters, bowing deeply in front of the cameras. "It was hard



TOKYO: Japan's Administrative Vice Finance Minister Junichi Fukuda answers questions during a press conference at the finance ministry in Tokyo yesterday. The top bureaucrat at Japan's finance ministry quit, following allegations he sexually harassed female reporters, saying he wanted to clear his name. —AFP

Governor accused of paying university students for sex



to find someone to date... I did give gifts and money to get attention" from the women, he said. "I wasn't able to tackle the nuclear issue, which I thought was a historic mission." A 22-year-old student told the magazine he was "a good client." Prostitution is illegal in Japan but prosecution is rare. There are seven reactors across the 4.2-million-square meter Kashiwazaki-Kariwa site.

The central government can overrule a governor's opposition to restarting nuclear reactors. But Abe has promised to win approval from local communities

before approving restarts under stricter post-Fukushima safety rules. Dozens of reactors across Japan were switched off in the aftermath of the March 2011 Fukushima accident, the worst nuclear disaster in a generation, and there are seven currently operating. The catastrophe forced resource-poor Japan to turn to expensive fossil fuels to plug its energy gap. But fears about the safety of nuclear power and radiation exposure linger, challenging a push by Abe and utility companies to switch back on the country's stable of reactors. —Agencies

Germany smashes Thai 'forced prostitution' ring in 'biggest' raids

BERLIN: German federal police said they carried out the biggest raids in their history yesterday against an alleged organized crime ring suspected of trafficking hundreds of women and transsexuals from Thailand for prostitution. The federal police force said in a statement that a record 1,500 officers swooped on more than 60 brothels and flats in 12 of Germany's 16 states. Prosecutors have 56 suspects in their sights, 41 of them women.

Authorities say a "core group" of 17 suspects "smuggled Thai women and transsexuals into Germany with fraudulent" visas for the passport-free Schengen zone. Those brought to Germany "had to hand over 100 percent of their wages to the operators of the respective 'massage parlors' to pay off their smuggling fee", an extortionate sum of between 16,000 and 36,000 euros (\$20,000-45,000).

Seven of the accused, including a 59-year-old Thai woman and her 62-year-old German partner, were taken into custody on outstanding arrest warrants. Beyond human trafficking, forced prostitution, procurement and embezzlement of wages, the ringleaders also face charges of tax evasion, a spokesman for the Frankfurt prosecutor's office, Alexander Badle, told reporters. Some of the suspects could face up to 15 years in prison. Prosecutors in Frankfurt, who have been working with police on the case since February 2017, estimate that the ring drew more than one million euros in income.

Transsexual prostitutes

Interior Minister Horst Seehofer praised the operation as an "unprecedented strike against a national organized crime network". "Several hundred women and men were at the mercy of the inhumane, boundless



RASTATT: Federal police officers raid a brothel in a red-light district of Rastatt, southern Germany yesterday. The raid was part of a major action against organized crime such as human trafficking and exploitation of sex workers across the country. —AFP

greed of human smugglers for years and across borders," he said. "This unscrupulous behavior and the sexual exploitation on an abominable scale were put to an end today." Badle said the ring had "specialized" in a niche for transsexual prostitutes in Germany's vast sex industry. He said that while the Thai victims were aware that they were being taken to German brothels, they were duped about the "conditions, including the fact that they would receive virtually no remuneration."

They were brought to Europe on tourist visas that explicitly prohibited work, and spoke no German, leaving them particularly vulnerable to exploitation, Badle added. He said immigration authorities would now examine the victims' legal status to determine how long they could stay in Germany. Prostitution is legal in

Germany but heavily regulated and taxed. However a 2002 law intended to improve the legal footing for sex workers has failed to stamp out mass-scale trafficking.

Thailand has a famously permissive attitude toward the so-called third sex people or "ladyboys", but its laws still refuse to recognize their sexual identity, rooting discrimination in the bureaucracy. Sex work, drugs and stigma combine with a lack of healthcare to push many of the country's estimated 180,000 third sex people to the "social, economic and legal" margins", a 2012 study by the United Nations Development Program found. It said HIV prevalence rates among transgender people across the Asia-Pacific region could be as high as 49 percent—a rate that "far exceeds (that of) the general population". —AFP

Counseling, not crocodiles: Indonesia anti-drugs tsar launches a new strategy

JAKARTA: Indonesia's new anti-narcotics chief Heru Winarko called for an expansion of rehabilitation centers across the country yesterday, flagging a new approach in contrast to the blood-soaked war on drugs underway in its neighbor, the Philippines. More users, addicts and even minor dealers would be diverted into centers run by medical professionals and counselors rather than heading straight into an over-crowded prison system, Winarko told Reuters in an interview. "With the rehabilitation approach, we cut the demand," he said. "If there is no demand, the supply will not come or reduce."

Winarko took over as head of Indonesia's anti-narcotics agency in March, replacing Budi Waseso, a former top police officer who advocated surrounding prisons with moats filled with crocodiles and piranhas to stop drug convicts escaping. Rather than wildlife, Winarko said he planned to set up rehabilitation facilities near prisons. "It is better if there is a rehabilitation centre located close to a prison," he said, noting that a former mental hospital near a correctional facility in Bali was being converted into a centre for offenders to tackle addiction.

"When we do it like this, it will be amazing. The prison

becomes a place for guiding people." Indonesia's president, Joko Widodo, has long warned that the country was gripped by a "drugs emergency" amid assertions by officials - challenged by some experts - that there were more than 6 million users. Widodo has said drugs posed a bigger danger than Islamist militancy and he intensified a drugs war that has included the execution of drug traffickers, including some foreigners. Winarko said there needed to be rapid growth in assessment centers which determine if drug convicts would benefit from therapy rather than incarceration.

The country's 127 rehabilitation centers were inadequate for a population of 250 million, and more should be built and existing facilities better integrated, he said. David McRea, a researcher from the University of Melbourne, said Winarko's enthusiasm for rehabilitation needed to be treated cautiously. Indonesia's criminal justice system already allowed for some offenders to be rehabilitated but the option was rarely used. "For years, there's been talk in Indonesia of a shift to rehabilitate people but people are still being sentenced to prison for petty drug crimes," he said.

Killings rise

Methamphetamine, known as shabu, is the most popular drug, according to Winarko. More than two tons of methamphetamine was seized off the coast of Sumatra island in February in two separate, record busts. Law enforcement officials would maintain their "stem" approach to traffickers and their "shoot to kill" policy if suspects were armed and resisted arrest, said Winarko. But he added Indonesia would not mimic the violent policies of President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines, who was praised by his predecessor, Waseso. "We have our own standard operating procedures," he said.



SOUTH TANGERANG: Indonesian police destroy thousands of bottles of illegal homemade alcohol during a public display in South Tangerang, outside Jakarta. —AFP

More than 4,100 people have died during police anti-narcotics operations in the Philippines since July 2016. Another 2,300 have been killed by unidentified gunmen. Philippines authorities say their actions are lawful and the deaths occur when suspects threaten police. However, human rights groups and UN officials have accused Philippine anti-drugs agents of extrajudicial killings. Police deny that. According to Amnesty International, Indonesian police killed 98 drug suspects in 2017, up from 18 the previous year. It said the deaths were rarely investigated. McRea said the trend of rising drug-related slayings continued in Indonesia this year and was "disturbing". —Reuters

News in brief

How healthy is too healthy?

BRUSSELS: Taking high doses of supplements containing green tea extracts may be associated with liver damage, according to new research from the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). Tea infusions, as used for brewed tea, are still considered safe. Instant tea drinks are also fine as they contain lower levels of the antioxidants naturally present in green tea, Parma-based EFSA said. Consuming too many of these antioxidants can be harmful, which is why the amount contained in supplements can have a harmful effect on the liver. Most supplements provide an intake of 5-1000 mg, while tea infusions typically only contain 90-300 mg, EFSA, which oversees food safety in the European Union, said. Researchers determined that consuming over 800 mg per day led to higher health risks, but the EFSA said experts could not yet determine a supplement dosage that would be entirely safe. —Reuters

UK slams 'reckless Russia'

THE HAGUE: Britain accused Russia yesterday of breaking the two-decade international ban on chemical weapons at emergency talks into last month's poisoning with a nerve agent of a former Russian spy. The accusations came as diplomats from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons met behind closed-doors in The Hague to discuss the case. Experts from the watchdog last week confirmed the British findings that former Russian double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter had been poisoned with a nerve agent. "We will continue to call out Russia's reckless and indiscriminate behavior when it violates the CWC (Chemical Weapons Convention), and when it threatens global security," British ambassador Peter Wilson said. "Russia has a proven record of conducting state-sponsored assassination," he claimed, according to a tweet from the British delegation to the OPCW. —AFP

French voters 'unhappy'

PARIS: Sixty percent of French voters are unhappy with President Emmanuel Macron, a survey said yesterday, with strikes and protests growing as the ambitious young reformer prepares to mark a year in office. Some 58 percent of people declared themselves dissatisfied with the 40-year-old, who has sparked anger among some groups by announcing reforms to everything from the courts and education system to the national rail operator. The Ifop-Fiducial poll was broadly in line with other surveys showing an approval rate at around 40 percent almost a year after Macron swept to power last May at the head of a new centrist party. A majority - 57 percent - agreed Macron was keeping his electoral promises after a campaign in which the political upstart pledged to slim down the state and make France more competitive. —AFP

Intruders storm parliament

ABUJA: Three men burst into Nigeria's Senate yesterday and snatched the legislature's ceremonial mace, in an incident the body's spokesman blamed on a lawmaker who had been suspended. The men entered the chamber, picked up the mace and left with it in a swoop that lasted less than two minutes. A Reuters journalist at the scene was not able to identify them. Decisions taken in the Senate cannot be approved without the mace, an ornamental staff which symbolizes the authority of Nigeria's legislature. "Today, some hoodlums led by suspended senator Ovie Omo-Agege walked into the Senate plenary and seized the symbol of authority of the upper legislative chamber, the mace," said Senator Aliyu Abdullahi, spokesman for the upper house, in a statement. Omo-Agege is a senator who was suspended last week after a disagreement with other lawmakers. —AFP

Analysis

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in The Arabian GulfTHE LEADING INDEPENDENT
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CIA CHIEF MADE SECRET TRIP TO NORTH KOREA AROUND APRIL 1



Castro successor unlikely to bring sweeping change

The man likely to become Cuba's next president is from a younger generation of leaders and has advocated modernizing the island but he is also a longtime Communist Party apparatchik who is not expected to push for sweeping political change. Miguel Diaz-Canel, 57-year-old first vice president, is expected to be named by the national assembly today as the successor to 86-year-old Raul Castro, making him the first leader since Cuba's 1959 revolution to be born after it.

An electronics engineer by training, Diaz-Canel has often appeared more in tune with the times than his elderly khaki-clad predecessors, Raul and his brother Fidel, who ruled the Caribbean island for the past six decades. As a young provincial party chief, Diaz-Canel bucked party orthodoxy by backing an LGBT-friendly cultural center, reportedly listening to rock music and sporting long hair. At a national level, Diaz-Canel called for more critical coverage of events in state-run media, and broader internet access to open one of the world's least web-connected societies. He often arrives at meetings carrying a tablet device.

Ultimately though, Diaz-Canel appears to be a consensus candidate hand-picked by Castro who earned trust by working his way through the ranks over three decades and sticking to the party line on key political and economic issues, analyst say. His recent public statements have focused on the need for continuity and to fight imperialism, a defiant and well-worn message as Cuba faces renewed tensions with the United States since President Donald Trump took office.

"There are reasons to expect he will be more flexible, more modern," said Arturo Lopez-Levy, a former Cuban government analyst who grew up in Diaz-Canel's hometown of Santa Clara and now lectures at the University of Texas. "But there is no evidence in favor of him being a reformist and assuming he will abandon the one-party system or stop favoring the state sector over the non-state sector." Diaz-Canel's policy views remain mostly an enigma. Political campaigning is banned in Cuba and Diaz-Canel has avoided the showboating that has ended the careers of other political pretenders over the years.

Many Cubans, frustrated with the slow pace of economic improvement under Castro, hope Diaz-Canel is simply biding his time until he can call the shots. Yet his room for maneuver will be limited as the Communist Party remains the driving political force and will be headed by Castro until 2021. At Castro's side in the party leadership will be fellow old-guard revolutionary Jose Ramon Machado Ventura, 87. Some members of Cuba's small dissident community - who are viewed by the government as working for the United States to destabilize the government - have condemned Diaz-Canel's presidency before it has even begun, saying it will simply be more of the same.

One opponent, Hildebrando Chaviano, dismissed him a "Mr Nobody" with no policies, adding Fidel Castro's long years in power had spawned a generation of followers, not leaders. Fidel Castro formally handed over power to his brother in 2008 and died in 2016.

Raul Castro's man

While Diaz-Canel's public persona has been reserved since he joined the national government nine years ago, residents in his home province of Villa Clara enthuse about him as a handsome, friendly "man of the people" who got things done. He grew up in a modest one-storey house with a crumbling stucco facade in what locals say is one of the roughest neighborhoods of the provincial capital, Santa Clara. A bright pupil, according to a former teacher, he taught at university before his political career took off and he became party chief in Villa Clara during Cuba's economic crisis of the 1990s following the collapse of its main ally, the Soviet Union.

Fuel was scarce so he cycled to work wearing shorts instead of commuting by Soviet-made Lada like other party leaders. "His closeness to the citizens was his trademark," said Ramon Silverio, 69, owner of Santa Clara's El Mejunje ("the mixture") cultural center that holds lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) nights. Silverio lauded Diaz-Canel for supporting El Mejunje at a time when homophobia was commonplace in the party.

A culture lover, Diaz-Canel would bring his two children from his first marriage to its youth events, dancing there himself in the evenings. He worked long hours, carrying out surprise inspections of state companies to counter corruption, leading to a nickname, "Diaz y Noche", a wordplay on his name and a television crime drama Day and Night. In 2003, Diaz-Canel was moved to be party chief in Holguin province, a center of Cuba's burgeoning tourism industry and foreign investment. He was summoned to Havana in 2009 to be higher education minister and in 2013 Castro made him his right-hand man, praising him for his "solid ideological strength."

"He is the man Raul has confided in and this gives him credit among the military and the old revolutionary guard," said Carlos Alzugaray, a retired Cuban diplomat. Diaz-Canel has stood in for Castro at major political events, received foreign dignitaries and traveled abroad on behalf of the government. — Reuters

Quebec wary of bitcoin gold rush

At the site of a former cocoa factory in Canada's Quebec province, tiny holes punctured in the walls of a warehouse allow fresh air to cool thousands of whirring processors connected by a tangle of wires. Yessoulou Goulibaly watches over the sea of 7,000-odd computers hidden away in this industrial park at a center operated by Bitfarms, one of the emerging players of the cryptocurrency "mining" boom. Unlike the dollar or the euro, cryptocurrencies are not issued by central banks. Instead they are "mined" or created thanks to server "farms" like the one in the Montreal suburb of Saint-Hyacinthe - which crack increasingly complex computer codes in order to unlock new batches, or blocks of virtual coins.

Mining on a large scale requires massive computing power, which in turn requires a lot of electric power. That is where Quebec comes in this industry: Luring miners with its plentiful, cheap electricity and below average temperatures - akin to Iceland, where a sister cryptocurrency blitz is also underway. Goulibaly is among a wave of entrepreneurs flooding the province, in a bid to transform it into a Silicon Valley for the emerging sector. But some authorities are leery, fearing a surge of demand for electric power could trigger blackouts, for the benefit of an industry that few fully understand.

In March, a number of Quebec municipalities slapped moratoriums on new cryptocurrency factories while the province's government and the Hydro-Quebec public utility have halted new projects to get a better grasp of the technology and its broader economic impact. The first to put on the brakes was the tiny municipality of Bromont, east of Montreal, where a new bitcoin operation was seeking to consume 30 of the town's 36 megawatts of

total available excess power. Soon after, the neighboring township of Brome-Missisquoi imposed a similar ban on new bitcoin mines. "Most of the business requests that we had in our region to open computer warehouses to mine cryptocurrencies would result in very little job creation," said the town administrator, Robert Desmarais. Marc-Antoine Pouliot, a Hydro-Quebec spokesman, added: "We can't predict the future for this industry." Authorities, he explained, "want to see first how projects can be established in Quebec in a sustainable manner," without ruling out a hike in electricity rates.

According to Pouliot, the dash began in September after China moved to regulate cryptocurrency trading. Quebec has received proposals for projects that would use more than 9,000 megawatts combined, out of Hydro-Quebec's total 40,000-megawatt capacity - equal to the power consumed by 83 percent of Quebec households. Most of the interest in relocating to the province has so far come from China, according to Pouliot. Russian investors have also shown interest, say organizers of the first international blockchain summit to be held in Montreal in April.

In Quebec, "electricity is affordable, abundant and green," Pouliot said, noting massive hydroelectric dams in the north generate most of the power. The cool weather also means factories require less air conditioning. Add those factors to bitcoin's soaring valuation - which peaked at \$20,000 in December, before falling to less than half that - and Canada has itself a modern-day gold mine, even as some critics warn the virtual currency boom could amount to a bubble, or even a Ponzi scheme.

Bitfarms president Pierre-Luc Quimper said his startup already employs 90 people. "It's like a traditional mining



A construction worker is seen inside bitcoin mining firm BitFarms in Saint-Hyacinthe, Quebec on March 19, 2018. — AFP

company that digs up gold and sells it, but 2.0," he said of his company, which channels computing power to mine bitcoins and other cryptocurrencies. The Internet entrepreneur made his fortune starting a web hosting and cloud services business at age 14. Now in his 40s, he says blockchain - the name given to the shared public database where all bitcoin transactions are recorded - is "a new technology that can be compared to the Internet" in terms of "revolutionary" potential. Quimper started Bitfarms last year after first mining bitcoin at home and is confident in his investment. "I did not miss the boat for the Internet; I do not want to miss the boat for blockchain," said the entrepreneur, who is convinced the technology will have applications for other industries including banking, aviation and transport. — AFP

Kremlin's earnings list gives glimpse of officials' wealth

The Kremlin's annual list of Russian officials' earnings has provided an outline of the richest names in government, even as the true wealth of many big-hitters remains opaque. Anomalous results include a senator whose income is 230 times higher than the previous year and several government heavyweights whose earnings are eclipsed by those of their wives. While speculation is rife about the personal fortune of Russian President Vladimir Putin, his officially declared income in the documents is relatively modest - in 2017 he earned 18.7 million rubles (\$302,000).

His only declared properties are a 77-square-metre apartment and a garage, while a 1,500-square-metre plot of land that was listed the previous year is no longer mentioned. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev - who anti-corruption campaigner Alexei Navalny has accused of commanding a luxury property empire - declared an income of just 8.56 million rubles, one flat and a rented plot of land.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov earned 14.3 million rubles in 2017, but is married to Tatiana Navka - an Olympic ice dancing champion who heads two enterprises that have benefited from state contracts, according to data from the Russian Interfax news agency. Navka, who was named in the "Panama Papers" scandal, had an income of 200 million rubles last year, up 66 percent from 2016. The income of Marina Medinskaya, the wife of culture

minister Vladimir Medinsky, also eclipsed that of her husband - boosted by her position as director of property and advertising companies, according to the Interfax data.

Who wants to be a millionaire?

According to an estimate by the RBK newspaper, the average family income of senior Russian officials has grown by 18 percent over the last year, even as the country's economy makes slow progress recovering from a recession. The highest-earning member of parliament in Russia is Grigory Anikeev, with an income of 4.3 billion rubles in 2017, an eight-fold increase on the previous year. The owner of the meat-processing ABI group, Anikeev is listed among the 200 richest Russians by Forbes magazine.

Among the richest senators, according to the documents, is Suleyman Kerimov, whose income is now 230 times what it was in 2016 and who is currently being investigated for tax fraud in France. The 51-year-old was arrested last year in the city of Nice over suspected tax evasion related to the purchase of luxury properties on the French Riviera, provoking an angry reaction from Moscow. However, no foreign properties feature on the list published by the Kremlin. Kerimov owns only a 38-square-metre flat in Russia, according to the document.

Corruption scandals regularly envelop senior officials, ministers and regional governors in Russia. In an angry editorial entitled "Who wants to be a millionaire?" for the independent Novaya Gazeta newspaper, managing editor Alexei Polukhin slammed the "phenomenal" increase in officials' earnings.

In a public role, you can see your income increase hundreds of times over," he wrote, citing the example of deputy prime minister Alexander Khloponin who earned 2.9 billion rubles in 2017 - or 293 times his income from the previous year. "All that because Khloponin sold property assets abroad.

In other words, he not only acted practically, but also patriotically," he wrote in a sarcastic barb. — AFP

India jet fuel demand to soar as domestic air travel takes off

An Indian push to connect more cities via airports as an expanding middle class increasingly takes to the skies is set to help propel the country's demand for jet fuel to record highs this year. That rapid growth in appetite for aviation fuel means the country's refiners are far less likely to send cargoes abroad, tightening markets from Asia to Europe. Years of breakneck economic expansion have helped India become the world's fastest growing major domestic aviation market, according to the International Air Transport Association.

That has been underpinned by ambitious government plans to overhaul the nation's infrastructure, including a push to build airports and offer airlines incentives to fly to smaller cities. "The country's air transport sector has huge potential to grow in the long-term given its large geographical expanse and growing consumer affluence," said Sri Paravaikkarasu, a Singapore-based analyst at energy consultancy FGE. Average monthly demand for jet fuel could break through 700,000 tonnes this year, up from 2017's record 623,000 tonnes and from 566,000 tonnes in 2016, several industry analysts estimated.

That would be an annual growth rate of around 12 percent, comparable to what China achieved during its main boom years in the early 2000s. India used 2.02 million tonnes of aviation fuel from January-March this year, up 9.4 percent from a year earlier, the latest government data showed. FGE forecasts a 10.5-percent year-on-year increase in Indian demand for jet fuel in 2018, while energy consultancy Trifecta expects growth of 12-15 percent.

Reach for the skies

Under a flagship government scheme, the Airports Authority of India (AAI) is set to invest 175 billion rupees (\$2.7 billion) in upgrading airport infrastructure over 2019-20. "Both passenger and freight miles should benefit from the state-led build out in related infrastructure and improving domestic interconnectivity," said Emma Richards, a senior oil and gas analyst in London at BMI Research. In a round of bidding for air routes concluded earlier this year, the AAI awarded over 400,000 km per week to connect smaller cities, known as 'Tier 2' destinations.

Top Indian carrier IndiGo Aviation, which operates as IndiGo and won most of the tenders, said new routes would include flying from Bhopal in central India to Nashik in the west. India's domestic air traffic for the first two months of 2018 jumped nearly 22 percent from the year before to 22.2 million passengers, according to data from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation. The country's top five busiest airports - Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai and Kolkata - handled 31.9 million passengers this January and February, up 15.3 percent from the same period last year.

Less for the rest

Indian oil refineries such as Reliance Industries and Essar Oil are significant exporters of petroleum products including jet fuel. Thomson Reuters data shows India is one of the top three Asian suppliers of jet fuel. But exports are set to slow as local demand surges. "Domestic demand growth will certainly limit its ability to service other markets in the region," said Richards at BMI. Already, India's monthly exports dropped by more than 7 percent year-on-year in 2017. To deal with rising consumption, India's refineries are expanding. India's Ratnagiri Refinery & Petrochemicals - a joint venture between Indian Oil, Hindustan Petroleum and Bharat Petroleum - in April signed an initial deal with Saudi Aramco to build a huge refinery in the western state of Maharashtra. Reliance Industries, operator of the world's largest refinery, plans to expand its oil processing capacity by over 40 percent by 2030. — Reuters



People in a so-called Stockerkahn boat make their way on the river Neckar as the sun shines in Tübingen in southern Germany on Tuesday. — AFP

Mizuho loses Saudi, Qatar bond roles in ongoing Gulf rift

DUBAI/LONDON: Japan's Mizuho Securities has lost a bond mandate for Saudi Arabia, on top of another for Qatar, banking sources said, highlighting how international banks have been caught up in Qatar's ongoing dispute with its neighbors. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt, last year cut diplomatic and transport links with Qatar accusing it of financing terrorism. Doha denies those charges and says the boycott is aimed at stripping it of its sovereignty.

Last week Saudi Arabia and Qatar had more than \$100 billion in total orders for competing US dollar denominated bonds. Mizuho Securities, part of Mizuho Financial Group, was offered a leading position in both the \$11 billion Saudi issue and the \$12 billion Qatar bonds. But Mizuho ended up without either role, losing a possible \$1.5-\$2 million in fees which would have accompanied the work, as it tried to juggle relationships on both sides of the rift, four banking sources with knowledge of the matter told Reuters.

Mizuho confirmed in a statement that it had withdrawn from the Qatar bond transaction after it had been appointed as a bookrunner, but it declined to comment yesterday about its role on the Saudi Arabian bond. Saudi Arabia had chosen the banks for its planned bond before Qatar publicly announced its own list on April 6. However, Mizuho had not informed the Saudis that it was also in the running for the Qatar deal, two of the bankers said, adding this was the reason the Japanese bank was no longer on the Saudi transaction.

Mizuho, which has significant business interests in

the kingdom, then decided to pull out of the Qatar transaction. "The (Saudi) Ministry of Finance appoints banks based on their capability, commitments and availability to serve the kingdom," a Saudi finance ministry spokesperson told Reuters. A Qatari official declined to comment on Mizuho's decision, which shows how international banks with significant business ties to Saudi Arabia have been treading cautiously to maintain relations on both sides of the diplomatic and economic crisis.

Saudi Arabia key

An expected wave of privatizations in Saudi Arabia and the expected IPO of Saudi Arabian oil giant Aramco, has given banks a money making opportunity they cannot afford to jeopardize. Mizuho, which earlier this year hired a banker to boost the growth and development of its franchise, was recently hired by Saudi Arabia's state-owned National Water Co to advise it on bringing private companies into water distribution. "We are a top-tier banking partner to numerous leading entities in the public and private sectors and Saudi Arabia continues to be a key element of our regional franchise," Hidefumi Takeuchi, managing director and head of MENA & Central Asia at Mizuho Bank said in a statement earlier this year.

Mizuho's case is not an isolated one. HSBC had turned down a role in Qatar's bond as it had decided not to take high-profile roles in major Qatari debt transactions, sources told Reuters earlier this year. The British bank arranged Saudi Arabia's \$11 billion bond last week, together with a consortium of banks including Citi, Goldman Sachs International, JPMorgan and Morgan Stanley. No bank on the Saudi deal was involved in Qatar's \$12 billion bond, which was arranged by a group of banks including Deutsche Bank, Credit Suisse, Barclays and Standard Chartered. — Reuters

Bush for the generosity she showed to us throughout our time in the White House," said Trump's Democratic predecessor Barack Obama and his wife Michelle. "But we're even more grateful for the way she lived her life - as a testament to the fact that public service is an important and noble calling; as an example of the humility and decency that reflects the very best of the American spirit." Bill Clinton, who succeeded Bush's husband in office, described her as "a remarkable woman" who brought together "grit and grace, brains and beauty". "She was fierce and feisty in support of her family and friends, her country and her causes. She showed us what an honest, vibrant, full life looks like."

Barbara Bush made a point of avoiding direct involvement in politics, and the constant posturing that comes with it - gaining a reputation for toughness, wry humor and straight-speaking. "What you see with me is what you get," she said at the 1988 Republican National Convention. "I'm not running for president; George Bush is." "She was smart, generous, kind, & a force to be reckoned with," said House Republican Steve Pearce.

Asked in 2010 about former Alaska governor Sarah Palin - who sought the vice presidency in 2008 - she told an interviewer: "I sat next to her once, thought she was beautiful, and I think she's very happy in Alaska, and I hope she'll stay there." Senator John McCain, who is battling cancer and was at the top of the ticket with Palin a decade ago, recalled that "Barbara understood that the greatest joy in life comes from putting the needs of others before yourself."

Another notable example came in 1984 when George H W Bush was seeking re-election as vice president under Ronald Reagan, a post he held from 1981 until becoming president in 1989. She told reporters that Geraldine Ferraro, her husband's Democratic rival for the vice presidency, was a "4 million dollar ... I can't say it but it rhymes with 'rich.'" She apologized to Ferraro, the first woman running for US vice president on a major-party ticket. Texas Governor Ann Richards mocked her husband at the 1988 Democratic convention - saying: "Poor George ... was born with a silver foot in his mouth" - and Barbara henceforth referred to Richards as "that woman". — Agencies

Divided UN council heads to Sweden for farmhouse retreat

UNITED NATIONS: After a week of bitter acrimony over Syria, UN Security Council ambassadors are heading to a farmhouse in southern Sweden for a retreat that could help them recover some common ground. US Ambassador Nikki Haley and her Russian counterpart Vassily Nebenzia will be among the 15 ambassadors joining Secretary-General Antonio Guterres for the secluded getaway, said Sweden's Deputy UN Ambassador Carl Skau.

The three-day retreat beginning Friday comes after one of the council's most divisive periods, with the United States and Russia split over the alleged chemical weapons attack in Douma that led to military action by Washington and its allies against Syria. The council met five times on Syria last

week including on Tuesday when Russia vetoed a US-drafted resolution setting up a chemical weapons probe while two other proposed measures failed to pass. Guterres declared that the Cold War was "back with a vengeance". "It's not news to anyone that the council is divided on Syria," said Skau. "There is some need for humility and patience at this moment."

The council will be staying at Backakra, the summer residence of Dag Hammarskjöld, who was the United Nations' second secretary-general. Skau said the residence located on the southern tip of Sweden, far from Stockholm, was a "fitting and inspiring venue" to reconnect with the power of diplomacy. "It's a place to roll up our sleeves, take off our jackets and ties and come up with some real and meaningful ways forward," he said. The annual brainstorming session usually takes place in upstate New York, but Sweden, which is a non-permanent council member, offered to host this year's gathering. Guterres had told council members that the focus of the meeting would be his plan for a "surge of diplomacy" to address conflicts worldwide, but the council's deadlock over Syria is emerging as the top priority. — AFP

Secret CIA trip to N Korea raises...

Continued from Page 1

on the cards. Seoul's push to formally declare an end to inter-Korean hostilities, which at the moment are subject only to an armistice, would have been unthinkable just months ago.

Trump earlier said that the summit could, with his "blessing," explore a peace treaty to formally end the conflict. "We are looking at the possibility of replacing the armistice regime on the Korean peninsula with a peace regime," a senior official at South Korea's presidential Blue House said yesterday. "But this is not something we can do by ourselves. It needs close discussions with relevant parties including North Korea."

The 1950-53 Korean War ended in an armistice rather than a peace treaty, leaving the two sides technically at war. The Demilitarized Zone between them bristles with minefields and fortifications. But reaching any final treaty would be fraught with complications. "The peace treaty is a very difficult problem," said Koo Kab-woo, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies. While the US-led United Nations command, China and North Korea are signatories to the decades-old armistice, South Korea is not.

Both Pyongyang and Seoul claim sovereignty over the whole Korean peninsula, but a treaty could imply mutual recognition of each other. Next week's meeting will be just the third summit between the North and South since the armistice was signed 65 years ago. Key moments including Kim and Moon's first handshake will be televised live, both sides agreed at working-level

talks yesterday, Seoul said.

Trump himself plans to hold a summit meeting with Kim within the next two months. The pair have not spoken directly, the White House said, but the president revealed Tuesday there had been contact at "very high levels" to prepare for the historic meeting - an apparent reference to Pompeo's visit. Trump also said that "five locations" were being considered for the summit. "That will be taking place probably in early June or before that assuming things go well. It's possible things won't go well and we won't have the meetings and we'll just continue to go on this very strong path we have taken."

US officials say that no decision has yet been made on a meeting venue, but China, North Korea, South Korea, and Panmunjom in the Demilitarized Zone between the two Koreas are seen as possible locations. Beijing is North Korea's sole major ally, an alliance dating back to the Korean War, but relations deteriorated after China supported UN sanctions to punish Pyongyang over its nuclear weapons program. The sudden talk of rapprochement on the Korean Peninsula has also sparked a flurry of diplomatic activity with Pyongyang's giant northern neighbor.

Last month Kim made a surprise visit to Beijing to meet President Xi Jinping in what was believed to be his first trip outside his isolated nation's borders since he succeeded his father in 2011. Senior Chinese officials have since travelled to Pyongyang amid mounting speculation Xi might make a reciprocal visit. Yesterday, reporters asked China's foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying about the reports of Pompeo's visit to Pyongyang. "We welcome the direct contact and dialogue between the DPRK and the US," Hua said, using the official acronym for the North. "But as the saying goes, a good start is half the battle." — AFP

America mourns Barbara Bush...

Continued from Page 1

in recent days, was moved into comfort care at her home in Houston.

She will be laid to rest in Texas after a memorial ceremony on Saturday in Houston to be attended by the first lady, Melania Trump. President Donald Trump ordered flags to be flown at half-staff at all public buildings and military posts in Bush's honor, as he paid tribute to her work to promote literacy - a cause she embraced during her time as first lady, from 1989 to 1993, and beyond.

George W Bush and his wife Laura expressed their gratitude for the prayers and sympathies pouring in for his mother, who is survived by five children, 17 grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. She lost a sixth child - a daughter - to leukemia as a toddler. A hugely popular figure during and after her time in the White House, Bush made history as one of just two women to be wife and mother to two US presidents. Abigail Adams, who died in 1818, was the other.

Another son, Jeb Bush, served two terms as governor of Florida and ran for president himself in 2016. "I'm exceptionally privileged to be the son of George Bush and the exceptionally gracious, gregarious, fun, funny, loving, tough, smart, graceful woman who was the force of nature known as Barbara Bush," Jeb Bush wrote in tribute to his mother.

Barbara first met her husband-to-be at age 16 when she was a schoolgirl and he was a student at an elite Massachusetts preparatory school. They married in 1945 while he was on leave from wartime service. She was her husband's consummate companion and advisor as they traveled the world, moving multiple times as he rose from Texas oil man to congressman, US ambassador to the United Nations and envoy to China, director of the CIA and eventually to the vice presidency and the White House.

Tributes poured in from across the political spectrum to honor her life. "We'll always be grateful to Mrs

Saudi Arabia launches first...

Continued from Page 1

including on public concerts, women driving and gender mixing. The kingdom banned cinemas in the early 1980s under pressure from Islamists as Saudi society embraced a severe form of Islam. Yet Saudis have been avid consumers of Western media and culture. Despite the cinema ban, Hollywood films and television series are widely watched at home and private film screenings have been largely tolerated for years.

In 2017, the government said it would lift the ban as part of reforms that aim to keep money in the country that Saudis currently spend on entertainment in trips to Dubai, Bahrain and elsewhere. To serve a population of more than 32 million, most of whom are under the age of 30, the authorities plan to set up around 350 cinemas with over 2,500 screens by 2030, which they hope will attract nearly \$1 billion in annual ticket sales.

A source familiar with the matter said last month

theatres would not be segregated by gender like most other public places. Information Minister Awwad Al-Awwad told Reuters yesterday that they would be similar to cinemas around the world. Initial screenings are likely to be for families with some occasional ones for bachelors. The extent of censorship was not clear but a Saudi official said the same versions of films shown in Dubai or Kuwait will be suitable for Saudi Arabia.

Many Saudis rejoiced in anticipation of the opening, sharing praise and pictures of Crown Prince Mohammed on social media. Others expressed confusion at what they called the government's about-face on cinemas' permissibility, with one tweeting: "Remember you will stand in front of God ... and you will bear the sins of all those who watched the movies." Religious conservatives say films from more liberal Arab states such as Egypt may violate religious taboos. Some also view cinema and acting, as a form of dissembling and inconsistent with Islam.

Awwad said the government wanted to create investment opportunities. "For those that would like to come and enjoy watching the movie at the movie theatre, they are more than welcome," he said. "And for those who don't want to watch movies at all, it's also their personal choice." — Reuters

Sports

Vegas Knights sweep Kings in Stanley Cup playoffs

Winnipeg closer in advancing to Western Conference semifinals

LOS ANGELES: Marc-Andre Fleury had 31 saves for his 12th career playoff shutout as the Vegas Golden Knights became the first expansion team in the 100-year history of the National Hockey League to sweep a playoff series in its first season with a 1-0 victory over the host Los Angeles Kings on Tuesday. Ex-King Brayden McNabb scored the lone goal for Pacific Division winner Vegas, which won the best-of-seven series 4-0. The Golden Knights will play the winner of the San Jose Sharks-Anaheim Ducks series in the Western Conference semifinals.

It was the 66th career playoff victory for Fleury, which moved him past Dominik Hasek into 11th place on the NHL's all-time list for playoff wins for a goaltender. Jonathan Quick stopped 20 shots for Los Angeles. McNabb netted the first playoff goal of his career at the 4:04 mark of the second period. The score came after Fleury made a big save on Dustin Brown. Vegas then broke out on a three-on-two rush ending with Reilly Smith sending a crossing pass to McNabb, who fired a one-timer from the dot in the right circle into the upper right corner of the net.

CAPITALS 3, BLUE JACKETS 2 (2OT)
Lars Eller scored 8:59 into the second overtime, giving visiting Washington the win against Columbus in Game 3

of an Eastern Conference first-round playoff series, though the Blue Jackets still have a 2-1 lead in the best-of-seven series. The decisive goal came on a wacky play where the puck appeared to hit off of Columbus defenseman Zach Werenski at the crease, then bang off the foot of Eller near the right post and then past goalie Sergei Bobrovsky. Braden Holtby got his first start of the series in goal for the Capitals after Philipp Grubauer's strong late-season play earned him the start for Games 1 and 2. Holtby came on in the third period of Game 2 and played well, then turned in a strong performance in Game 3, making 33 saves. Game 4 will be tonight in Columbus.

66th career playoff victory for Fleury

JETS 2, WILD 0
Connor Hellebuyck recovered from a shaky

performance to notch 30 saves, and visiting Winnipeg beat Minnesota to pull within one game of advancing to the Western Conference semifinals. Mark Scheifele scored both of Winnipeg's goals, including an empty-net tally with 11 seconds to play as the Jets built a 3-1 lead in the best-of-seven series. Scheifele's first goal came with 28 seconds left in the first period after the Jets killed off the first Minnesota power play of the game. Minnesota goalie Devan Dubnyk made 26 saves. Game 5 is Friday night in Winnipeg, where the Jets dominated at times in the first two games. — Reuters



LOS ANGELES: David Perron #57 of the Vegas Golden Knights makes a pass between Jake Muzzin #6 and Dustin Brown #23 of the Los Angeles Kings during the first period in Game Four of the Western Conference First Round during the 2018 NHL Stanley Cup Playoffs at Staples Center on Tuesday in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

Al-Qadisiya Sports Club crowned champions

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Al-Qadisiya Sports Club were basketball champions of the Kuwait Basketball League after defeating Kuwait Club 76-75 during the deciding match that was played at Fajhan Hilal Al-Mutairi court at the Al-Qadisiya club.

The match was played as each team ended the regular season with 19 points, so a deciding match was played as the competition rules stipulate.

The match was very strong from the onset as Kuwait was dominant with three pointers by Hussein Al-Khabbaz, while Qadisiya players were rushing things and reckless and the first quarter ended 17-18 for Kuwait.

Qadisiya started to recover in the second quarter, as they began to defend with the pressure which confused the attacks of Kuwait players, also Qadisiya players Saleh Yousuf and Ahmad Darweesh controlled the rebounds and took the score in favor of Qadisiya at 22-21 and ended the second quarter 35-29.

The third quarter saw both teams exchanging scores as Musaed Al-Otaibi was scoring from outside as Hamad and Mohammad Adnan were scoring from under the basket. Qadisiya was not able to score as it failed to penetrate the zone defence employed by Kuwait players who ended the quarter in their favor 55-51. Qadisiya regained its balance in the fourth quarter through outstanding plays by Abdelmohsen Mortadha as the match ended 76-75 with Qadisiya finally emerging as winners.



Chiefs halfback disgusted by Folau anti-gay comments

WELLINGTON: Waikato Chiefs halfback Brad Weber has condemned Wallabies superstar Israel Folau's anti-gay comments and urged other rugby players to speak out. Weber said he could not remain silent after Folau wrote on social media this month that God's plan for gay people was hell unless they repent their sins.

"Kinda sick of us players staying quiet on some of this stuff," Weber tweeted late Tuesday. "I can't stand that I have to play this game that I love with people, like Folau, who say what he's saying."

Weber, who earned his sole All Blacks cap in 2015 but has struggled with injuries since, said he was disgusted by Folau, a devout Christian, was judging his loved ones. "My cousin and her partner, and my aunt and her partner are some of the most kind, caring & loving people I have ever had the pleasure of knowing," he wrote.

"To think that I play against someone that says they'll go to hell for being gay disgusts me." Rugby Australia has decided against sanc-

tioning Folau over his comments, saying the player never intended to hurt anyone. Referee Nigel Owens, who attempted suicide as a young man struggling to accept he was gay, said he respected Folau's religious beliefs but the player should think about the impact of his words.

"When you're in a position of privilege like that, there comes a responsibility in the way in which you convey those beliefs," he told British lifestyle website joe.co.uk. "Me being gay is not a choice. There are young people out there taking their own lives, feeling like I did."

Owens urged Folau to "judge me and other gay people on the content of their character, not on their sexuality". The furor has cast doubt on Folau's future with the Wallabies after he revealed this week that he had offered to walk away from the final year of his contract if Rugby Australia thought he was hurting the game. Rugby clubs in Europe and Japan, as well as Australia's National Rugby League, are reportedly interested in signing the 29-year-old. Until Weber's comments, Folau's fellow players have been largely quiet about his remarks, aside from a message of support from his NSW Waratahs teammate Curtis Rona. The Wallabies' major sponsor Qantas, which strongly backed Australia's gay marriage referendum last year, told AFP yesterday that there were "no changes" to the contract, which is due to expire in 2020. — AFP

Ahmadi Futsal Championship for Coops



KUWAIT: The Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) recently sponsored Ahmadi 3rd Futsal Championship for Coops, which was held over three days at KOC's sports center.

Speaking on the occasion, CBK's assistant manager for PR

and publicity, Amani Al-Wer'a said that sponsoring the championship came as part of the bank's arrangements to support and sponsor various activities organized by Kuwaiti governorates.

S African rugby player gets 4-year drugs ban

LONDON: A South African playing second-tier rugby union in England has been banned from all sport for four years by British anti-doping authorities after testing positive for three banned steroids, it was announced yesterday.

United Kingdom Anti-Doping said Brandon Staples, 20, a flanker with Championship side Yorkshire Carnegie, failed tests for metandienone, dehydrochloromethyl-Testosterone and stanozolol—the substance that saw Canada sprinter Ben Johnston stripped of his 100 metres gold medal at the 1988 Seoul Olympics.

Staples produced an adverse finding in a urine sample taken after a training session on August 9 last year. He is the first player in English professional rugby union to fail a drugs test

for a performance-enhancing substance since 2011.

He claimed his positive test was a result of consuming a nutritional drink in South Africa while he was on holiday in May 2017. An independent national anti-doping panel still suspended him until September 6, 2021.

The ban was originally imposed last November but details were only made public yesterday after Staples failed to have his suspension overturned on appeal. Stephen Watkins, RFU anti-doping and illicit drugs programme manager, said: "This is the first failed test for a performance-enhancing substance in English professional rugby since 2011 and a reminder to all that we cannot be complacent in our efforts to keep rugby a clean sport."

UKAD chief executive Nicole Sapstead stressed that all athletes competed under a rule of "strict liability" and were "solely responsible" for the substances found in their bodies.

Sapstead added: "The market for supplements, particularly those purchased online, has grown significantly in recent years and it is the duty of each athlete to check all ingredients against WADA's (the World Anti-Doping Agency) prohibited list." — AFP

Sports

West African cricket teams start small but aim big

We need to start from the grassroots

LAGOS: The Tafawa Balewa Cricket Oval in Lagos, Nigeria, is a world away from the Melbourne Cricket Ground and other leading venues in the sport. But in theory at least, one could lead to the other, as top teams from West Africa gathered this week to begin qualifying for the Twenty20 World Cup in Australia in two years' time.

Realistically though, Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and The Gambia have little chance of progressing through the further stages to make it to the finals. Yet those watching in Lagos believe such tournaments will help the sport take off in Nigeria and the wider region, both of which are known for their fanatical following of football.

Under the shade of a tree beyond the mid-wicket boundary, Ewa Henshaw watched hosts Nigeria take on Ghana in searing heat approaching 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit). The former Nigeria and West Africa captain said local cricket was undergoing a resurgence. "We used to play regularly before there was a downturn. Now it looks like everything is coming alive again," he told AFP.

LONG HISTORY

Like many other former British colonies, Nigeria-Africa's most populous nation with more than 180 million people—has had a long association with cricket.

In 1904, the first "inter-colonial" match was played at the Lagos Racecourse Cricket Ground—later renamed after the first post-independence prime minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. The ground has since played host to matches between Nigeria, Ghana and Tanzania, quadrangular tournaments and even visiting sides from the Marylebone Cricket Club from the 1970s.

On the pitch on Tuesday, Nigeria, in their green and

yellow uniforms, struggled to 119 for eight off 20 overs, in front of a few hundred spectators and gyrating cheerleaders. Children in sponsors' caps and t-shirts looked on while a group of young men cheered increasingly loudly at the Pavilion End as the innings progressed.

Ghana's top order batsmen in black, red and gold began by making short work of the low score. But in the end Nigeria made Ghana toil for their victory with tight bowling in the final overs and the visitors secured a seven-wicket win with only one ball to spare.

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Like many teams in the lower reaches of any sport, West Africa's cricketers are not full-time but still have lofty ambitions. Ghana captain Isaac Aboagye, a hotel receptionist in Accra, said the aim was to get at least to the standard of African sides such as Kenya and

Zimbabwe.

"This (tournament) isn't our limit. We're going to go high. We're going to climb big mountains," added Simon Ateak, whose 50 not out helped steer Ghana to victory. "All I can say is we need to start from the grassroots." Both said developing local leagues was key while Nigeria coach Uthe Ogbimi said at national level, the world's leading cricketing nations needed to provide more technical support.

Passion and enthusiasm only goes so far, he said. "But if the right technical input is not coming in you will just keep on showing up for tournaments and never getting across the line," he added.

"THE SKY'S THE LIMIT"

For Henshaw's Nigeria and West Africa team-mate, former wicket-keeper Ayanti Udoma, the re-introduction of cricket in schools is key to the sport's development. "When we were playing, thanks to our colonial



LAGOS: Ghanaian players appeal for a decision against a Nigerian batsman from the umpire during an International Cricket Council (ICC) World Twenty20 African 'A' qualification match between Nigeria and Ghana in Lagos on Tuesday. The inaugural ICC World Twenty20 African qualifier has begun in Lagos with four countries, Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia and Sierra Leone participating. — AFP

masters, all government colleges had cricket teams," he added. "Most of the people who played for Nigeria (came) from government colleges."

Henshaw sees the next step as regional and collegiate level, then the introduction of semi-professional teams to help players to progress through a system.

Uyi Akpata, the vice-president of the Nigerian Cricket Federation, is one of those charged with putting such ideas into practice. That includes creating a grassroots programme, finding expert coaching for the under-19 and senior teams and attracting corporate

sponsorship to fund it all.

Many of those in the federation played cricket at school and appreciated "its shared work ethic and conduct" and it being seen as a "gentleman's game", he said.

"At the end of the day, we need to give something back," added Akpata, a senior partner with PwC Nigeria. Udoma said persistence was key. "The sky's the limit... There's no reason we can't aspire to be the best in the world, especially in Twenty20 cricket," he added. — AFP

Ricciardo wants two-year deal because of F1 uncertainty

LONDON: Daniel Ricciardo says he does not want his next Formula One contract to tie him down for the next four years due to the uncertainty over the sport's future and instead wants to sign a two-year deal.

The 28-year-old Australian, winner in China at the weekend and one of the hottest properties on the market, is out of contract with Red Bull at the end of the year. "I don't want to sign anything too long because I don't know where the sport's going," The Times newspaper quoted him as saying on Wednesday.

"I feel like life is happening pretty fast. Each year something might change so I don't want to tie myself down for four more years and then I'm like, 'I don't want to do this anymore'."

"Ideally I'd sign a two-year contract. I think two years I can definitely be comfortable with and then see it from there," he added. "That third year will be the rule change so I will probably wait and see what happens then." Formula One's current engine regulations last only to the end of 2020, when team agreements also expire, and the sport is deciding how the future should look and what kind of engines will be used.



SHANGHAI: File photo shows Red Bull's Australian driver Daniel Ricciardo celebrates with his shoe on the podium after winning the Formula One Chinese Grand Prix in Shanghai. — AFP

Ferrari have already warned that they could walk away if they do not like what is on offer. Red Bull could have a new engine partner as early as next season, with the team weighing up whether to stay with Renault or switch to the improving Honda units used by their Toro Rosso team.

Mercedes have yet to announce a new deal for four times world champion Lewis Hamilton, who is also out of contract at the end of this season and has said he wants to see what the future holds before committing. While Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel and Red Bull's Max Verstappen have long-term deals, there is uncertainty about the futures of Kimi

Raikkonen at Ferrari and Valtteri Bottas at Mercedes.

Ricciardo would be a strong replacement for either but the Australian told the newspaper that neither team had been in touch so far. "I kind of feel like if they want me to race for them they should contact me, but they haven't," he said.

Ricciardo has said consistently since last year that he just wants to be in the fastest car and would be happy to stay at Red Bull if they can provide it. "If we win this year then I'm staying with Red Bull. It's pretty simple," he said. "It's really just about performance at the moment." — Reuters

Beware the Hamilton fightback, warns Rosberg

LONDON: Lewis Hamilton's Formula One rivals should beware the backlash because the four-times world champion's dip in form will not last long, his former Mercedes team mate Nico Rosberg has warned.

Speaking on his YouTube channel, the 2016 world champion said last Sunday's Chinese Grand Prix showed the Briton, who finished fourth, was struggling. The German, whose once-friendly relationship with Hamilton grew increasingly frosty in their time together, saw that as just one of those "typical phases" that his old rival goes through.

"When it doesn't go perfectly, he starts to lose that edge a little bit and a touch of motivation or whatever and then just struggles for a while," said Rosberg. "And those are the races you have to maximise... because Lewis always comes back, and when he comes back he comes back so damn strong that he's almost unbeatable. And so let's see when that happens."

The next race is at Azerbaijan's Baku circuit on April 29. Hamilton has not won since last year's US Grand Prix in

October, a run of six without standing on the top step of the podium. In the three so far this year, the 33-year-old has finished second, third and fourth and been beaten twice by Finnish team mate Valtteri Bottas.

Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel won in Australia and Bahrain and Red Bull's Daniel Ricciardo in China—the first time since the V6 turbo hybrid era started in 2013 that Mercedes have lost three races in a row.

Hamilton had a longer winless run at the end of 2015 and early 2016 when Rosberg won seven in a row before Max Verstappen triumphed for Red Bull in Spain. Hamilton then won six of the next seven. The Briton went on another five-race run without victory after that before winning the last four races, but the damage had been done and Rosberg was champion.

Hamilton said after Shanghai, where Ferrari swept the front row for the second race in succession, that he felt he was in "no-man's land". "Obviously it's a tough battle ahead of us. I would say on my side but also as a team, we've been underperforming," he added.

"I have got to try and rectify that and get myself back into normal performance mode, otherwise more valuable points will be lost." Team boss Toto Wolff agreed Hamilton's form had dipped.

"Like the car, he was maybe not in the best place this weekend," the Austrian told Sky Sports. "He's the best driver, in my opinion, but also the best ones have days where it's just not 100 percent." — Reuters

Kohli downbeat despite smashing IPL run record

NEW DELHI: Virat Kohli smashed 92 off 62 balls to become the highest run-scorer in Indian Premier League history but his efforts could not halt Royal Challengers Bangalore's slump in this year's tournament.

Kohli's innings took his IPL total to 4,619 runs in 153 matches, putting him ahead of Suresh Raina of Chennai Super Kings on 4,558. His knock went in vain however as Bangalore went down to defending champions the Mumbai Indians by 46 runs on Tuesday.

"I don't feel like wearing this (orange cap) right now because it really doesn't matter," said Kohli, who is top of the IPL batting chart with 201 runs in four games this season. "We tried our hardest but couldn't get the breakthroughs." Kohli said on his team letting Mumbai score 213 after batting first. It was Bangalore's third loss in four matches.

The 29-year-old Kohli has been with Bangalore since the IPL started in 2008, but

has not won a single title in the cash-rich T20 league. The Kane Williamson-led Sunrisers Hyderabad—a side that edged out Bangalore to win their maiden title in 2016 — leads the points table with three wins from three games.

Meanwhile, Kohli says he is keen to play county cricket to get used to conditions on English soil ahead of India's tour of the country later this year.

The Indian skipper—the second-ranked Test batsman in the world and the best in one-day internationals—had an uncharacteristically ordinary spell during the England tour in 2014. The prolific run-getter managed just 134 runs in 10 innings, a far cry from the average 53.40 over 66 Tests, including 21 centuries, that earned him the moniker "King Kohli".

He wants to avoid a repeat of his poor form on English soil, and plans to train there to prepare for India's tour starting July. "Playing county cricket will help me improve my game," the 29-year-old batsman told Indian TV channel NDTV.

"I think it makes things more challenging and more competitive and there are no guarantees whether you are going to do well even if you go in advance. "It's just about giving yourself more opportunity to get used to the conditions that you are not used to."

The all-important series will see India

play England in three Twenty20 matches, three ODIs and five Tests. It has been widely reported in Indian press that Kohli would join English county side Surrey for a brief stint in June.

Surrey's director Alec Stewart had expressed interest in signing Kohli after reports the Indian cricket board would allow their top batsman to skip a one-off Test against Afghanistan starting June 14.

Kohli had stressed the need for getting used to local conditions after India, the world's top Test team, lost a series to South Africa 2-1 in January. "If players get an opportunity then why not," he said of Indians taking whatever chances they get to hit abroad.

But speculation of Kohli's debut in county cricket has rubbed some the wrong way. Former England pacesman Bob Willis said England risked losing Test matches at home if "we're accommodating all these visiting players". "I can't stand overseas players in county cricket," he told Sky Sports. "The only way to improve our Test team is to have as many England-qualified players playing in the County Championship as possible."

"Instead, they're going to pay Kohli, presumably, five figures a match so he can hone his skills in English conditions before a Test series. It's a nonsense." — AFP

Cavendish to make racing return

LONDON: British rider Mark Cavendish will make his return from injury at next month's Tour de Yorkshire. Cavendish has not raced since crashing in the final stages of Milan-San Remo last month when he broke a rib and sustained an ankle injury, forcing him to miss the Commonwealth Games in Australia. The 32-year-old will use the Tour de Yorkshire, from May 3-6, as part of his preparations for the Tour de France, which he will start four stages wins from matching Eddy Merckx's record of 34.

"I'm delighted to have recovered sufficiently from my injuries at Milan-San Remo to be back racing sooner than I initially thought and what better way to do that than at what could be described as a home race for me," Cavendish told the Team Dimension Data for Qhubeka website. "My mother's from Harrogate and obviously the last time I raced things didn't go that great in the 2014 Tour de France (which started in Yorkshire) but one thing I do remember is the incredible crowds and I know that the Tour de Yorkshire always provides."

Another Dimension Data rider, Serge Pauwels, will return to Yorkshire to defend the title he won in 2017. "It's one of my favourite races, not only because I won it last year but because the course suits me and there is always a great ambience from the passionate spectators," said the Belgian. — AFP

Sports

Honeymoon over for Ohtani after Boston mauling

Realmuto hit three-run homer as Miami beat New York

LOS ANGELES: The Red Sox and a blister teamed up to knock out Los Angeles Angels sensation Shohei Ohtani, and Boston posted a 10-1 win in a game matching the teams with the two best records in the majors Tuesday night at Anaheim, Calif. With Mookie Betts' three home runs leading the way, the Red Sox ended the Angels' winning streak at seven games while extending their own winning streak to five. Jackie Bradley Jr., Brock Holt and Rafael Devers also went deep for Boston. Ohtani left after two innings, and the Angels announced that his exit was caused by a blister on his right (pitching) hand. However, the Red Sox had already roughed up the Japanese star for three runs and four hits in the opening two frames. It was clear right from the start that Ohtani's fate would be quite different than his previous start on April 8, when he didn't allow an Oakland A's batter to reach base until the seventh inning. Betts led off the game with the first of his three homers. The Boston right fielder also homered in the third and eighth innings.

DIAMONDBACKS 1, GIANTS 0

David Peralta singled in a run to break up a scoreless tie in the eighth inning, and Patrick Corbin pitched a one-hitter in Arizona's victory over visiting San Francisco. Jarrod Dyson walked with one out in the eighth inning off Tony Watson (1-1) and took second on Corbin's sacrifice bunt. Peralta then singled up the middle as the D-backs (12-4) tied the best start in franchise history. Corbin (3-0) gave up a walk and a two-out, eighth-inning single while pitching his first career complete game. He struck out eight, relying mainly on a slider. He is tied for the NL lead in victories.



St Louis stretch its winning streak

MARLINS 9, YANKEES 1

Jarlin Garcia escaped trouble in five scoreless innings for his first win as a starting pitcher, and J.T. Realmuto hit a three-run homer in his season debut as Miami beat host New York as a restless home crowd continued to lustily boo former Marlins star and current Yankee Giancarlo Stanton. Garcia (1-0) allowed one hit in five innings but also struggled with the strike zone. The left-hander issued five walks, including three in the first inning, but recorded two big outs against Stanton, who finished 0-for-4 and struck out twice. Realmuto drove in four runs after coming off the disabled list following his recovery from a back bruise.

ASTROS 4, MARINERS 1

Lance McCullers Jr. allowed just one hit in seven innings and struck out 11 batters as Houston defeated host Seattle thanks to Brian McCann's tiebreaking two-run homer in the sixth inning. McCullers (2-1), who entered the game with a 7.71 ERA, made just one

mistake. With two outs in the bottom of the first inning, he left an 0-2 pitch over the plate, and Robinson Cano hit it over the center field fence, his first home run of the season. Seattle reliever Dan Altavilla (1-2) got into trouble immediately after entering in the sixth. He walked Evan Gattis on four pitches, then threw a wild pitch that allowed the runner to advance to second. McCann then launched a 2-1 pitch into the right field bleachers to give the Astros their first lead. It was McCann's first home run of the year.

INDIANS 6, TWINS 1

Francisco Lindor, Jose Ramirez, Michael Brantley and Yonder Alonso hit home runs to back the strong pitching of Corey Kluber (2-1), lifting Cleveland over Minnesota, which was serving as host in the opener of a two-game series in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Minnesota's Jake Odorizzi (1-1) had a two-hit shutout two outs into the fifth inning before Bradley Zimmer smacked his second double of the game. After a passed ball, Lindor gave the Indians a 2-0 lead with a home run to right field, his second of the season. Ramirez led off the sixth with his fourth homer, followed on the next pitch by Brantley's first of the year for a 4-0 advantage.

A'S 10, WHITE SOX 2

Jed Lowrie ignited a five-run first inning with a home run, and Trevor Cahill threw seven innings of shutout ball as Oakland celebrated "Free Baseball" on their 50th anniversary with a 10-2 trouncing of visiting Chicago. One day after the clubs drew 7,479 for the opener of a three-game series, 46,028 attracted by free admission and free parking witnessed the

A's put up a double-figure run total for the second time in a week. The game was played exactly 50 years after the first-ever Major League Baseball game in Oakland, featuring the Baltimore Orioles and the A's, in 1968. Cahill (1-0), making his first major league start of the season after beginning the year in the minors, benefitted from Oakland's 13-hit attack. He allowed five hits and two walks while striking out eight.

DODGERS 7, PADRES 3 (12 INNINGS)

Yasmani Grandal and Kyle Farmer hit two-run doubles in the top of the 12th inning to give Los Angeles a win at San Diego. Scott Alexander (1-0) threw one scoreless inning for the win. Matt Kemp hit a homer and drove in two runs for the Dodgers. The Padres scored two in the bottom of the ninth to tie the game at 3-3 against Dodgers closer Kenley Jansen. Eric Hosmer hit a leadoff homer, and pinch hitter Chase Headley's two-out double sent the game to extra innings.

Matthysse vows fight 'to the death' against Pacquiao

MANILA: World champion Lucas Matthysse yesterday vowed a fight "to the death" in his July title defence against Manny Pacquiao, describing the Philippine boxing legend a diminished star. But the 35-year-old Argentine—who took the vacant World Boxing Association welterweight title in January—said it was still a "dream-come-true" and "an honour" to face Pacquiao, winner of eight unprecedented world titles in different weight classes.

"Obviously he is still a very great fighter but since the knockout of Marquez, I think he is not the same fighter anymore," Matthysse said at a joint news conference in Manila, referring to the Filipino's sensational 2012 knockout loss to Juan Manuel Marquez.

"He is not in his prime anymore," the Argentine added. Pacquiao, 39, will fight Matthysse for the WBA welterweight belt on July 15 in Malaysia's capital Kuala Lumpur. The Filipino has 59 wins with 38 knockouts in his career, and is currently a senator in the Philippine parliament.

Many in the country believe he will one day run for president, but Pacquiao has insisted that he is happier in the ring than in politics. But Matthysse—who has 39 wins with 36 knockouts in 43 matches—said he was not fazed by the status of his opponent.

"Sure, Manny has won so many titles... I (have) only won one title. I am not going to give it up. I will die for it if I have to," he said. "I will defend this title to the death." Pacquiao has not fought since he lost his World Boxing Organization welterweight crown in a shock points defeat to Australia's Jeff Horn last year, and has not knocked out an opponent in nearly nine years.

ROACH OUT?

He insisted, however, that he was far from finished. "That is what I am trying to prove this coming July 15 that Manny Pacquiao is not done yet in boxing," he said. "I keep on fighting because boxing is my passion and I love raising the flag of the Philippines."



ANAHEIM: Shohei Ohtani #17 of the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim pitches during the first inning of a game against the Boston Red Sox at Angel Stadium on Tuesday in Anaheim, California. — AFP

CARDINALS 5, CUBS 3

Matt Carpenter knocked in three runs, and Paul DeJong homered as visiting St. Louis stretched its winning streak to five games by dropping Chicago. Adam Wainwright (1-2) picked up the win by tight roping through five innings. Wainwright yielded four hits and an unearned run, walking four and striking out five while plunking two hitters. He stranded nine men during his stint. Tyler Chatwood (0-3) absorbed the loss despite giving up just one hit and fanning seven over 4 2/3 innings. He issued seven walks, two of which came around to score in the third inning, and permitted two runs.

ROCKIES 2, PIRATES 0

Colorado starter Chad Bettis combined with three relievers for a five-hit shutout against host Pittsburgh. The Rockies didn't muster a great deal of offense—just five hits, same as the Pirates—but a run each in the first and fourth innings sufficed. Bettis (3-0) pitched 7 1/3 innings, permitting five hits and two walks while striking out three. He allowed a Pittsburgh runner in each of the first six innings, then had his only one-two-three inning in the seventh. Bryan Shaw and Jake McGee finished the eighth, and closer Wade Davis set the Pirates down in order in the ninth. Pirates starter Trevor Williams (3-1) missed a chance to become the first four-game winner in the major leagues. He pitched six innings, allowing two runs and four hits with three walks and four strikeouts.

NATIONALS 5, METS 2

Trea Turner had three hits and two runs, and visiting Washington never trailed in a win over New York, aided by Wilmer Difo and Pedro Severino hitting back-to-back RBI singles in the fourth. The Nationals, who came back from a five-run, eighth-inning deficit in an 8-6 victory Monday, have won the first two games of the three-game series against the Mets. New York (12-4) lost consecutive contests for the first time this season. Turner doubled in the first and ninth, singled and scored the game's first run on a Bryce Harper sacrifice fly in the third and walked and scored on Ryan Zimmerman's single in the seventh. The leadoff man also stole his major-league-leading eighth base.

PHILLIES 5, BRAVES 1 (10 INNINGS)

Rhys Hoskins drove in two runs with a two-out double to spark a four-run rally in the 10th inning, helping Philadelphia outlast host Atlanta. Scott Kingery drew a four-pitch walk from Jose Ramirez to open the 10th, stole second and went to third on a bunt single by Cesar Hernandez. Hoskins then delivered his seventh double of the season to right field to plate the go-ahead runs. After a walk to Aaron Alther, Maikel Franco doubled home two runs with a fly ball just out of the reach of center fielder Ender Inciarte. Ramirez (0-2) gave up four runs on three hits and three walks in one inning, and his ERA soared to 17.05. — Reuters

FIFA plans to revamp Club World Cup

LISBON: FIFA has laid out plans to replace the Confederations Cup with an expanded Club World Cup that would only be held every four years from 2021, a source told AFP yesterday. According to a letter Gianni Infantino, the president of world football's governing body, sent to the heads of the continental confederations, and that has been seen by AFP, the Confederations Cup would cease while the club tournament would no longer be played annually in December. It would now be held every fourth June in the year before a World Cup—just as the Confederations Cup was.

Last year's Confederations Cup in Russia—won by Germany—would therefore be the last. The competition would last 18 days. The new format means the club competition would interfere less with the rest of the football calendar, particularly in Europe.

FIFA also faces the problem that while its principal tournament, the World Cup, is immensely lucrative and popular, neither the Confederations Cup nor the Club World Cup have been remotely as attractive to fans or sponsors. Clubs from the six confederations take part in the Club World Cup, but the gulf in quality can be embarrassingly large and only sides from Europe or South America have ever won it.

Although Brazilian sides claimed the first three editions, only one of the last 11 has not been won by a European team—inaugural winners in 2000, Corinthians triumphed for the second time in 2012. In the United Arab Emirates in December, Real Madrid became the first club to retain the trophy when they beat Brazilians Gremio 1-0 with a goal by Cristiano Ronaldo.

The changes dovetail with FIFA's desire to build on plans already unveiled by UEFA, the European federation, and CONCACAF, which runs football in North and Central America and the Caribbean, for a Nations League to replace friendlies in the international calendar. The inaugural UEFA Nations League will begin in September of this year, with the top four teams going through to the finals in June 2019. — AFP



MANILA: Filipino boxing idol Manny Pacquiao (L) poses for photographs with Argentina's Lucas Matthysse (R) during a press conference in Manila yesterday, ahead of their World Welterweight championship bout in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia in July. — AFP

In a separate interview with AFP, Pacquiao described Matthysse as an "aggressive fighter". "He keeps on coming, which is good for me". He said he plans to improve his footwork, head movement and work on more combinations to counter the champion.

Matthysse for his part told AFP Pacquiao "changed his style a little bit" after the Marquez KO, though he is not guaranteeing a knockout. "Both of us fighters are very aggressive. We're gonna fight toe-to-toe and it's gonna make for a great fight," he said.

The Kuala Lumpur bout will likely mark the first time in 15 years that Pacquiao will be fighting without his long-standing US trainer Freddie Roach, who expressed hurt last week after saying ties have been cut. The boxer suggested Wednesday that role might go to his own friend and compatriot Buboy Fernandez,

at least for the Matthysse bout. "We just want to try and experience that Buboy will handle this one fight and after that go back to Freddie," Pacquiao said, stressing he had yet to decide and was "not closing the door" on Roach.

The bout will also mark Pacquiao's first venture as a promoter, instead of having his long-time American impresario Bob Arum handle that end of the business. "Bob Arum is in charge of American pay-per-view and that's it," Pacquiao told AFP.

After the Matthysse fight, Pacquiao told reporters yesterday he wants to take on Vasyli Lomachenko, the Ukrainian superfeatherweight WBO champion. He is currently considered by many to be the world's top "pound-for-pound" fighter, an unofficial honour Pacquiao once held. — AFP

Sports

Bayern rout Leverkusen to cruise into German Cup final

Bayern to face either Schalke or Eintracht Frankfurt

BERLIN: Thomas Mueller shone as Bayern Munich romped to a 6-2 semi-final win at Bayer Leverkusen on Tuesday to reach the German Cup final and keep their treble dreams alive. Leverkusen are up to third in the Bundesliga, but trail champions Bayern by a massive 24 points and the gulf in the league table showed up clearly in this semi-final.

"We were very effective and the team worked really well together," beamed Mueller after Bayern's master-class in attacking football. "We really deserved it, the team performance was great. "Of course we want more (titles), we can feel that something is possible this season," he added as Bayern eye winning the Cup for the 19th time in the club's history.

Mueller, the man of the match, scored twice and helped set up the visitors' first goal for Javi Martinez after only three minutes. Robert Lewandowski added a second, his 36th goal in 40 games this season, when left unmarked in the area as Munich raced into a 2-0 lead after just nine minutes at the BayArena in Leverkusen.

Bayer captain Lars Bender gave the hosts hope with a 16th-minute header while the Bayern defence appealed for an offside call which never came. Leverkusen's Germany winger Karim Bellarabi could have equalised when he twice forced Bayern goalkeeper Sven Ulreich into reflex saves, but it stayed 2-1 at the break.

Bayern stormed away in the second half as their star-studded attack turned on the style. Mueller, a constant

menace to the Leverkusen defence, netted his first on 52 minutes after good work from Thiago Alcantara, who hit their third eight minutes later.

The Spain international ran across goal and pulled back a sublime shot which wrong-footed Leverkusen goalkeeper Bernd Leno. Arjen Robben made it 5-1 when he fired home unmarked in the area on 64 minutes. Jamaica winger Leon Bailey, a second-half replacement, pulled a goal back for Leverkusen with a stunning free-kick on 72 minutes. But Mueller extinguished any hopes of a fight-back with his second and Bayern's sixth as the attacking midfielder scored a classic striker's goal.

When a Thiago pass played him into the area, Mueller shielded the ball with his body, then spun around his marker to bang his shot past Leno on 78 minutes. Mueller was cheered off by visiting Munich fans when he made way for James Rodriguez on 80 minutes.

Having already wrapped up a sixth straight Bundesliga title, Bayern will now face either Schalke or Eintracht Frankfurt, who meet in other semi, in the cup final in Berlin on May 19.

"We are delighted that we are going to Berlin," said Bayern goalkeeper Ulreich. Bayern host Real Madrid in the Champions League semi-final a week on Wednesday before the return leg in Madrid on May 1.

"When we play like we did today, it will even be hard for Real," added Ulreich as Bayern eye a repeat of their 2013 treble. — AFP



LEVERKUSEN: Bayern Munich's Spanish midfielder Thiago Alcantara (R), Bayern Munich's Austrian defender David Alaba (front, L), Bayern Munich's French midfielder Franck Ribery (L), Leverkusen's German midfielder Lars Bender (3L) and Leverkusen's German midfielder Karim Bellarabi vie for the ball during the German football Cup DFB Pokal semifinal match Bayer 04 Leverkusen vs Bayern Munich in Leverkusen. — AFP

“We are delighted to go to Berlin”

Kane strikes, but Spurs held by Brighton

BRIGHTON: Harry Kane stepped up his bid to win the Premier League's golden boot as Tottenham warmed up for the FA Cup semi-finals with a 1-1 draw at Brighton on Tuesday. Kane fired Tottenham ahead in the 48th minute when his close-range shot deflected in off Brighton defender Bruno.

It was Kane's 26th of the season and kept him in with a chance of catching Liverpool's Mohamed Salah, who sits ahead of the Tottenham striker on 30 goals in the race to finish as the Premier League's top scorer. But Mauricio Pochettino's side, who face Manchester United at Wembley on Saturday, left the Amex Stadium frustrated after conceding an equaliser two minutes after Kane's opener.

Albion drew level when Pascal Gross slotted home a penalty awarded for Serge Aurier's foul on Jose Izquierdo. Tottenham have gone two games without a league victory, but they are still in pole position to qualify for next season's Champions League via a top four finish. They are in fourth place, eight points ahead of fifth placed Chelsea, who have only five matches left to close the gap. "It was a difficult game, the first half was even and the second half we started really well. We scored but in the next section we conceded," Pochettino said.

"We created chances but not enough to win the game. The draw is a little bit disappointing because the intention was to get all three." Brighton are eight points clear of the bottom three and should be safe from relegation at the end of their first season back in the top-flight. With the FA Cup representing Tottenham's last chance of silverware this season, Pochettino-yet to win a trophy in his four years with the north London club-made six changes from the team beaten 3-1 by Manchester City on Saturday.

Belgium defender Toby Alderweireld was handed his



BRIGHTON: Brighton's Australian goalkeeper Mathew Ryan (C) jumps to make a save during the English Premier League football match between Brighton and Hove Albion and Tottenham Hotspur at the American Express Community Stadium in Brighton, southern England on Tuesday. — AFP

first league start since October in place of Davinson Sanchez, while Dele Alli, Kieran Trippier, Mousa Dembele and Eric Dier were rested.

Pochettino defended his selection, saying: "We were thinking of giving the team fresh legs because Saturday's game against Manchester City was tough mentally and physically. "We have a squad good enough to win games. This result was not because we rotated the team.

"Everyone is ready to play but Brighton was a very difficult opponent and we need to give credit to them." Lucas Moura, given his first league start as part of Pochettino's switches, threatened with a powerful drive from distance as Tottenham tried to take control.

Tottenham winger Son Heung-Min went closest to breaking the first-half deadlock with a low shot which forced a fine save from Albion goalkeeper Mat Ryan. Pochettino's men took the lead when a poor pass from Gross, followed by indecision from Gaetan Bong, allowed Son to slip into the area. The South Korean did well to keep control and the ball eventually broke for Kane to sweep home.

However, Brighton were back on level terms in the 50th minute as Izquierdo won a penalty by inducing Aurier's rash challenge. Regular Brighton penalty taker Glenn Murray, who has missed twice from the spot this season, stepped aside to allow German midfielder Gross to shoot under Hugo Lloris's dive. — AFP

Inter move third to put pressure on Roman rivals

MILAN: Mauro Icardi scored his 25th goal of the Serie A campaign to help Inter Milan ease past Cagliari 4-0 to move third in Serie A on Tuesday, putting the pressure on Roman rivals Lazio and Roma in the battle for Champions League places.

Inter had not scored or won in their last three games but Joao Cancelo broke the drought after just three minutes off a free kick in the San Siro. Inter's top scorer Icardi got the second after the break with Marcelo Brozovic returning from suspension to grab the third on the hour with Ivan Perisic rounding off the rout in the final minute. "After securing the result, the ball started to move at the right tempo, whereas before we didn't have the right rhythm," said coach Luciano Spalletti. "All in all we had a good game, I liked the team."

It was a dominant display by the former European giants who have no option but to win as they target a Champions League return for the first time since 2012. Spalletti's side move back up to third position with 63 points from 33 games before Roma and Lazio, both on 61 points, play Genoa and Fiorentina respectively later.

French striker Yann Karamoh missed two golden chances in front of goal with the hosts losing midfielder Roberto Gagliardini who was stretchered off in the first

half with a suspected hamstring problem.

Cancelo left Cagliari's Alessio Cragno with no chance in goal early but Karamoh could have got the second after quarter of an hour in Milan when captain Icardi set him up with only the goalkeeper to beat.

Karamoh, 19, also missed a second chance to finish off a Danilo D'Ambrosio cross but rattled the crossbar. Leandro Castan blocked a close range Icardi effort before the break, with Karamoh looking to have finally scored but was ruled offside.

Icardi failed to finish off a Perisic ball on front of goal before the half-time whistle but made no mistake after the break slotting in off a Rafinha cross to slot in his 25th goal of the Serie A campaign—a personal record for the Argentine. It surpassed the 24 he scored last year to take his career total to 106 Serie A goals in 185 appearances. Ten minutes later Perisic sent the ball down the middle for Icardi, who was blocked by Cagliari centre-back Marco Andreoli, with the ball falling to the feet of Brozovic, who curled in and then set up Perisic for the fourth.

"I'm happy for the 25 goals, although I guess he's not happy, because he could have capitalised more," said Spalletti of Icardi. "He made a lot of movement, he helped the team, but from the point of view of scoring I think he's not happy. I know he would like to bring everything home."

Cagliari are struggling 14th just five points above the relegation zone. Champions Juventus travel to Crotona on Wednesday with Napoli's dwindling Serie A title hopes are hanging on a win at home against Udinese who have lost their last nine games. Napoli are six points behind Juventus before this weekend's top-of-the-table clash in Turin. — AFP



MILAN: Inter Milan's captain Argentinian forward Mauro Icardi (L) fights for the ball with Cagliari's Brazilian defender Leandro Castan during the Italian Serie A football match between Inter Milan and Cagliari at The San Siro Stadium in Milan. — AFP

Barcelona hold on for draw at Celta Vigo

MADRID: Lionel Messi was thrown on as a substitute but 10-man Barcelona were relieved to escape with a draw as Celta Vigo came within a whisker of inflicting the Catalans' first league defeat of the season on Tuesday.

Messi was introduced after an hour at the Stade Balaidos and looked to have inspired another Barca victory when Paulinho gave the visitors a 2-1 lead four minutes later. But Sergi Roberto was sent off for preventing Iago Aspas sprinting clear and in the 82nd minute the former Liverpool striker made it 2-2, albeit with a large slice of luck given the ball brushed his hand on its way into the net. Vigo pushed for a late winner and should have had it when substitute Lucas Boye went through one-on-one but he took too long and Marc-Andre Ter Stegen made a crucial stop.

"I think we deserved to win the game," Celta Vigo coach Juan Carlos Unzué said. Earlier, a superb strike from Ousmane Dembele had been cancelled out by Jonny Castro's close-range finish as Barcelona stretched their record unbeaten run to 40 La Liga games.

They also extend their lead at the top of the table to 12 points, which could be cut to nine if Atletico Madrid beat Real Sociedad on Thursday. "You always have to accept a point but our intention was to win," Barca coach Ernesto Valverde said afterwards.

"When we lost Sergi, we had difficulties but it is one more point. We need only two more victories and we have to fight for them." With one eye on Saturday's Copa del Rey final against Sevilla, Valverde made several changes to his Barca starting line-up as the likes of Messi, Luis Suarez, Gerard Pique, Samuel Umtiti, Sergio Busquets and Ivan Rakitic were all rested.

"There were players who came from playing a lot of games and I thought it suited us," Valverde said. "Let's see if we can give our fans some joy on Saturday." Ter Stegen, Philippe Coutinho and Dembele were the more established names selected and Dembele took his chance, capping an excellent attacking display with a brilliantly taken goal in the 39th minute.

Coutinho played wide to Paco Alcacer whose return ball was bouncing as Dembele controlled and sent a dipping half-volley into the corner. On the stroke of half-time, however, Vigo were level. Andre Gomes gave the ball away and then, after the break developed, allowed Maximiliano Gomez to fire in a cross, which Castro bundled in. Messi came on in the 60th minute for Coutinho and by the 64th, Barca were ahead.—AFP

Live		Matches on TV
		(Local Timings)
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE		
Leicester City v Southampton		21:45
SPANISH LEAGUE		
Deportivo Alaves v Girona	beIN SPORTS HD 3	20:30
Real Sociedad v Atletico de Madrid	beIN SPORTS HD 3	20:30
Real Betis v Las Palmas	beIN SPORTS HD 3	22:30
Levante v Malaga	beIN SPORTS HD 3	22:30

13 West African cricket teams start small but aim big



14 Matyisse vows fight 'to the death' against Pacquiao



15 Bayern rout Leverkusen to cruise into German Cup final



TORONTO: Pascal Siakam #43 of the Toronto Raptors goes to the basket against the Washington Wizards in Game Two of Round One of the 2018 NBA Playoffs on Tuesday at the Air Canada Centre in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. —AFP

Wizards spellbound by rampant Raptors

Boston down Milwaukee to take lead in first round series

LOS ANGELES: DeMar DeRozan scored 37 points as the Toronto Raptors overwhelmed the Washington Wizards 130-119 to take a 2-0 lead in their best-of-seven Eastern Conference NBA playoff series Tuesday. A record-breaking first-half performance laid the foundations for the Raptors, who had surged into a 76-58 lead at half-time to leave Washington chasing an 18-point deficit after the break. DeRozan, who also contributed four assists and five rebounds, spearheaded a rampant Toronto offense, which saw six players finish with double-digit points tallies. "I just let the game come to me," DeRozan said afterwards. "It's not like I go out there thinking I have to score 30 or 40 points."

Tonight I just wanted to be aggressive," Jonas Valanciunas scored 19 points, while C.J. Miles had 18 off the bench as Toronto took a firm grip on the series with game three set for Washington on Friday. "We're

strong as a team, it's not about individual players," Valanciunas said. "We did it as a team tonight. We were great defending, helping each other."

It's a team sport and when you play together and support each other it's fun," Washington's resistance was led by John Wall with 29 points, but the Wizards were rarely in the contest, save for one late rally as the top-seeded Raptors eased up.

Wall had given Washington hope of a recovery after draining two free throws to take the Wizards back to within five points at 108-103 in the fourth quarter. But Toronto slammed the door with a rapid burst of scoring to take the game away from the Wizards for good as the clock wound down.

Earlier, the Raptors wasted no time in forging ahead during a lop-sided first half. Toronto powered into a 24-11 midway through the first period and were

soon 34-13 up. Toronto maintained a 20-point cushion through most of the first half, and they quickly passed their franchise record points tally of 63 to finish on 76 as the half-time the buzzer sounded at the Air Canada Center.

Elsewhere Tuesday, second seeds Boston shrugged off their injury crisis to down Milwaukee 120-106 to take a 2-0 lead in their first round series. The Celtics are still reeling from confirmation that star Kyrie Irving will miss the rest of the season.

But the Boston club produced a dominant display to seal a win that puts them firmly in the driving seat in the best-of-seven series. Jaylen Brown shouldered the offensive burden in the absence of Irving, scoring 30 points in 33 minutes on court.

Brown said the Celtics had been unfazed by the raft of injuries that has threatened to derail their season. "I

don't pay attention to that—ultimately we just want to win games," Brown said.

"We're confident as ever. Teams have been writing us off all year and we just keep proving people wrong," Terry Rozier had 23 points with eight assists on a night when six Celtics put up double figures. Giannis Antetokounmpo led the scoring for the Bucks with 30 points, with Khris Middleton adding 25 in a losing effort.

In Portland, New Orleans took a 2-0 lead in their series against the Trail Blazers with a 111-102 victory on the road. Jrue Holiday scored 33 points for the Pelicans — including 12 in a fourth quarter rally—to guide New Orleans home, with Anthony Davis adding 22.

C.J. McCollum led the scoring for the Blazers with 22 points, while Damian Lillard was effectively nullified by the Pelicans defense, scoring just 17 points. —AFP

Djokovic battles past Coric, Nadal into last 16

MONTE CARLO: Novak Djokovic needed 10 match points to see off Borna Coric in the Monte Carlo Masters second round yesterday, while world number one Rafael Nadal eased past Aljaz Bedene 6-1, 6-3.

Djokovic, playing only his fourth tournament since Wimbledon last July after struggling with a right elbow injury, overcame some late nerves to win 7-6 (7/2), 7-5.

Djokovic is working with long-time former coach Marian Vajda for the first time in almost a year after splitting from Andre Agassi, and the 30-year-old has looked rejuvenated in Monaco after early exits in Indian Wells and Miami. The Serbian will next face Austrian fifth seed Dominic Thiem with a possible quarter-final against defending champion Nadal, who plays Karen Khachanov in the last 16 on Thursday, up for grabs.

The first game set the tone for the rest of the match, with 12-time Grand Slam champion Djokovic eventually

holding after nine minutes of bruising baseline rallies that included a missed break point for Coric. Both players saved break points in their opening service games, but the Croatian could not fend off Djokovic for long as the two-time Monte Carlo winner moved 3-1 ahead when the 21-year-old Coric mishit a smash. But he dug deep to break back thanks to two backhand unforced errors from Djokovic.

Djokovic was rock solid in a tie-break, though, as Coric became ragged, dumping a simple short ball into the net and firing a backhand long to gift his opponent the first set. The former world number one was showing the ferocity and accuracy of old in his groundstrokes and he had the better of three straight breaks to take control. But the 39th-ranked Coric saved two match points on his own serve, before fighting back from 40-0 down as Djokovic struggled to get over the line as he served for the match.

A succession of wild backhands and a tame forehand into the net saw four more match points come and go, before Coric levelled the set at 5-5 as Djokovic blasted wide and long. He rediscovered his composure, though, to break again and finally complete the job at the 10th time of asking as Coric sent a backhand flying long.

NADAL THRASHES BEDENE

Nadal started his bid for an 11th Monte Carlo title with a comfortable victory over Slovenia's Bedene. The 16-time

Grand Slam winner, like Djokovic, is looking for a record 31st Masters title, and he swatted aside Bedene for the loss of only four games. Nadal brought up set point in the opener with a trademark, curling forehand up the line, before sealing the set with a drop shot. Bedene, who switched his allegiance back to Slovenia from Britain earlier this year, put up some resistance in the second set, but Nadal broke through in game seven.

The 31-year-old Spaniard wrapped up a comfortable victory in the Monaco sunshine with another break as Bedene hit a forehand into the net. Japan's Kei Nishikori continued his comeback from injury with an impressive 7-5, 6-2 win over Russian Daniil Medvedev.

The former world number four, who has struggled over the last year with a right wrist injury, followed up his first-round victory against Tomas Berdych with a solid display on centre court. "The first set was a real battle, he was playing a little better than me I think at the beginning," said Nishikori.

"I just tried to stay calm and not do anything too crazy and stay calm at the baseline," Russian Khachanov cruised past Gilles Simon 6-2, 6-2, while 11th seed Roberto Bautista Agut beat Feliciano Lopez in straight sets.

Last year's runner-up Albert Ramos-Vinolas slumped to a 6-4, 6-2 defeat by Philipp Kohlschreiber, whose fellow German Jan-Lennard Struff joined him in the last 16 by seeing off Italian 13th seed Fabio Fognini. —AFP



MONACO: Rafael Nadal of Spain returns a ball to Aljaz Bedene of Slovenia during the Monte-Carlo ATP Masters Series Tournament, yesterday in Monaco. —AFP

Business

THURSDAY, APRIL 19, 2018

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19 Kuwait's non-oil growth improves to 3.3% in 2017



21 Turkish Airlines celebrates 10th anniversary of Star Alliance entry



WASHINGTON: (From left) Maurice Obstfeld, Economic Counsellor and Director of the Research Department at the IMF, Gian Maria Milesi-Ferretti, Deputy Director of the Research Department at the IMF, and Malhar Nabar, Deputy Division Chief of the Research Department at the IMF, hold a press briefing on the World Economic Outlook during the 2018 Spring Meetings of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank Group at IMF Headquarters on Tuesday. —AFP

IMF warns of risks as central banks tighten

Report calls for global coordination to regulate cryptocurrencies

WASHINGTON: The International Monetary Fund urged central banks yesterday to take a gradual and transparent approach to tightening monetary policy, warning that unexpected moves could shock the global economy. The fund cautioned that investors and financial markets expect a steady approach to monetary tightening based on the belief inflation will remain relatively tame.

But the IMF pointed to some fragilities in global finance after a lengthy period of easy money policies and low interest rates, including a flood of high-risk bonds, record-high debt levels and lofty prices for risky assets. If conditions change abruptly that could even derail the economic recovery, the fund warned. "Financial vulnerabilities, which have accumulated during years of extremely low rates and volatility, could make the road ahead bumpy and could put growth at risk," the IMF said in its Global Financial Stability Report, a twice-annual analysis that also called for global coordination to regulate cryptocurrencies.

A sudden acceleration of inflation in the United States could lead the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates more quickly than currently expected, the report. Tobias Adrian, director for the IMF's monetary and capital markets department, acknowledged in a press brief-

ing that uncertainty about inflation is currently "very low," but warned that markets could have an outsized reaction to any spike.

"What we are flagging is that at some point markets see shocks in inflation that raise inflation uncertainty and when that happens, that is associated with a rise in long-term interest rates and that might lead to a tightening in financial conditions," he said. Emerging markets would be especially vulnerable to "spillovers" if that happens, the report cautioned.

"Gradual and well-telegraphed" moves by advanced economy central banks have so far been favorable for emerging economies, but financial flows could fall by "at least one-quarter" if central banks mishandle the transition, the fund said. The analysis is the latest to tackle the myriad policymaking challenges as the world moves towards ending a long period of low

interest rates and monetary stimulus enacted after the 2008 financial crisis.

The US Federal Reserve has undertaken a series of interest rate hikes over the last two and a half years, and the European Central Bank has signaled it plans to soon end its stimulus program.

While these moves are necessary, central banks should "maintain accommodation as needed" and raise rates in "a gradual and well-communicated manner," the fund said.

Crypto-coordination needed

Adrian said talk of a US-China trade war had not so far significantly affected financial conditions beyond the effect on markets. "In recent weeks, discussions around trade have increased investor uncertainty and as a result financial conditions have tightened somewhat, but remain easy," he said.

The IMF also added their voice to a growing chorus of

concern among regulators about cryptocurrencies, and called for more international attention on the issue. While the fund saw potential for digital money to make the financial system more efficient, it warned that they have "been afflicted by notorious cases of fraud, security breaches, and operational failures and have been associated with illicit activities."

Adrian said the crypto sector is still too small to pose major risk to the financial system, but cautioned the currencies have the potential for fast growth. "We feel that cooperation across jurisdictions is important, as investments in crypto-assets is very global by nature and business models in the fintech sector are very often very global by nature," Adrian said.

Regulators have been stepping up oversight of the domain following volatility in bitcoin prices. New York authorities on Tuesday announced an inquiry into 13 bitcoin trading platforms.

Agustin Carstens, general manager of the Bank for International Settlements, has called for regulators to act preemptively, arguing that bitcoin and others fail the "basic textbook definitions" of currencies—which are backed by governments and their central banks.

Instead it "has become a combination of a bubble, a Ponzi scheme and an environmental disaster." —AFP



Unexpected moves could shock global economy

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The IMF also added their voice to a growing chorus of

NBK Capital holds Smart Wealth Forum



KUWAIT: NBK Capital recently organized a Smart Wealth Forum for Smart Wealth Management in cooperation with Kuwait Economic Society. Key speakers in the field of financial investment presented best practices on financial services, sustainability, personal planning and innovation in financial technology and investment solutions for middle-income individuals.

The forum was held with the participation of NBK Group Deputy CEO and Chairman of NBK Capital Sheikha Al-Bahar, NBK Capital CEO Faisal Al-Hamad, NBK Capital's Financial Technology Sector Vice President Fahd Al-Rasheed Al-Bader, head of the accredited financial analysts society Mujib Al-Qattan, Secretary of the Kuwait Economic Society Muhammad Al-Sane, Administrative Partner of Sirdab Lab Mona Al-Mukhaizeem, President of the Global Research Institute at Deutsche Asset Management Stuart Kirk.

"The objective of this forum is to provide all the perspectives for sound planning in financial investment and create sophisticated investment services and plans that will meet the needs of our clients," said Bahar. "We are committed to continuing to improve financial services for our customers and to make progress in providing products and services that meet the needs and needs of our customers," she added.

Hamad called for educating investors, especially in the

current circumstances, taking into consideration that financial markets are not based on chance, confusion and random estimates, but on study, knowledge and economic tools that enable investors to make successful investment decisions with positive results.

Qattan stressed the need to develop investment tools offered in the market to suit the needs of the middle-income segment of the society in order to increase their participation in the market, taking into account the importance of educating investors on how to choose investment products suitable for their objectives, liquidity and ability to take risks.

Meanwhile, Sane said the challenges facing the Kuwaiti economy currently require that people with middle income review their investment methods and ways of saving money through identifying their main needs in life and being educated on how to choose investment products suitable to their needs and not relying on traditional investment and savings alternatives.

Mukhaizeem said technology has become a major part of our daily lives. Therefore, there is a need for more attention by investment companies in changing current methods by developing the way they deal with their customers to meet their needs.

Inflation-busting pay hikes highlight German shift towards consumption

BERLIN/FRANKFURT: German unions have reached an inflation-busting pay hike deal for more than 2 million public sector workers that could push up prices and boost a consumer-led upswing in Europe's biggest economy.

The deal sealed late on Tuesday night is part of a broader, gradual shift in Germany's economy in which private consumption has overtaken exports as the main growth driver, making the recovery more resilient to external shocks. The complex wage agreement gives public sector workers a 3.2 percent pay raise backdated to March 1, followed by a 3.1 percent increase from April 2019. In a third stage, wages will rise by a further 1 percent from March 2020.

With inflation projected to stay well below 2 percent this year and next, the agreement also means in real terms that workers have more money to splash out.

"It is the best result in many years," Verdi union chief Frank Bsirske told reporters in the town of Potsdam near Berlin. Thorsten Schulten, wage expert at the WSI institute, called the agreement a "strong deal" with pay hikes clearly above the levels seen in previous years.

It comes in the wake of an unusually high pay hike reached in February for 3.9 million workers in the industrial sector, amounting to a roughly 4 percent annual rise for 2018 and 2019.

Record-low unemployment and unprecedented shortages of skilled labor in many sectors have led German employers to give up years of wage restraint. "The time of ultra-low wage settlements is clearly behind us. Above all, this reflects how Germany is slowly reaching full employment," Commerzbank economist Joerg Kraemer said.

The European Central Bank is keeping a close eye on German wage negotiations for any sign that wage growth is picking up, potentially helping lift inflation and giving the eurozone's central bank added leeway to start winding down its massive stimulus program. Salary growth has been missing despite a brisk expansion in the eurozone economy over the past year, largely fuelled by the central bank's easy money and by a booming global economy.

The German wage deal is likely to bolster the ECB's confidence that salaries in the bloc's largest economy are finally picking up, paving the ground for a long-awaited recovery in inflation. This would strengthen the ECB's hand as it prepares to close the money taps after three years of aggressive stimulus.

"This is good for Germany and the euro zone and obviously reduces the headache in the towers of the ECB in Frankfurt," said Florian Hense, an economist at Berenberg Bank. Inflation across the euro zone has stabilised comfortably above 1 percent, allowing the ECB to gradually reduce the amount of stimulus it provides to the economy as it seeks to lift price growth to its target of just under 2 percent. —Reuters

Business

Souk Safar - The Avenues, an innovative new concept

An iconic project that offers all what a traveler needs



KUWAIT: Robert Hayek and other officials during the cake-cutting ceremony. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



KUWAIT: Boodai Aviation has officially opened its new iconic project Souk Safar at The Avenues.

During the lunch and the cut ribbon ceremony that took place yesterday, Robert Hayek, Group General Manager have emphasized during his speech on the occasion, that Souk Safar comes as a reflection to the worldwide fundamental changes in the travel industry and within the ongoing development journey of Boodai Aviation.

Hayek added that Boodai Aviation offer two exciting new products:

Otolat.com.kw, an online booking engine responding to the new generation trend and latest technologies

offering the traveler to finalize all airline's bookings, hotels, transfer, car rental cruises, tickets for sport and culture events at the comfort of his place with very attractive offers. Otolat.com.kw is available as mobile Apps on both Android and IOS.

He added that the uniqueness of Otolat.com.kw is that the support desk is in Kuwait and not abroad. We understand the values and traditions of the Kuwaiti society and always try to offer the best deals that reflected in our slogan: Book online with a peace of mind, we are in Kuwait.

The second product is "Souk Safar" that responds to the family and individual travelers who look for profes-

sional advice with an "easy to reach" comfortable environment. Souk Safar consists of several airlines desks, namely Lufthansa, Turkish Airlines, Jazeera, American Airlines, Air China and two areas dedicated to sell Emirates and Qatar Airways tickets as well as several hotel chains and Holidays namely Emirates Holidays, Minor Hotels - Anantara, Raffles Istanbul, Myconian Collection Myconos, Kempinski Mall of Emirates and an area dedicated to Holidays packages to Turkey, Azerbaijan and Bosnia.

Souk Safar offers you the facility of submitting your Schengen and British visa through VFS visa center located at Souk Safar dedicated to VIP service

as well as Safenet travel insurance and international driving license.

Souk Safar Holidays offers to the traveler a variety of exclusive worldwide packages with very competitive rates.

The ceremony was attended by several ambassadors, CEO and Managers of reputable airlines, General Managers and Sales Managers of several individual and hotel chains and representatives of the Civil Aviation. All attendees have praised the concept and the facilities offered to the traveler under one roof. Souk Safar is located at Phase 3 (The Grand) at M1 opposite Tarboush Restaurant.

Ford Mustang celebrates 54 years of true muscle car

KUWAIT: The legendary Ford Mustang turns 54 years old today and shows no signs of slowing down. Global demand for the new 2018 model has driven Ford Mustang to its third straight year as the best-selling sports coupe in the world, while its social media status as world's most hashtagged car proves that passion for this motoring icon is stronger than ever with fans of all ages.



Global Mustang registrations in 2017 totaled 125,809 cars, according to Ford analysis of the most recent new light vehicle registration data from IHS Markit. This data - compiled from government and other sources and capturing 95 per cent of global new vehicle volumes in more than 80 countries - puts Mustang ahead of all other sports coupe competitors worldwide.

"Demand for Mustang continues to be very strong," said Crystal Worthem, Marketing director, Ford Middle East & Africa. "Even more encouraging is that, with the updated 2018 Mustang shortly making its way to our region, customers will no doubt love all the great new technologies it will offer, including the all-new 10-speed automatic transmission, the new active valve performance exhaust, and of course, the 12-inch customisable digital instrument cluster which it gets from the Ford GT."

Of the nearly 126,000 vehicles registered worldwide, Ford reported 81,866 of those were registered in the United States, meaning just over one-third of all Mustang registrations are occurring in export markets. The most popular configuration worldwide is the Mustang GT with the 5.0-litre V8. While sports cars have traditionally skewed toward male buyers in the United States, Mustang is increasingly finding favor with women. In an environment of relatively flat sports car sales to women, Ford research shows a 10 per cent gain in women buying Mustang in the last five years.

Since global exports began in 2015, through December 2017, Ford has sold 418,000 Mustangs around the world. Sports coupes, as defined by IHS Markit, include two-door and convertible models.

Social Media Superstar

While the Ford Mustang was born in the 1960s, its enduring legacy means it currently enjoys unparalleled social media status all over the globe. It is the world's most hashtagged car on Instagram for 2017.

To celebrate Mustang's popularity, and to mark its 54th anniversary, Ford Middle East unveiled a stunning mosaic made of up of hundreds of regional Mustang fan photos neatly arranged to form the Pony car's iconic emblem, an exceptionally unique creation presented for the first time ever in the region.

In the lead up to Mustang Day, Ford asked fans in the Middle East to post pictures of their Mustangs to Instagram with the hashtag #Mustang54, with those images accumulated and compiled to create a mosaic - a first-of-its-kind in the region. Contributors can zoom in on the picture here to find their car's place in this epic image.

Barclays: Equities may continue outperforming bonds

KUWAIT: Barclays published its Q2 2018 Compass Report, which examines major asset classes globally. The report notes that today's best performing investment portfolios are those geared towards developed and emerging market equities, in addition to high yield and emerging markets bonds. The report also reinforces the importance of maintaining a well-diversified long-term core investment portfolio.

Compiled by Barclays, the quarterly research provides investment commentary for investors around the world. The latest Compass report looks at the impact of current global issues on investments, including US policy, the new regulatory framework for fund managers (MiFID II), and the impact of news on investor behavior.

Francesco Grosoli, Barclays' Head of Private Bank for Europe, the Middle East and Africa (EMEA), said:

"Our investment team often makes the point that the risk of political events seriously affecting the economic backdrop is overstated. That's why we believe that a recession scenario is unlikely given the strong and broadening global economic growth. Therefore, despite recent market volatility, it makes sense for investors to put their money to work especially with inflation being relatively contained. Our investment team expect stocks to continue to outperform bonds, particularly among emerging markets and those in Continental Europe and the US."

Grosoli added: "We'll likely see volatility return to historically more normal levels, which is why more investors are being drawn to diversified multi-asset portfolios and active managers who stand to benefit from the slightly more challenging environment."

Emerging markets

The Q2 2018 Compass report kept a tactical overweight position in Developed Markets Equities, where a healthy global economy is allowing for strong profit growth across a range of sectors. Barclays also remains focused on the more pro-cyclical sectors: industrials, technology and financials.



Francesco Grosoli

Emerging Markets Equities are also outlined as a tactical overweight allocation and remain strong overall, as evidenced by recent business confidence surveys and trade data. Asian markets remain the preferred region, with Barclays favouring Korea, Taiwan, China (offshore) and India on a strategic basis.

High Yield & Emerging Markets Bonds have been kept at a tactical overweight to benchmark, favoring Global High Yield over Emerging Markets Debt, with the former offering a higher yield and lower duration risk. Allocations to Investment Grade Bonds, Cash and Short-Maturity Bonds, Developed Government Bonds and Alternative Trading Strategies remained tactically underweight in the latest Compass report. The report also kept a neutral view towards Commodities and Real Estate, which retains pro-cyclical characteristics.

Russian real wages miss forecast, retail sales grow slightly

MOSCOW: Real wages in Russia rose less than expected in March and real incomes fell from the previous month, failing to provide the support needed for significant growth in the Russian economy, data showed yesterday.

Russia's economy grew 1.5 percent last year after two years of recession, but fell short of a government target of 2 percent. Russia's economy ministry has said it expects gross domestic product growth to accelerate in 2018. Data provided by Russia's state statistic service, Rosstat, show-

ing activity in economy in the first quarter was "generally quite soft," analysts at Capital Economics said in a note. "The outlook has, of course, been clouded by fresh US sanctions and the sell-off in Russian financial markets earlier this month," they wrote.

The United States imposed new sanctions against Russia on April 6, targeting major Russian companies and some of the country's most prominent businessmen in response to alleged Russian meddling in the 2016 US election and other "malign activity". In March, before the sanctions were imposed, real wages rose 6.5 percent year-on-year and real incomes rose 4.1 percent, compared with a 4.3 percent increase in the previous month. Economists polled by Reuters had expected that real wages would grow by 8.8 percent in March. Retail sales, a barometer of consumer demand and Russia's key driver of economic growth, rose 2.0 percent in March compared with a year

ago after rising 1.8 percent in the preceding month.

"The weak recovery in retail sales was a surprise, given that we are seeing significant growth in real wages and disposable incomes," said B&N Bank analyst Natalia Shilova. The World Bank said late last year that consumer demand was expected to be the main engine of GDP growth in 2017-2019 in Russia. Vladimir Miklashevsky, senior economist and trading desk strategist at Danske Bank in Helsinki, said the Russian central bank would not consider real wage growth as an inflationary risk at its meeting on April 27. "In its decision on the rate, the central bank, most likely, will emphasize the strengthening of inflation risks because of the growing volatility of the rouble due to geopolitical tensions," Miklashevsky said. Inflation is likely to be the first economic indicator to feel the impact of the sell-off in Russian markets. Higher inflation could alter the central bank's plan for further cuts to its key interest rate, now set at 7.25 percent. —Reuters

EXCHANGE RATES

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
Europe		
British Pound	0.423737	0.431237
Czech Korune	0.006679	0.015979
Danish Krone	0.045828	0.050828
Euro	0.366126	0.373626
Georgian Lari	0.122408	0.122408
Hungarian O.001106	0.001296	
Norwegian Krone	0.034635	0.039835
Romanian Leu	0.063064	0.079914
Russian ruble	0.004865	0.004865
Slovakia	0.008923	0.018923
Slovenia	0.031699	0.036699
Swedish Krona	0.0303958	0.314958
Swiss Franc		
Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.224962	0.236962
New Zealand Dollar	0.214067	0.223567
America		
Canadian Dollar	0.233612	0.242612
US Dollars	0.296500	0.300900
US Dollars Mint	0.297000	0.300900
Asia		
Bangladesh Taka	0.003189	0.003773
Chinese Yuan	0.046293	0.049793
Hong Kong Dollar	0.036204	0.038954

Indian Rupee	0.004112	0.004753
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000017	0.000023
Japanese Yen	0.002713	0.002893
Korean Won	0.000271	0.000286
Malaysian Ringgit	0.073294	0.079294
Nepalese Rupee	0.002999	0.003169
Pakistan Rupee	0.002499	0.002789
Philippine Peso	0.005678	0.005978
Singapore Dollar	0.223783	0.233783
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001605	0.002185
Taiwan	0.010110	0.010290
Thai Baht	0.009264	0.009814
Arab		
Bahraini Dinar	0.790717	0.799217
Egyptian Pound	0.014226	0.019944
Iranian Riyal	0.000083	0.000084
Iraqi Dinar	0.000202	0.000262
Jordanian Dinar	0.419359	0.428359
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000148	0.000248
Moroccan Dirhams	0.023282	0.047282
Omani Riyal	0.774461	0.780141
Qatar Riyal	0.078277	0.083217
Saudi Riyal	0.079073	0.080373
Syrian Pound	0.001273	0.001493
Tunisian Dinar	0.121274	0.129274
Turkish Lira	0.068617	0.078917
UAE Dirhams	0.080417	0.082117
Yemeni Riyal	0.000977	0.001057

Dollarco Exchange Co. Ltd

Rate for Transfer	Selling Rate
US Dollar	300.250
Canadian Dollar	239.550
Sterling Pound	430.780
Euro	373.130
Swiss Franc	293.050
Bahrain Dinar	798.475
UAE Dirhams	82.150
Qatari Riyals	83.380
Saudi Riyals	80.960
Jordanian Dinar	424.760
Egyptian Pound	16.971
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.921
Indian Rupees	4.578
Pakistani Rupees	2.598
Bangladesh Taka	3.602
Philippines Pessso	5.766
Cyprus pound	17.875
Japanese Yen	3.795
Syrian Pound	1.585
Nepalese Rupees	2.867
Malaysian Ringgit	78.085
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	48.175
Thai Bhat	10.605

Business

NBK Economic Report

Kuwait's non-oil growth improves to 3.3% in 2017

Recovery in consumer sector gained pace

KUWAIT: The non-oil economy improved in 2017, with growth exceeding expectations. The rebound has come from project spending and a recovering consumer sector. Data thus far in 2018 continued to indicate that the recovery in consumer activity is robust. Meanwhile, the solid US economy saw the Fed raise interest rates again in March, with the Central Bank of Kuwait deciding to do the same to keep interest rates margins narrow and to maintain the stability of the currency.

Non-oil GDP

The non-oil economy grew by 3.3 percent in 2017, up from 2 percent the year before and slightly stronger than our 3 percent forecast. The pace of growth slowed slightly in 4Q17 to 2.4 percent y/y, but overall the economy has continued to recover from the sharp slowdown in late-2014 and 2015. We expect this trend to continue in 2018 and 2019, with non-oil growth seen accelerating to 3.5 percent and 4 percent, respectively.

However, lower oil output saw total GDP shrink by 2.9 percent in real terms during 2017. Oil output was down 8 percent due to crude oil production cuts implemented by OPEC and its non-OPEC partners, a policy which helped reduce the imbalance in the international oil market and shore up the price of oil. Indeed, the recovery in oil prices over the last year helped increase nominal GDP in the oil sector by over 20 percent in 2017.

Project spending

Much of the boost to non-oil activity has come from a continued commitment to capital spending by the government, even as other countries in the region canceled planned projects or put them on hold. In March, the government re-iterated this commitment at this year's Kuwait Investment Forum with its ambitious plan to develop the northern region. With the aim of diversifying the economy away from oil and bolstering national security, the plan promises to generate 200,000 jobs for Kuwaitis. This project will boost income and spending, providing an impetus to credit and economic growth over the medium term.

Recovery in the consumer sector

The health of the consumer sector has been no less important to the recovery in the non-oil economy. Recent data has further confirmed the improving trend in the sector. The Ara consumer confidence index rose to 113 in

March, up 15 percent y/y. This improvement in confidence has been felt most noticeably in consumers' view of the current economic conditions and employment opportunities, which reflect also the relative recovery in the price of oil.

Real estate buoyant

Real estate activity was up in February, though prices appeared to soften. Sales during the month stood at KD 189 million, up by 22 percent y/y. The strength came from the residential (26 percent y/y) and investment (46 percent y/y) sectors, while commercial sales remained weak. Prices in all sectors were softer in February, though residential land and home prices were within their 12-month ranges. The exception was the index of investment prices, which slipped to its lowest level in more than four years. This may reflect oversupply in the investment market (rental units) and lower demand stemming mainly from reduced growth among expatriates.

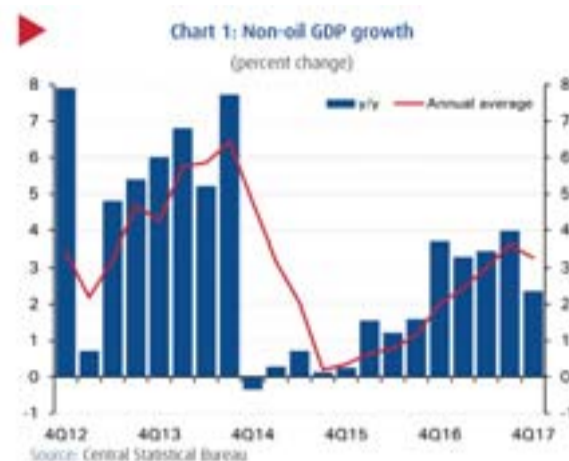
Business credit activity

Bank credit growth eased for the fifth consecutive month in February, with growth slowing to 2.5 percent, but credit to households and businesses showed some improvement. Business credit activity was encouraging, with its first gain in six months stemming mostly from core business activities such as trade and industry. These gains were partially offset by the drop in credit to non-bank financials and credit for the purchase of securities, with total outstanding credit posting an increase of KD 40 million.

CBK raises interest rates

To avoid a further widening of the spread between USD and dinar interest rates, the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) increased its policy rate in March following a similar move by the US Federal Reserve. An improving US economy no doubt further bolstered that decision. The CBK discount rate was increased by 25 basis points to 3 percent, after keeping rates unchanged following the two previous Fed hikes. The spread between dinar and USD rates has narrowed significantly over the last year, which required a hike to maintain the relative stability of the KD.

Banks adjusted their rates accordingly. This rate increase has not had any negative impact on lending and we do not expect it to lead to a drop in borrowing in the near future. For consumer lending, the increase is too



small to make a dent. As for corporates, the interest rate is not the only factor affecting demand for credit, which still benefits from attractive expected rates of return on investment. Meanwhile, the increase in interest rates should boost bank deposits.

Budget deficit narrows

Higher oil prices have continued to support the fiscal position. The average price of Kuwait export crude stabilized at \$62 in March, but remained 25 percent higher than a year ago. As a result, the fiscal deficit narrowed to KD 2.5 billion for FY17/18 to-date in February, to an annualized 7.3 percent of GDP. We think FY17/18 will close with a deficit of around 10 percent of GDP, well below the 17 percent projected in the official budget. The deficit is expected to remain broadly stable in the following two fiscal years at around 9 percent of GDP. If the price of oil remains close to its current level, government borrowing needs will be reduced and so will the need to draw down on the General Reserve Fund.

CA deficit turns to surplus

Improving oil prices also helped boost Kuwait's current account in 2017. The current surplus more than doubled to KD 1.1 billion in 4Q17 from the prior period, increasing the full 2017 balance to a surplus of 6.3 percent of GDP compared to a 4.5 percent deficit in 2016. The improvement is owed largely to a 19 percent increase in oil receipts during the year, though 8 percent

growth in investment income and a 9 percent decline in worker remittances also supported the current account. At the same time, double-digit growth in imports and the services bill weighed on the balance. The current account is expected to improve further in 2018 but will continue to be weighed by the growth in imports on the back of the economic recovery and growth in consumer demand.

Inflation weakens

Despite an improving economy, inflation has been weakening, mostly on continued softness in housing inflation. Inflation eased to 0.8 percent y/y in February, from 1.0 percent in January and an average of 1.5 percent in 2017. The weakness is largely due to deflationary pressures from housing rent and food prices. Healthcare costs also continued to fall, while inflation eased in the transportation, communication, and education segments. The expected increase in demand this year is not likely to have a major impact on inflation given that much of the demand will be channeled through imports unless exchange rates in trade partners' countries appreciate noticeably against the dinar.

Bourse Kuwait

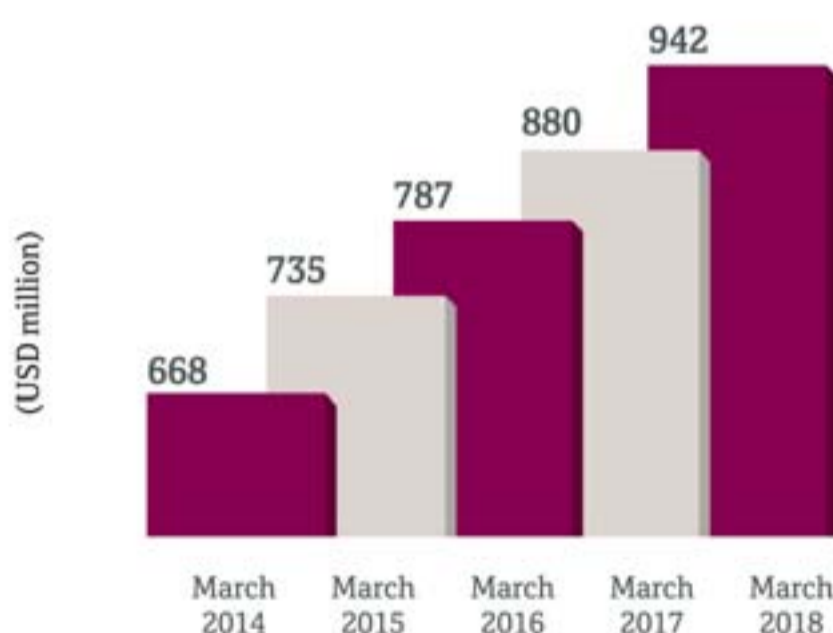
Boursa Kuwait ended the first quarter of 2018 on a healthy note, increasing by 3.6 percent q/q, supported by global trends in equities and by foreign investor interest following the release of a list of the ten most likely companies to be included in FTSE Russell's emerging market index. Kuwait's inclusion in the index is expected to be phased in over two stages in September 2018 and December 2018, with a target country weight of 0.4 percent. Analysts are predicting passive inflows of around \$800 million as a result.

The market's capitalization added KD 1 billion over the quarter, with KD 145 million added in March. Despite this, trading activity eased, with the 1Q18 average daily value of shares traded decreasing by 19 percent to KD 12.4 million.

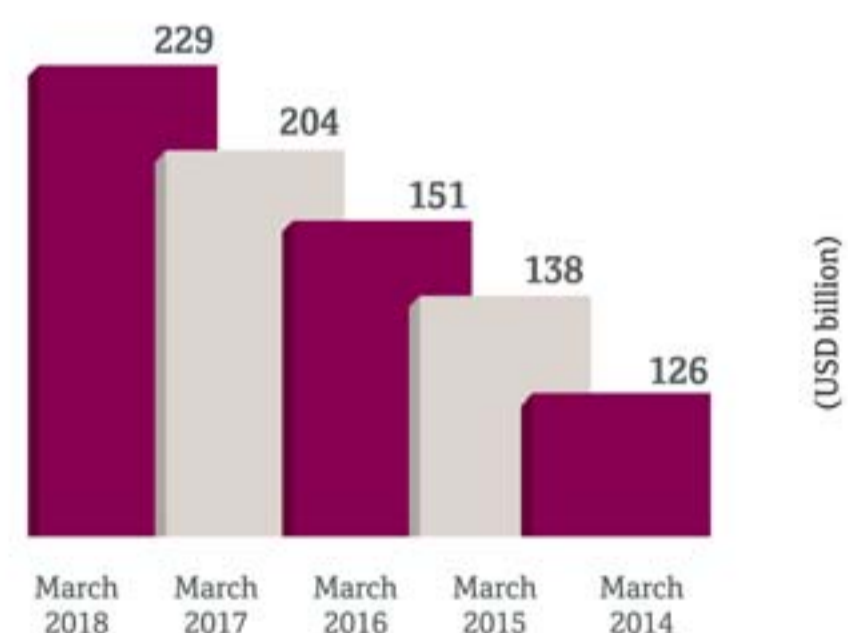
In April, Boursa Kuwait began implementing its new exchange structure, with a one-year phase-in period for some listings. The move is expected to boost the market's liquidity and attractiveness, particularly to foreign investors. Combined with the inclusion of Kuwait in the FTSE Russell index, the changes should provide some upward momentum in the market given the solid economic fundamentals Kuwait enjoys.

QNB Group, the largest financial institution in the MEA region delivers another record first quarter result in 2018

Net Profit US\$942 million, up 7% on March 2017



Total Assets US\$229 billion, up 12% on March 2017



QNB Group achieves record financial results for the three month ended 31 March 2018.

- QNB Group, the largest financial institution in the MEA region, is currently present in more than 31 countries across three continents
- QNB Group staff exceeds 28,000 serving more than 22 million customers through 1,200 locations and 4,300 ATMs
- QNB Group enjoys one of the highest credit ratings: Capital Intelligence AA-, Fitch A+, Moody's Aa3, Standard & Poor's A

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Business

S&P posts slight gains, IBM drags

NEW YORK: The benchmark S&P 500 index posted slight gains yesterday, helped by gains from industrial and energy stocks, but IBM's disappointing results and a sell-off in semiconductor stocks weighed on the Nasdaq and the Dow. IBM fell 6.2 percent after the company reported quarterly profit margins that fell short of Wall Street expectations.

Semiconductor stocks also took a hit, led by Lam Research's 5 percent drop after what analysts called a disappointing shipment forecast. The S&P technology index fell about 0.5 percent. Not all results were disappointing. Morgan Stanley rose 3 percent after it reported a 40 percent jump in quarterly profit, driven by its trading business. United Airlines rose 1.6 percent after

reporting a rise in profit and CSX Corp jumped 7 percent after the railroad operator topped profit estimates. That helped lift the Dow Jones Transport index by 1.2 percent.

Oil prices jumped about 2 percent, lifted by a reported decline in US crude inventories and the risk of supply disruptions. Exxon and Chevron were up about 1.3 percent. S&P 500 companies are expected to post an 18.6 percent rise in profits in the first quarter, the biggest increase in seven years, according to Thomson Reuters data. Stocks have gained solidly in the past two days after strong results from industry bellwethers as well as positive economic data helped investors turn attention away from geopolitical and trade tensions.

Europe stocks rise

Europe's major stock markets rose yesterday after solid gains elsewhere, with London buoyed by the weak pound as UK inflation dived to a one-year low. Asian markets climbed following a rally on Wall Street as easing trade and Syria concerns allowed investors to concentrate on earnings and upbeat data, while fresh news on US-North Korea talks also provided support. "Stocks in Europe are higher... as the global mood starts to improve," said CMC Markets analyst David Madden. "There was a strong finish in New York last night and Asia overnight as traders focus more on corporate and economic data. "While the Syrian conflict and uncertainty surrounding global trade are on hold, investors could remain bullish." London's benchmark FTSE 100 index of

major companies was the standout performer in Europe, as official data showed that annual British inflation slowed unexpectedly to 2.5 percent in March from 2.7 percent in February. The news, which confounded expectations for no change, sent the pound reeling as it undermined the urgency of raising interest rates-although analysts said a hike was still expected in May. Pundits said the data nevertheless throws into doubt the course of the Bank of England's monetary policy this year. "The FTSE 100 has gone from the back of the pack to the market leader, as a sharp deterioration in UK inflation has driven the pound sharply lower, ramping up FTSE gains," said IG analyst Joshua Mahony. "The out-performance of the pound has certainly been one of the main determinants of FTSE 100

underperformance among European bourses." The weaker pound pushes up share prices of multinationals trading on the FTSE.

Hammerson axes takeover

In company news, British retail property giant Hammerson yesterday scrapped a £3.4-billion (\$4.9-billion, 3.9-billion-euro) takeover of rival Intu that would have created a pan-European shopping mall giant, citing a weak UK consumer market. Investors appeared to welcome Hammerson's decision, with the group's share price jumping more than three percent. Intu meanwhile slumped nearly four percent. Hammerson's U-turn comes amid difficulties for retailers housing large floor space who are competing also for fast-growing online sales.

VIVA launches a unique offer for youth with MacBook Air and mini router

KUWAIT: VIVA, Kuwait's fastest-growing and most developed telecom operator, launched a new unbeatable offer targeting school and university students once they subscribe or renew their VIVA Internet plan. This new bundle allows them to get a MacBook Air with mini router starting from KD 19.

Commenting on this offer, Abdulrazzaq Bader Al-Essa, Director of Corporate Communications at VIVA, said: "We are eager at VIVA to support students either through our CSR program or innovative offers, thus we strived to be the first telecom operator to enrich and cater our academic customers' needs and experience with this creative bundle."



Waqfe launches next-generation platform to help banks' digital customers

MANAMA: Waqfe, the Bahrain based fintech solutions provider, has announced the launch of its revolutionary mobile banking service platform for banks, Digital Deposit Mobilization Solution. At the nexus of three innovative technologies including mobility, artificial intelligence and data, it will help banks acquire and retain customers, attract longer tenor deposits and generate higher customer lifetime value.

At the heart of the platform is the best customer experience in the region. Waqfe helps build a highly personalized relationship with a customer based on his/her digital footprint and cements that with the option of providing visibility to actual community impact that a customer's banking activities enable. The platform is built around Application Program Interfaces (API), making it extremely simple and cost-effective for



banks to embed within their offerings, thus augmenting their existing digital investments. The venture, which has been lauded by a number of regulatory authorities in the GCC, is backed by Finocracy, a firm that invests in and builds fintech solutions alongside banks in the GCC. Speaking on the launch, Shaikh Khalid bin Mohammad Al-Khalifa, Waqfe's Chairman said: "It gives me great pleasure to announce the launch of a revolutionary, game-changing solution in the GCC. While providing convenience to customers is one of the main aims of the platform, our ultimate objective is to reintroduce 'purpose' into a banking experience made even more unique and friendly by exponential technologies. The launch of the platform will help our partner banks harness the potential of digital banking in the GCC, focusing on an audience that value technology and depend on it for convenience and simplicity."

"The platform is geared to assist our partner banks mobilize 1 million customers and USD 10 billion in retail deposits over the next five years. That will shift the paradigm for the banking industry. We're excited by the roll out of the product and we firmly believe that it will add significant value to the banking sector in the Kingdom and the GCC," he added.

Further speaking on the launch, Ashar Nazim, the Chief Executive Officer of Waqfe said: "Our platform enables a comprehensive banking experience, yet one which is simple and flexible. The platform will help banks gain

the acceptance of customers looking for speed and ease in managing their banking requirements. Customers will not be required to visit any physical branch since the opening of a bank account can also be done on the platform in just 7 minutes from anywhere in the GCC through a smartphone, tablet or laptop. This shifts the onboarding paradigm in the banking industry allowing for unparalleled customer centricity."

The platform embeds several pioneering features for the GCC market, including electronic know your customer (eKYC), forensic document analysis, cross-selling and upselling, and digital identity management.

Waqfe's solution is being deployed by partner banks across the region. The platform is already up and running in the Kingdom of Bahrain with a leading Islamic financial institution already on board. A number of financial institutions from Bahrain, Oman, United Arab Emirates and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have also shown keen interest in the solution and are in discussions to integrate Waqfe's platform into their digital strategy.

Merkel wants EMF with national oversight

BERLIN: German Chancellor Angela Merkel backs the idea of a European Monetary Fund, provided national governments have sufficient oversight, sources close to her said before a visit by the French president. President Emmanuel Macron, who will meet Merkel in Berlin today, is pushing hard for bold euro zone reforms to defend the 19-member currency bloc against any repeat of the financial crisis that took hold in 2009 and threatened to tear it apart.

His vision includes turning Europe's existing ESM bailout fund into a European Monetary Fund (EMF). At one point, Macron also suggested the zone should have its own budget worth hundreds of billions of euros, an idea that does not sit well with Germany. Merkel told lawmakers from her conservative bloc on Tuesday that she favoured the EMF concept as long as member states retain scrutiny over the body, participants at the meeting said.

"It's not that one side is putting the brakes on and the other pushing ahead," one of the participants at Tuesday's meeting said. "We want to find a good reform path together."

German conservatives worry that an EMF could fall under the purview of the European Commission and could use German taxpayers' money to fund profligate states. They also fear the Bundestag, Germany's lower house of parliament, would lose its ability to veto euro zone aid packages. Merkel told the meeting that an EMF should be incorporated into European law via a change in the EU treaty, though she did not make this a stipulation for cre-

ating it, participants said. European treaty change is a tricky feat that could take time to achieve, but by not categorically insisting on it Merkel leaves wiggle room for her talks with Macron.

The chancellor's remarks to her parliamentary bloc tread a careful line between Macron's drive for bold euro zone reform and her conservatives' push to retain scrutiny of any EMF. A succession of bailouts for Greece aroused stiff opposition in Germany. The Bundestag approved them all, but the rise of the anti-euro Alternative for Germany (AfD) - now the main opposition party - has since heightened the conservatives' wariness of going too far with euro zone reforms. "Angela Merkel must not become Macron's assistant," the AfD's leader in parliament, Alexander Gauland, said in a statement, urging her to distance the government from the French leader's plans.

Reform

One participant at Tuesday's meeting of lawmakers with Merkel said she wanted an EMF to act with conditionality - the same approach taken by the International Monetary Fund, which attaches strict reform conditions to aid. In line with leading members of her conservatives in parliament, she also rejected plans floated by the European Commission to make use of a specific EU legal provision to develop the existing euro zone bailout fund into an EMF.

Merkel's coalition partners, the left-leaning Social Democrats (SPD), sympathise with Macron and want him to be rewarded for his efforts to reform the French economy, well aware that a large chunk of French voters remains susceptible to far-right and far-left populists sceptical about the EU.

France and Germany, which account for around 50 percent of euro zone output, are essential to the reform drive. But while they often put on a strong show of political unity and shared intent, the devil is often in the



German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

detail. On Tuesday, Merkel said creating a euro zone banking union was a priority for her, but she also broadened out the reform question to include a European asylum system, as well as foreign, defence and research policy. Framing reform as such a broad issue risks diluting Macron's drive to beef up the euro zone with extra funding fire power.

In Brussels, senior EU officials are playing down expectations for rapid and substantial progress. They hope the next couple of months can lay the groundwork for what will be agreed over the coming years.

"We hope to get an early harvest in June and a road map for the rest," said one senior official, describing the Commission's hopes for a Franco-German deal to conclude some euro zone reforms at a summit on June 28-29 and agree a schedule for further moves. — Reuters

Sri Lanka slaps new tax on gold to curb imports

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka yesterday slapped a 15 percent tax on gold to curb surging imports that have impacted the trade deficit and put pressure on the exchange rate, officials said. The finance ministry said the tax was reintroduced after a five-year hiatus as authorities detected a rapid spike in imports in recent months. "We believe that a lot of duty free gold (imported to Sri Lanka) is

smuggled out to neighbouring countries where there are high customs duties," a finance ministry official told AFP.

He said nearly 8,000 kilos (17,600 pounds) of gold had been brought into Sri Lanka in the first three months of this year-almost equivalent to all imports of the precious metal in 2016. Last year, more than 15,000 kilos was brought in. The steep increase had not translated to a boon in jewelry manufacturing sparking suspicions it was being spirited to neighbouring India, the world's largest consumer of gold.

Sri Lanka's central bank warned in February that the sharp spike in gold imports was worsening the island nation's yawning trade deficit. — AFP

National Bank of Kuwait		Financial Markets		Daily Report				
At 02:00 PM Previous Day								
Global Stock Indices								
Index	Previous Close	Last Price	Change	Daily Performance %	Yearly Performance %			
Dow Jones	24,573.04	24,786.43	213.59	▲	0.87			
NASDAQ	7,154.29	7,281.10	124.81	▲	1.74			
S&P 500	2,677.84	2,706.39	28.55	▲	1.07			
Financial Times	7,326.05	7,286.44	60.39	▲	0.84			
DAX	12,585.57	12,587.89	2.32	▲	0.02			
CAC 40	5,353.54	5,373.21	19.67	▲	0.37			
Swiss	8,820.04	8,849.91	29.87	▲	0.34			
Nikkei 225	21,847.59	22,158.20	310.61	▲	1.42			
Topix	1,729.98	1,749.67	19.69	▲	1.14			
Hang Seng	30,062.75	30,284.25	221.50	▲	0.74			
Straits Times	3,498.20	3,557.82	59.62	▲	1.70			
MENA Stock Indices								
Index	Previous Close	Last Price	Change	Daily Performance %	Yearly Performance %			
Kuwait	6,603.51	6,633.44	29.93	▲	0.45			
Saudi Arabia	8,096.40	8,127.99	31.59	▲	0.39			
Dubai	3,131.33	3,087.75	-43.58	▼	-1.39			
Abu Dhabi	4,706.76	4,682.08	-24.68	▼	-0.52			
Bahrain	1,301.98	1,301.98	0.00	▼	0.00			
Qatar	8,958.00	9,055.02	97.02	▲	1.08			
Oman	4,769.42	4,751.95	-17.47	▼	-0.37			
Lebanon	1,140.97	1,141.30	0.33	▲	0.02			
Jordan	2,194.13	2,192.80	-1.33	▼	-0.06			
Egypt	17,802.48	17,755.96	-46.52	▼	-0.26			
Morocco	12,902.19	12,873.40	-28.79	▼	-0.22			
Tunisia	7,094.96	7,130.37	35.41	▲	0.50			
Global Currencies Exchange Rate								
Currency	Kuwaiti Dinar	Saudi Riyal	US Dollar	Euro	Sterling Pound	Swiss Franc	Japanese Yen	Australian Dollar
Kuwaiti Dinar		12.3940	3.3190	2.4805	3.3352	3.2124	355.69	4.2776
Saudi Riyal	0.08068		0.2678	0.2163	0.1884	0.2592	28.70	0.3451
US Dollar	0.30130	3.7343		0.8076	0.7036	0.9679	107.17	1.2888
Euro	0.37307	4.6238	1.2382		0.8712	1.1984	132.72	1.5961
Sterling Pound	0.42824	5.3076	1.4213	1.1478		1.3758	152.36	1.8324
Swiss Franc	0.31129	3.8581	1.0332	0.8344	0.7268		110.77	1.3316
Japanese Yen	0.00281	0.0348	0.0093	0.0075	0.0066	0.0090		0.0120
Australian Dollar	0.23378	2.8974	0.7759	0.6265	0.5457	0.7510	83.15	
MENA Currencies Exchange Rate								
Currency	US Dollar	Kuwaiti Dinar	Saudi Riyal	Bahraini Dinar	Qatari Riyal	Omani Riyal	Emirates Dirham	Egyptian Pound
US Dollar		0.30130	3.7343	0.3741	3.6272	0.3831	3.6576	17.6270
Kuwaiti Dinar	3.3190		12.3940	1.2415	12.0385	1.2716	12.1394	58.5032
Saudi Riyal	0.2678	0.08068		0.1002	0.9713	0.1026	0.9795	4.7203
Bahraini Dinar	2.6733	0.80546	9.9829		9.6966	1.0242	9.7778	47.1222
Qatari Riyal	0.2757	0.08307	1.0295	0.1031		0.1056	1.0084	4.8597
Omani Riyal	2.6101	0.78648	9.7471	0.9764	9.4675		9.5469	46.0091
Emirates Dirham	0.2734	0.08238	1.0210	0.1023	0.9917	0.1047		4.8193
Egyptian Pound	0.0567	0.01709	0.2119	0.0212	0.2058	0.0217	0.2075	
Global Interest Rates								
Currency	1-Week	1-Month	3-Month	6-Month	1-Year			
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.25	1.75	2.00	2.19	2.44			
US Dollar	1.74	1.89	2.35	2.50	2.74			
Euro	-0.42	-0.40	-0.36	-0.32	-0.24			
Sterling Pound	0.48	0.53	0.78	0.89	1.06			
Swiss Franc	-0.79	-0.78	-0.73	-0.65	-0.52			
Australian Dollar	1.65	1.87	1.82	1.82	1.89			
Japanese Yen	-0.03	-0.04	-0.04	0.02	0.11			
Global Bond Yields								
Country	2-Year	5-Year	10-Year	30-Year				
United States	2.40	2.70	2.84	3.02				
Europe	-0.58	-0.08	0.52	1.17				
United Kingdom	0.83	1.13	1.41	1.81				
Commodities								
Index	Previous Close	Last Price	Change	Daily Performance %	Yearly Performance %			
Kuwait Oil	68.42	68.33	-0.09	▼	-0.13			
Brent	72.32	73.72	1.40	▲	1.94			
West Texas	66.55	66.45	-0.10	▼	-0.15			
Gold	1346.91	1349.71	2.80	▲	0.21			
Silver	16.75	16.98	0.23	▲	1.37			

Business

Mezzan Holding holds 17th annual general meeting

Shareholders approve cash dividend of 22 fils per share

KUWAIT: Mezzan Holding KSCP, one of the largest manufacturers and distributors of food, beverage, FMCG and pharmaceutical products in the Gulf, held its 17th Annual General Meeting (AGM) yesterday.

During the AGM, the shareholders approved the Board of Directors' recommendation to distribute 22 fils per share for a total dividend payout of KD6.8 million (22 percent of capital) for the year.

Mezzan Vice Chairman, Mohammad Jassim Mohammad Al-Wazzan said: "Despite a challenging macroeconomic environment the company has faced in some of the markets we operate in, the Board is pleased with the company's overall performance as we maintain our focus on strengthening our regional presence with leading positions in each of our categories. The company witnessed the highest capital expenditure year on record and we look forward to growing our profitability in 2018 and beyond."

2017 Full Year Financial Performance Review: Revenue: KD204.5 million, down 1.4 percent EBITDA: KD20.9 million, down 15.5 percent Reported Net Profit attributable to Equity holders of the Parent Company: KD12.9 million,

down 24.7 percent

2017 Balance Sheet Highlights:

Total Assets: KD 210.9 million, up 8.2 percent
Equity to Parent Company: KD110.1 million, up 8.4 percent
Mezzan Holding performance by business line



A total cash payout of KD6.8 million

Mezzan Holding incorporates 30 subsidiaries and is operationally structured into two primary business lines: the Food Business Line and the Non-Food Business Line. Below is the company's performance by business line:

Food Business Line: Accounted for 75.4 percent of Group Revenue, and comprises

Manufacturing and Distribution (53.9 percent of Group Revenue), Catering (14.4 percent) and Services (7.0 percent). Revenue reached KD154.2 million, a slight decrease of 0.7 percent compared with the same period in 2016.

Manufacturing and Distribution: Revenue increased 1.0 percent.

Catering: FY Revenue increased by 10.2 percent.

Services: FY Revenue declined by 25.7 percent.

Non-Food Business Line: Accounted for 24.6 percent of Group Revenue and comprises FMCG and Pharmaceuticals (21.8 percent of Group Revenue) and Industrials (2.8 percent). Revenue reached KD50.3 million, a decline of 3.3 percent compared with the same period in 2016.

FMCG and Pharmaceuticals: FY Revenue decreased by 3.7 percent.

Industrials: FY Industrials revenues decreased by 0.4 percent.

Regional Business Highlights:

In Kuwait: FY Revenue grew by 1.8 percent due to steady performance as the local retail market returns to buoyancy.

In UAE: FY Revenue decreased by 12.7 percent



KUWAIT: Mezzan Vice Chairman Mohammad Jassim Mohammad Al-Wazzan addressing the annual general meeting.

due to lower exports to Qatar and the impact of excise tax introduced in October 2017.

In Qatar: FY Revenue grew by 3.2 percent driven by resolving supply chain issues putting sales and profitability back on track.

In KSA: FY Revenue grew by 243.5 percent as Mezzan continues to focus on gaining a foothold in the region's largest consumer market.

In Jordan: FY Revenue decreased by 44.8 percent due to challenges to tenders driven business.

In Afghanistan: FY Revenue decreased by 16.1 percent as operations were suspended for three months. The situation was resolved in August

In Iraq: FY Revenue grew by 34.3 percent.

KAMCO participates in ACK Business Talk



KUWAIT: Faisal Sarkhou delivers a speech

KUWAIT: KAMCO Investment Company, a leading investment company with one of the largest AUMs in the region, participated in the Australian College of Kuwait's ("ACK") Business Talk. The School of Business at ACK hosted KAMCO's Chief Executive Officer, Faisal Sarkhou, who delivered an informative and intellectually stimulating talk titled "Kuwait as the financial hub in the region".

The talk took place at ACK's auditorium where Sarkhou gave an overview on the recent developments of the financial centers throughout the region, while primarily focusing on the strengths and rationale for Kuwait to be a financial hub. He also highlights some of Kuwait's key demographics and the opportunities they present in the local economy. In addition to that, Sarkhou's talk featured an educational overview of the region's growing debt market, the challenges and risks of technology, oil dependency, political instability,

project delays and lack of diversification. Following the talk, the floor was opened to any questions from the audience.

Commenting on his participation, Sarkhou said, "I would like to thank ACK's School of Business for organizing this initiative and hosting guest speakers such as myself in their series of Business Talks. Knowledge provides the younger generations with the vital critical thinking abilities, increased confidence levels and analytical skills to make logical and informative decisions that will greatly impact our society and economy. At KAMCO, we believe in the necessity towards educating and empowering the youth as one day they will be the leaders of our society. These initiatives fall in line with our individual and corporate social responsibilities towards social, economic and environmental issues to maintain a positive balance between our economies and ecosystems."



Turkish Airlines celebrates 10th anniversary of its Star Alliance membership

KUWAIT: Turkish Airlines celebrates the 10th anniversary of joining to the Star Alliance network which was established in 1997 as the first truly global airline alliance to offer worldwide reach, recognition and seamless service to the international travellers. The flag carrier of Turkey celebrated its membership anniversary at Turkish Airlines Headquarters with the participation of Turkish Airlines Chairman of the Board and the Executive Committee, M. Ilker Ayci, and Star Alliance CEO, Jeffrey Goh.

"Today we are delighted to be together both with Star Alliance CEO, Jeffrey Goh, and you, all distinguished guests to celebrate the 10th anniversary of our Star Alliance membership. Like yesterday and today, Turkish Airlines will continue to be a valuable partner for Star Alliance and its members; as an important element for our common strategy that will enable the Alliance to move forward with solid footprints. We're sure that we will have more constructive partnerships within this big family, by working towards the



desired goal of making further successes in forthcoming period," said M. Ilker Ayci, Turkish Airlines Chairman of the Board and the Executive Committee.

"It is a great pleasure for me to be present at this special event in Istanbul today. In the last ten years Turkish Airlines has played an important role in developing Star Alliance's global network, especially improving access to Turkey, Central Asia and the Middle East. As Star Alliance transitions into its third decade, we look forward to continued close cooperation and support from Turkish Airlines, as we shift the Alliance's focus to improving the customer journey by leveraging digital technology," said Jeffrey Goh, Star Alliance CEO.

Turkish Airlines was welcomed as 20th Star Alliance member airline in April, 2008. When Turkish Airlines joined Star Alliance network in 2008, 31 new destinations were

added to the Star Alliance network. Today, Star Alliance is present in 72 unique destinations around the World.

Turkish Airlines offers a wide-range of exclusive products and high-end global services while its passengers enjoying worldwide recognition on every Star Alliance member flight. Together with other 27 Star Alliance member airline, the flag carrier offers the widest choice of flights that connect people and cultures around the World.

Since 2008, Turkish Airlines' Miles & Smiles Program members can make use of the full Star Alliance FFP benefits. Not only they can earn and redeem miles on all member airline flights through their status, but also they can access more than 1000 passenger lounges across the globe, make use of extra baggage allowance, priority baggage delivery, fast track security and immigration, separate check-in counters and priority boarding.

IVECO in Kuwait: Robust, reliable and durable as no other

KUWAIT: IVECO, the leading Italian brand in the field of manufacturing light, medium and heavy commercial vehicles, was launched by Kaico. New DAILY; STRALIS & TRAKKER was celebrated in an evening of extraordinary style in four points by Sheraton, Yousef Al-Shaya - CEO, graced this special occasion with his presence. The Italian Ambassador to Kuwait, Ashish Tandon - General Manager of Kaico, Nader khaled Salmeh, Sr. Divisional manager -vehicles at kaico, Alberto PELLEGRINI - IVECO Area Manager Middle East and Kini Nagesh- Service Manager at IVECO were the other dignitaries of the event. Senior Management of KAICO, key clients and representative from the local press were also present at the launching ceremony.

In the opening speech, The GM of Kaico Ashish Tandon said that "the partnership with IVECO comes as part of Kaico Company's strategic plan to expand and cooperate with a large brand with a good reputation. Government institutions, construction companies, and truck operators are our target; IVECO range offers a complete solution that meets customers' needs". Speaking about IVECO he added "With full of hope, Kaico Company has become the distributor of IVECO in Kuwait." In the concluding presentation about IVECO range, Mr. Alberto PELLEGRINI



N1 - IVECO Area Manager Middle East said, "IVECO is proud to come back again in Kuwait and is willing to become your preferred business partner"

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maintenance program.

Engine: 13.0 L ,6 cylinder turbo charged diesel, 420 hp,1900nm of max torque, manual & automated, 16 -speed transmission, rigid 6 X 4 drive, soft feel dashboard with multifunctional steering wheel incorporating touch button menu controls for the real time digital dash display ,

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conditioner with timer, for a comfortable cab temperature with the engine off, over 30 drawers and storage compartments including a fridge, for the longest missions, a max- fridge over 50 liters. Engine: 10.0 L, 6 cylinder turbo charged diesel, 430 hp, 1900nm of max torque, manual & automated, 16 -speed transmission, tractor 4 X 2 drive, and Dual scale speedometer. All gauge functions monitored using international symbols. "Working on the HI-WAY means spending your life on board. So you need a big performance, great comfort, high safety levels... and a value that lasts." Is STRALIS main Missions?

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A REAL TRUCK, IN A COMPACT SIZE The New DAILY is the toughest of all light

commercial vehicles, with the most lasting performance, superb balance on the road, extremely easy drive and the best load volumes in its class.

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Engine: 3.0 L, 4 cylinder turbo charged diesel, 146 horsepower, and 350nm of max torque, Transmission 6 speed manual transmission, cargo area 19.6 m3, anti-corrosion protection for all body, twin rear wheel drive.

Technology

Facebook rolling out privacy choices under European rules

‘It will be rolled out in the next weeks and months’

MENLO PARK: Facebook announced yesterday it would begin rolling out changes to how it handles private data this week to comply with forthcoming EU rules, with European residents seeing the measures first. The social network, which has been rocked by disclosures about the hijacking of personal data on tens of millions of its users, said it will start implementing “new privacy experiences” to comply with the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which become effective May 25.

“Everyone—no matter where they live—will be asked to review important information about how Facebook uses data and make choices about their privacy on Facebook,” said a statement from chief privacy officer Erin Egan and deputy general counsel Ashlie Beringer. “We’ll begin by rolling these choices out in Europe this week.”

Under the new policy, Facebook users will be asked to review and make choices about ads they receive, including whether they want Facebook to use data from third parties. Facebook users will also be asked to review and choose what to share about the political, religious, and relationship information on their profiles.

Additionally, users will be allowed to opt in or out of use of facial recognition technology. The statement said users will be told that facial recognition is optional, but that it could offer some benefit, such as being notified when someone is using an unauthorized picture. “We not only want to comply with the law, but also go beyond our obligations to build new and improved privacy experiences for everyone on Facebook,” Egan and Beringer wrote.

The news comes a week after Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg faced 10 hours of questioning in two congressional panels following revelations that personal data was harvested on 87 million users by Cambridge Analytica, a consultancy working for Donald Trump’s 2016 campaign. Zuckerberg testified that Facebook intends to offer the

same privacy protections embodied in GDPR for its worldwide users, but that there could be some differences in format.

Egan and Beringer said Facebook users in the EU will start seeing the requests this week so they can make choices before May 25. “It will be rolled out in the next weeks and months” globally added deputy chief privacy officer Rob Sherman, with no specific date yet set for the United States. They added that Facebook would take steps to comply with the EU rules that limit advertising and public viewing of data for teens. This will mean no use of facial recognition for anyone under age 18 and limitations on who can see certain information teens have shared. To comply with GDPR, Facebook will also limit what it shows to users between the ages of 13 and 15 unless they get permission from a parent.

“
New and improved
privacy
experiences”

”

Russia to probe Facebook

Elsewhere, Russia’s telecoms watchdog plans to probe Facebook before the end of the year after blocking access in the country to the popular messaging app Telegram, its head said yesterday. “We will conduct a probe of the company before the end of 2018,” the head of state regulator Roskomnadzor, Alexander Zharov, told pro-Kremlin newspaper Izvestia.

Russia’s telecoms regulator has repeatedly warned Facebook it could be banned this year unless it complies with a law on the personal data of Russian nationals. A 2014 law requiring foreign messaging services, search engines and social networking sites to store the personal data of Russian users inside the country has caused widespread concern as it is seen as putting the information at risk of being accessed by Russian intelligence services.

Zharov told Izvestia that Facebook still did not comply with the Russian legislation. “They are already significantly late in their deadlines and in complying with

both iOS and Android devices, has been extended to users to purchase products outside their home markets and is available in five languages, including Spanish, English, simplified Chinese, Brazilian Portuguese and German, Amazon said on Tuesday.

It will allow customers to shop in 25 currencies, with more languages and currencies to be added in 2018. Customers can also choose from different shipping options and delivery speeds. The international shopping feature will display pricing, shipping costs and import duty estimates, with Amazon managing courier service and customs clearance in case of potential surprises at the time of purchase or delivery. — Reuters

Amazon launches international shopping

SEATTLE: Amazon.com Inc has launched an international shopping feature that will enable customers across the world to shop more than 45 million items that can be shipped to their country from the United States. The international shopping feature, which is available on a mobile browser and the mobile app for

Bitcoin’s believers vow to ride out rollercoaster

NEW YORK: The crowds have thinned somewhat at Bitcoin Center, leaving just the true believers in the volatile cryptocurrency. “Two months ago we couldn’t breathe here” due to the throngs, recalled Nick Spanos, founder of the trading and educational hub in lower Manhattan. “People outside couldn’t get inside.” The center, which was set up in December 2013, calls itself a one-of-a-kind epicenter for all things bitcoin. It is primarily frequented by technology and financial types, mostly male and mostly younger, although it aspires to go well beyond that core audience.

“The Bitcoin Center is open seven days a week to shed light on the world of bitcoin to whoever walks in our doors!,” proclaims its website. “Our staff can provide an overview of bitcoin on the spot or register guests for our comprehensive bitcoin courses.” On a recent weekday evening, about 100 people gathered in the space, a parlor in a Ukrainian restaurant, to trade bitcoins on smartphone applications, nibble on complimentary snacks and take in the latest insights from Spanos.

He threw a few barbs at journalists who have cast a skeptical eye on the cryptocurrency’s rollercoaster performance. But Spanos, who worked previously for former Republican and Libertarian presidential candidate Ron Paul, saved his sharpest words for Jamie Dimon, the JPMorgan Chase chief who last year said it was “stupid” to invest in bitcoin, which he has called a “fraud.”

The mention of Dimon drew boos from the crowd, who have seen bitcoin swoon from nearly \$20,000 in mid-December to \$7,895 on Tuesday, according to Bloomberg. Total trading volumes have fallen in half between mid-December and the start of April, according to Bitcoinity.org. In another sign of faltering interest, the number of weekly searches on Google for bitcoin now stands at about one-fifth the peak level in December, when the cryptocurrency began trading on major exchanges. The price retreat comes as regulators adopt an increasingly skeptical stance towards the digital money.

On Tuesday, New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, citing reports of theft of vast sums of virtual currency from customer accounts, and sudden and poorly explained trading outages, sent queries to 13 major trading platforms on their operations, internal controls, and safeguards to protect customer assets

Buy and hold

Twenty-four-year-old Zalman bought his first bitcoin a few months before the spike. “I panicked at the end of December,” said the young man, who declined to



HANOI: This photo illustration shows a Vietnamese cryptocurrency investor looking at the latest Bitcoin values on a smartphone. — AFP

give his last name. “The slip was hard to digest even though I knew the price could not go up forever,” he said. “I did not sell because I believe in the technological revolution.”

Daniel, a fellow enthusiast, acknowledged selling a small number of his bitcoins amid the rout. “It’s hard to wake up in the morning and realize that we’ve lost thousands of dollars in the night,” Daniel said he first began buying the cryptocurrency eight years ago when it cost less than \$1. He said he thinks back on the 2013 bubble “to convince me to keep my bet,” alluding to a seven-day stretch when bitcoin lost about half its value after hitting \$1,137 in November of that year.

Some see a silver lining in bitcoin’s recent stumble. “It’s probably a good thing that prices have fallen, we had gone up too fast,” said one member of the Bitcoin Center who declined to give his name. “People who knew absolutely nothing came to us by saying they would withdraw all their savings to put them in virtual currencies!”

Longtime cryptocurrency watchers have learned to ride out the waves of volatility. “Mum-and-dad investors who entered the market when Bitcoin was worth \$19,000 can be disappointed,” said Michael Casey, chairman of the advisory board at CoinDesk, a digital media and information service for crypto assets. “But the community, including those who invested not later than last May, did not lose money.” Spanos cautioned that “bitcoin is not a ‘get rich quick’ scam.” “The goal is to keep your bet and ultimately get monetary independence.” — AFP



WASHINGTON DC: Facebook CEO and founder Mark Zuckerberg testifies during a US House Committee on Energy and Commerce hearing about Facebook on Capitol Hill. — AFP

other laws,” Zharov said, referring to Facebook. “The question of a ban will be raised” if Facebook does not fully comply with the law, he said, adding that he meets with representatives of the social media giant “around once every half a year.”

Roskomnadzor began blocking the popular messaging app Telegram on Monday after a court banned the service for refusing to give the security services access to private conversations. The ruling came after a long-running battle between the Russian authorities and Telegram, which has a reputation for securely encrypted communications, as Moscow pushes to increase surveillance of internet activities.

Telegram, a free application that lets people exchange messages, stickers, photos and videos, has attracted more than 200 million users since its launch by Russia’s Pavel Durov and his brother Nikolai in 2013. On Tuesday, Roskomnadzor blocked millions of IP addresses that were used to get around the Telegram ban. Facebook and Telegram are widely used by the opposition to President Vladimir Putin to coordinate protests and make political statements. The Kremlin’s press service also used Telegram to communicate with journalists but earlier this week switched to ICQ, a 1990s chat service now controlled by Kremlin-friendly billionaire Alisher Usmanov. — AFP

Are we alone? NASA’s new planet hunter aims to find out

TAMPA: Are we alone? NASA’s new planet-hunting mission, poised to launch Monday, aims to advance the search for extraterrestrial life by scanning the skies for nearby, Earth-like planets. The Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite, or TESS, is poised to blast off at 6:32 pm aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from a NASA launchpad in Cape Canaveral, Florida.

The \$337 million washing machine-sized spacecraft is built to search the nearest, brightest stars for signs of periodic dimming. These so-called “transits” may mean that planets are in orbit around them. TESS is expected to reveal 20,000 planets beyond our solar system, known as exoplanets, NASA said. Its discoveries will be studied further by ground- and space-based telescopes for signs of habitability, including rocky terrain, a size similar to Earth and a distance from their sun—neither too close nor too far that allows the right temperature for liquid water.

NASA predicts that TESS could find more than 50 Earth-sized planets and up to 500 planets less than twice the size of the Earth. TESS will survey far more cosmic terrain than its predecessor, NASA’s Kepler Space Telescope, which launched in 2009, taking in some 85 percent of the skies. “TESS is equipped with four very sensitive cameras that will be able to monitor nearly the entire sky,” said George Ricker, TESS principal investigator at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). “That is about 20 times what the Kepler mission was able to detect.”

Kepler vs TESS

Kepler, the first planet-hunting mission of its kind, was launched to answer one single question: How common is a planet like Earth around a star like the Sun? “said Patricia “Padi” Boyd, director of the TESS guest investigator program at NASA’s Goddard Spaceflight Center. “It was designed to look at 150,000 stars in a fairly wide field of view without blinking, for four years,” she told reporters on the eve of the launch. “One of the many amazing things that Kepler told us is that planets are everywhere and there are all kinds of planets out there. “So TESS takes the next step. If planets are everywhere, then it is time for us to find the planets that are closest to us orbiting bright nearby stars, because these will be the touchstone system.” TESS and Kepler use the same system of detecting planetary transits, or shadows cast as they pass in front of their star.

While Kepler confirmed some 2,300 exoplanets and thousands more potential planet candidates, many were too distant and dim to be studied further. With Kepler running low on fuel and nearing the end of its life, TESS aims to pick up the search while focusing closer, on planets dozens to hundreds of light years away. “TESS is going to dramatically increase the number of planets that we have to study,” said Ricker. The Hubble Space Telescope and the James Webb Space Telescope, scheduled to launch in 2020, should be able to reveal more about planets’ mass, density and the makeup of their atmosphere—all clues to habitability. The first data from TESS is expected to be made public in July, and NASA says citizen astronomers are welcome to help study the planets. — AFP



PORTSMOUTH: A handout picture released yesterday by the University of Portsmouth shows researchers Bryon Donohoe and Nic Rorrer at the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) punching out coupon samples from a plastic bottle. — AFP

Researchers engineer plastic-eating enzyme

TAMPA: Researchers in the US and Britain have accidentally engineered an enzyme which eats plastic and may eventually help solve the growing problem of plastic pollution, a study said Monday. More than eight million tons of plastic are dumped into the world’s oceans every year, and concern is mounting over this petroleum-derived product’s toxic legacy on human health and the environment. Despite recycling efforts, most plastic can persist for hundreds of years in the environment, so researchers are searching for better ways to eliminate it. Scientists at the University of Portsmouth and the US Energy Department’s National Renewable Energy Laboratory decided to focus on a naturally occurring bacterium discovered in Japan a few years ago. Japanese researchers believe the bacterium evolved fairly recently in a waste recycling center, since plastics were not invented until the 1940s. Known as Ideonella sakaiensis, it appears to feed exclusively on a type of plastic known as polyethylene terephthalate (PET), used widely in plastic bottles.

A useful mutation

The researchers’ goal was to understand how one of its enzymes—called PETase—worked, by figuring out its structure. “But they ended up going a step further and accidentally engineered an enzyme which was even better at breaking down PET plastics,” said the report in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, a peer-reviewed US journal.

Using a super-powerful X-ray, 10 billion times brighter than the Sun, they were able to make an ultra-high-resolution three-dimensional model of the enzyme. Scientists from the University of South Florida and the University of Campinas in Brazil did computer modeling which showed PETase looked similar to another enzyme, cutinase, found in fungus and bacteria.

One area of the PETase was a bit different, though, and researchers hypothesized that this was the part that allowed it to degrade man-made plastic. So they mutated the PETase active site to make it more like cutinase, and unexpectedly found that this mutant enzyme was even better than the natural PETase at breaking down PET. Researchers say they are now working on further improvements to the enzyme, with the hope of eventually scaling it up for industrial use in breaking down plastics.

“Serendipity often plays a significant role in fundamental scientific research, and our discovery here is no exception,” said study author John McGeehan, professor in the School of Biological Sciences at Portsmouth. “Although the improvement is modest, this unanticipated discovery suggests that there is room to further improve these enzymes, moving us closer to a recycling solution for the ever-growing mountain of discarded plastics.” — AFP

Health

'I just want my life back': Japan sterilization victims seek justice

Part of what has been called a 'eugenics' program

SENDAI: Junko Iizuka remembers clearly the day she was taken to a hospital as a teenager and forcibly sterilized under a Japanese government program. Her foster mother gave her a rice ball as they stood by a river, and then took her without explanation to a doctor. Sometime afterwards, Iizuka, who requested a pseudonym to describe her experience, woke up in a hospital bed with a huge vertical scar across her stomach.

Iizuka, now in her seventies, is one of thousands of men and women forcibly sterilized as part of what has been called a "eugenics" program—a Japanese law in place until 1996 that mandated the procedure for people judged to have disabilities. After the operation, Iizuka was sent back to her birth parents and it was only then she understood what had happened, when she overheard them saying she was now sterile. "That was when my anguish started," she told AFP at her small, meticulously neat home. Japan's health ministry acknowledges that around 16,500 people were forcibly sterilized under the law, which came into force in 1949. The law allowed doctors to sterilize people with heritable intellectual disabilities, to "prevent the generation of poor quality descendants".

Another 8,500 people were sterilized with their consent, according to authorities, though lawyers say even those cases were likely "de facto forced" because of the pressure individuals faced. Iizuka had never been formally diagnosed with a disability, though her foster mother sent her to a home for intellectually disabled children at the age of 14. Her father later told her that local officials had "repeatedly pushed" him to sign off on the procedure, an operation that has haunted her for decades. "When I moved to Tokyo to start working, I went to a hospital to ask doctors if they could fix my body," she said quietly, her voice tight with frustration. "But it was impossible."

'Clear human rights violation'

In her twenties she turned down marriage offers because she was sterile, though she eventually married and adopted a son. "But I still envy my friends when I see them receiving visits from their grandchildren," she said. For two decades, she lobbied Japan's government to recognize her suffering, but she always received the same response: the procedure was legal at the time, and no apology nor compensation would be given.

Michiko Sato heard the same line as she lobbied on behalf of her sister-in-law Yumi, who was sterilized as a

teenager. Both of the women, who are in their sixties, asked to be identified by pseudonyms. "I've picked up the gauntlet," Michiko told AFP. "But to be honest, I feel so empty asking myself 'why do we have to fight despite this clear human rights violation?'"

Michiko learnt about the procedure Yumi was subjected to when she married into the Sato family, more than 40 years ago. "I was 19, she was 18... When I first heard about it from her mother, I felt so sorry for both of them." "I couldn't ask why, I felt it would be too cruel to her mother to ask," she said. "For years I wondered why she had been sterilized, before I learnt last year that it had been forced on her at the age of 15." A childhood photo shows Yumi as a smiling, rosy-cheeked girl with bobbed hair. She had learning disabilities caused by an accident involving anaesthesia during an operation as an infant. It was a condition she could not have passed on, but she was sterilised anyway. With Michiko's help, she is now suing the government in a first-of-its-kind lawsuit, demanding compensation and an apology. The government has urged the court to dismiss the case.

'Years of agony' -

"Disabled people are still stigmatized by the general public, and that's part of the reason I'm doing this," said Michiko. She points to the murder last year of 19 people at a centre for the disabled south of Tokyo. The perpetrator claimed he was on a mission to rid the world of people with mental illness. "We have to change this kind of thinking," Michiko said. "Disabled people are human beings, and precious family members." The lawsuit has prompted others to come forward, including a man in his seventies who read about Sato's case and thought: "Isn't this what happened to me?" "I've been in agony about this for years," he told reporters recently, speaking on condition of anonymity. He was sterilised as a teenager. When he married years later, he couldn't bring himself to tell his wife, only confiding in her shortly before her death in 2013.

"I felt pain when I saw my wife cradling someone else's baby," he said. "I've kept this burden in my heart for a long time... I want my life back." In March, lawmakers pledged to study compensation for those affected, with plans for a bill on the issue next year. But victims and their supporters say the process is moving too slowly. "I am inching closer to my grave," Iizuka, now battling breast cancer, told lawmakers in March. "Everyone is ageing. Please make progress quickly." —AFP



Exercise urged to prevent senior falls

TAMPA: Falling is the leading cause of injury-related death among people over age 65, and seniors who want to avoid falls should exercise, not rely on supplements like vitamin D, US guidelines said Tuesday. The new recommendations from the US Preventive Services Task Force update those last issued in 2012, when the independent medical advisory group was favorable to taking supplements containing vitamin D as a way of preventing fall-related injury.

But unless a person has vitamin D deficiency or a frail bone condition known as osteoporosis, the task force's latest review of clinical trials on the topic found no benefit for average seniors, and even an increased risk of kidney stones for those who take vitamin D and calcium supplements. "The USPSTF found adequate evidence that vitamin D supplementation has no benefit in preventing falls in older adults," said the guidelines published in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

Instead, the USPSTF "recommends exercise interventions to prevent falls" in those 65 years or older who are at increased risk of falling. Such exercise may include "supervised individual and group classes and physical therapy," said the guidelines. The update was based on a review of 11 randomized, clinical trials involving more than 51,000 people.—AFP

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What's On

Al Areen Palace & Spa presents 'Qasr Al Sultan' this Ramadan season



Al Areen Palace & Spa, a leading luxury property in Bahrain, is delighted to announce its new offer for the upcoming Holy Month of Ramadan. This year will see a popular theme and package deals that characterize the Arabian and Middle Eastern traditions to best serve the special occasion with family and friends.

Themed as "Qasr Al Sultan", the Ramadan tent seamlessly blends contemporary design with traditional Turkish elements. Ensuring an exclusive cultural and culinary experience, the premium brand will provide an authentic backdrop of Turkish flair featuring festivities, music fusion of both heritages performed by a famed Turkish band, flavorful Arabic, Turkish and international cuisines.

Valid before May 7th, travelers can look forward to indulging in Al Areen Palace & Spa's varied discounted deals which consist of the lavish Iftar buffet, available on week days for KD 11++ and KD 13++ on weekends under the Early Bird package while the Ghabga buffet is generously priced at KD 11++ on weekdays and KD 12 ++ on weekends.

The regular package deal offers an Iftar

buffet for KD 13++ on weekdays and KD 14++ on weekends followed by the Ghabga buffet that is available for only KD 12++ on weekdays and KD 13++ on weekends. Guests can live within the comfort and convenience of a modern, luxurious setting designed with local architectural significance in the Al Areen Palace and Spa Villa for only KD 111++ or KD 127++ or KD 151++ featuring a desert pool villa and discounted meal and spa options.

It is worth mentioning that Al Areen and Spa holds the largest spa in the Middle East, blending Western and Eastern medicines, with the latest technologies, practiced by a group of internationally certified health professionals. Unique in its approach, the 'Live your Life' programs encompass detox, re-energizing, weight optimization, fitness and beauty solutions.

Complimentary packages include access to Al Areen Wildlife Park and Lost Paradise of Dilmun Water park, Bahrain's biggest water park. Diners can enjoy a family - friendly Eid brunch for only KD 13++ which includes Arabic and international dishes coupled with live cooking stations and entertainment for all members of the family at "Qasr Al Sultan".



Burgan Bank offers a chance to watch 'Avengers: Infinity War'

Burgan Bank, in collaboration with Grand Cinemas, announced yesterday that its Youth Account Holders will be offered the exclusivity to watch the first screening of the new movie "Avengers: Infinity War" for free at the luxurious movie theatre of Grand Cinemas located in Al Hamra Luxury Centre. The movie screening will be held on Thursday April, 26th, 2018, wherein each customer is entitled to 2 free tickets on one of the two shows, at 5:30 pm or 8:30 pm. To book the free seats, Youth Account Holders are required to visit Grand Cinemas box office in Al Hamra Luxury Centre and present their Youth ATM card.

The bank strives to reward its Youth account holders with exclusive offers that fits their lifestyle. The Youth Account is dedicated for young individuals, between the ages of 15 to 25, and who seek to attain a successful future. Furthermore, account holders receive free prepaid MasterCard and an ATM card which entitles them to discounts at selective merchants along with an exclusive discount at Grand Cinemas Theatres, Al Hamra Luxury Centre and The Gate Mall.



Performance by Pops Mohamed at the Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiyyah

The Embassy of the Republic of South Africa in partnership with the Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiyyah (DAAI) of the State of Kuwait will host a Music Performance by Mr Pops Mohamed and His Group on Sunday, 22 April 2018 at 7:00pm at the Al Yarmouk Theatre. Mr Mohamed's performance forms part of the cultural program of the Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiyyah, depicting the vibrant arts and cultural relations and exchanges between the Republic of South Africa and the State of Kuwait.

Mr Mohamed is one of the most influential indigenous South African Musicians of his generation, known for playing of African indigenous instruments, vocals, keyboards, guitar, and said by many to be South Africa's 'unofficial Minister of Music'. He began his career in the 90s recording the music of the San from the Kalahari in Namibia and integrating it into various projects ranging from jazz and funk to drum 'n' bass and trance. Pops Mohamed has been known as a producer / performer and loves experimenting with the newest technology, always in the service of music!

At the age of 14 he founded his own first band The Les Valiants, with whom he played kwela, soul, pop and Latin music. With his band Children's Society (early 70's) he then recorded his first hit in the townships: 'I'm a married Man. In the 80s Pops worked more backstage as a producer and sound-engineer, while also learning to play the Mbira, African



mouth bow, bird whistle, berimbau, thumb piano, didgeridoo, etc. At the same time he took more interest in traditional music from all over the world. As he put it: 'If people don't understand where they come from, there is a hole in their soul.'

In 1991 and 1992 he produced for the South African market the solo albums Kalamazoo, and Sophia Town Society, both nominated for the Best Jazz Album Award in the South African OKTV awards, now known as the South Africa Music Awards (SAMA). In 1995 he issued his international debut album Ancestral Healing, where he himself played the Piano, the Kora, the Mbira and various percussion instruments. This album won the 3rd annual FNB SAMA Award for Best Traditional Performance.

Some of the countries Pops toured to spread his message and still continue to do so include the USA, the UK, all the Scandinavian countries, Namibia, Swaziland, Tanzania (especially Zanzibar), Germany, Switzerland,

Kathmando in Nepal, Vietnam, etc.

The most successful result has been the album How Far Have We Come, the first product of his long-lasting connection to the San people from the Kalahari. He has produced several records with various artists such as trumpeter Bruce Cassidy, formerly with the band Blood, Sweat & Tears, the London Sound Collective, Basil Coetzee, Robbie Jansen, Gcina Mhlophe, Siphon Gumede, Khaya Mahlangu, Ntsiki Mazwai, Steve Newman, Emma Mthakathi (from New York) the imitable rapper Zubz, Andreas Vollenweider, Airta Moreira from Brazil, Madala Kunene, Busi Mhlongo, Amampondo, Mabi Thobajane, Max Lasser from Switzerland and many more. Pops scored the music for the movie 'The Whale Caller' which was filmed in the beautiful town of Hermanus near Cape Town that is famous for the Southern Right Whales during spring and winter. 'The Whale Caller' won an award for best African movie at the Johannesburg Film Festival in 2016.

KFH takes part in Career Fair at AUM

Kuwait Finance House (KFH) participated in the career fair held at The American University of the Middle East (AUM) as part of its keenness to support the efforts of qualifying national cadres while offering them suitable job opportunities, especially that KFH is a pioneer in raising bar of Kuwaiti youth and the recruitment efforts.



KFH team with the AUM officials at Bank booth

The Bank's participation also comes as part its efforts in the educational field to support and encourage Kuwaiti youths to work at the private sector, while encouraging the recruitment of Kuwaiti youth, and to boost the labor market.

It is worth noting that the fair includes a wide array of private and public sector companies that offer jobs for new graduates. Such events allow the youth to be aware of the privileges and benefits of working for various companies that take part in the fair, in order to find a job that suits their qualifications. In addition, the fair allows those graduates to recognize the jobs required in the labor market.

New approach to employee engagement at Knowledge Club

Vigor Events - in co-operation with Al Gas events- presents Creating Behavior That lasts: a one day seminar on the 24th of April with the World's #1 Leadership Thinker and the author of 34 books on Leadership strategies - Dr Marshall Goldsmith.

This powerful, solution-based seminar is designed to help successful leaders achieve positive, lasting change in behavior: for themselves, their people, and their teams. In this fast-paced interactive seminar, Dr Goldsmith will begin with a unique discussion on the challenges that come with success in leadership and demonstrate how to use "what to stop" in coaching. Dr Marshall's straight forward approach will help middle and senior managers to preemptively

fix behaviors, know how to use 'what to stop' in coaching, practice and be ready to use feed forward, understand triggers and how they impact our behavior.

It is worth mentioning that Dr Goldsmith is the author of 34 books, which have sold over two million copies, been translated into 30 languages and become bestsellers in 12 countries. He has written two New York Times bestsellers, MOJO and What Got You Here Won't Get You There - a Wall Street Journal #1 business book and winner of the Harold Longman Award for Business Book of the Year.

Marshall's global professional acknowledgments include: Harvard Business Review - World's #1 Leadership Thinker, Institute for Management Studies - Lifetime Achievement Award (one of only two ever awarded), American Management Association - 50 great thinkers and leaders who have influenced the field of management over the past 80 years, Business Week - 50 great leaders in America, Wall Street Journal - top ten executive educators, Forbes. His recent clients include IBM, Toyota, Johnson & Johnson, 3M, Linkage, Herman miller, GSK & Goldman Sachs.

TV



00:25 Countdown
02:00 Resident Evil: Vendetta
03:40 The Net
05:35 American Ninja II: The Confrontation



00:45 Mekong: Soul Of A River
01:40 Dogs/Cats/Pets 101
02:35 Swamp Brothers
03:40 Swamp Brothers



00:25 The Good Karma Hospital
01:10 Death In Paradise
02:05 Orphan Black
02:50 Orphan Black



00:00 Psychic Kids
01:00 My Ghost Story: Caught On Camera
01:55 Robbie Coltrane's Critical Evidence



00:05 Workaholics
00:30 Another Period
00:55 Why? With Hannibal Buress

16:30 Friendszone
16:55 Friends
17:20 Friends
17:45 Disaster Date



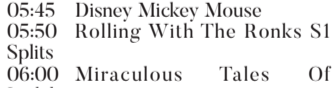
00:05 You Can't Lick Your Elbow
00:30 Kids Do The Craziest Things
00:55 Kids Do The Craziest Things



00:45 Blood Relatives
01:40 Jodi Arias: From Lust To Murder
02:35 The Accused, Jeffrey Macdonald: People Magazine...



00:00 Hank Zipzer
00:25 Alex & Co.
00:45 Disney Mickey Mouse

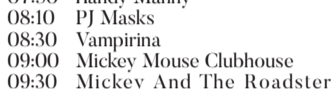


06:00 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug...
06:25 Hotel Transylvania: The Series
06:50 Tsum Tsum Shorts

19:25 Liv And Maddie
19:50 Jessie
20:15 Disney Mickey Mouse



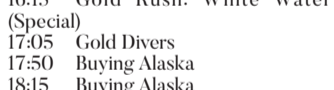
00:00 Trulli Tales
00:30 PJ Masks
00:55 Trulli Tales
01:20 Henry Hugglemonster



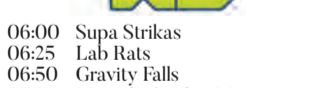
00:15 Ice Cold Gold
01:05 Jungle Gold
01:50 Gold Rush: White Water (Special)



00:15 Ice Cold Gold
01:05 Jungle Gold
01:50 Gold Rush: White Water (Special)



06:00 Supa Strikas
06:25 Lab Rats
06:50 Gravity Falls



00:05 Maxium Foodie
00:45 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
01:10 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia

21:35 Marvel's Rocket And Groot
21:40 Disney Mickey Mouse
21:45 Lab Rats



00:05 Botched
00:55 Botched
01:50 E! News
02:50 Botched



00:10 Paul O'grady's Animal Orphans
01:00 Emmerdale
01:30 Coronation Street



00:00 Ancient Discoveries
01:00 Brad Meltzer's Decoded
02:00 The Universe



00:20 Milwaukee Blacksmith
00:45 Pawn Stars
01:10 Pawn Stars



00:15 Maxium Foodie
00:45 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
01:10 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia

05:20 George Clarke's Amazing Spaces
06:15 Billionaire's Paradise: Inside Necker Island



00:10 Miracle Hospital
01:00 Jackie Chan's Green Heroes
02:00 Years Of Living Dangerously



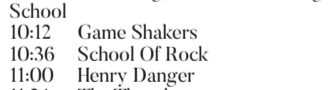
00:10 Miracle Hospital
01:00 Jackie Chan's Green Heroes
02:00 Years Of Living Dangerously



00:20 Africa's Wild Kingdom
01:10 Monster Fish
02:00 Crococalypse

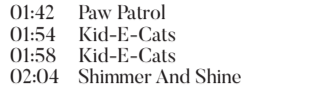


00:12 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
00:36 Rabbids Invasion
01:24 Sanjay And Craig

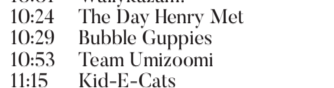


01:15 The Little Mermaid: Ariel's Beginning
02:45 Tarzan II
04:15 Pirates Of The Caribbean: On Stranger Tides

00:40 Kiva Can Do!
00:51 The Day Henry Met
00:57 Blaze And The Monster Machines



00:10 The Funhouse Massacre
01:45 Stakeout
02:26 Double Take
05:45 We Bought A Zoo



00:25 Guernica
02:25 My Sister
04:25 Wuthering Heights
06:20 Chitty Chitty Bang Bang



00:10 Ivan The Incredible
01:40 Rock Dog
03:15 The Secret Of Kells



00:15 How I Met Your Mother
01:05 Seinfeld
01:55 According To Jim
03:10 Late Night With Seth Meyers



01:15 The Little Mermaid: Ariel's Beginning
02:45 Tarzan II
04:15 Pirates Of The Caribbean: On Stranger Tides

20:00 Chicago P.D.
21:00 The Voice
22:00 Lethal Weapon
23:00 S.W.A.T.



00:10 The Funhouse Massacre
01:45 Stakeout
02:26 Double Take
05:45 We Bought A Zoo



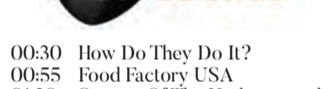
00:25 Guernica
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01:40 Rock Dog
03:15 The Secret Of Kells



00:15 How I Met Your Mother
01:05 Seinfeld
01:55 According To Jim
03:10 Late Night With Seth Meyers



00:30 How Do They Do It?
00:55 Food Factory USA
02:10 Secrets Of The Underground



01:25 Ankhon Dekhi
03:00 Ankhon Dekhi
03:20 Little Krishna - The Darling Of Vrindavan



01:15 Meet Bill
02:45 Nee
04:45 Grace Of Monaco



CROSSWORD 1887



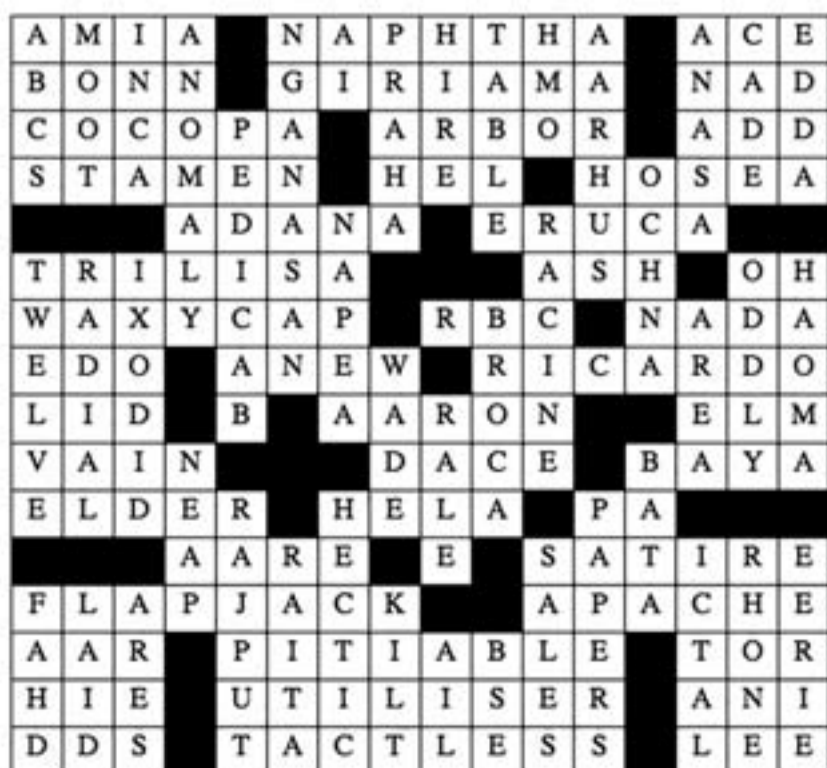
ACROSS

1. Ratio of the adjacent side to the hypotenuse.
4. The work of cleansing (usually with soap and water).
12. A large sandwich made of a long crusty roll split lengthwise and filled with meats and cheese (and tomato and onion and lettuce and condiments).
15. The elementary stages of any subject (usually plural).
16. The sixth of the seven canonical hours of the divine office.
17. An inflated feeling of pride in your superiority to others.
18. A lady's bedroom or private sitting room.
19. A colorless explosive liquid that is volatile and poisonous and foul-smelling.
20. A mountain range in western Russia extending from the arctic to the Caspian Sea.
22. God of the earth.
23. A quantity of no importance.
25. Of or relating to or supporting Islamism.
27. Pertaining to or containing any of a group of organic compounds of nitrogen derived from ammonia.
29. In a competent capable manner.
30. A metallic element of the rare earth group.
32. A public promotion of some product or service.
33. A radioactive element of the actinide series.
34. The address of a web page on the world wide web.
37. (used of opinions and actions) Far beyond the norm.
40. Small-holed Swiss cheese.
42. Type genus of the Laridae.
43. A resource.
45. A metric unit of length equal to one billionth of a meter.
46. A volume equivalent to 2 butts or 252 gals.
47. (Islam) The man who leads prayers in a mosque.
49. A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
52. A tricycle (usually propelled by pedalling).
54. A genus of plants of the family Crassulaceae.
57. A sweetened beverage of diluted fruit juice.
58. The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
62. Dressed or clothed especially in fine attire.
66. German poet (born in Austria) whose imagery and mystic lyricism influenced 20th-century German literature (1875-1926).
69. The highest level or degree attainable.
71. A long depression in the surface of the land that usually contains a river.
72. Small buffalo of the Celebes having small straight horns.
75. A city in the Saxony region of Germany on the Saale River.
76. Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
77. Far away from home or one's usual surroundings.
79. A male monarch or emperor (especially of Russia prior to 1917).
80. God of love and erotic desire.
81. Tiered seats consisting of a structure (often made of wood) where people can sit to watch an event (game or parade).
82. Freedom from difficulty or hardship or effort.

DOWN

1. Open-heart surgery in which the rib cage is opened and a section of a blood vessel is grafted from the aorta to the coronary artery to bypass the blocked section of the coronary artery and improve the blood supply to the heart.
2. A slender double-reed instrument.
3. A device (trade name Aqua-Lung) that lets divers breathe under water.
4. King of Sparta and hero of the battle of Thermopylae where he was killed by the Persians (died in 480 BC).
5. (zoology) Pertaining to or characteristic of birds.
6. Italian operatic composer (1813-1901).
7. An associate degree in nursing.
8. Anterior pituitary hormone that stimulates the function of the thyroid gland.
9. Region of western Asia Minor colonized by Ancient Greeks.
10. In operation or operational.
11. The basic unit of money in Bhutan.
12. Morally degraded.
13. Large sweet juicy hybrid between tangerine and grapefruit having a thick wrinkled skin.
14. Greenish-yellow pear.
21. A large gathering of people intended to arouse enthusiasm.
24. Any of various spiny trees or shrubs of the genus Acacia.
26. Reject with contempt.
28. Shrub bearing round-fruited kumquats.
31. Expletives used informally as intensifiers.
35. (Akkadian) Mother and earth goddess in Gilgamesh epic.
36. Toxin secreted by animals (by certain snakes and poisonous insects (e.g., spiders and scorpions)).
38. Relating to or used in or intended for trade or commerce.
39. A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali earth group.
41. Small ornamental ladies' bag for small articles.
44. An official prosecutor for a judicial district.
48. A metabolic acid found in yeast and liver cells.
50. A unit of absorbed ionizing radiation equal to 100 ergs per gram of irradiated material.
51. Weaken mentally or morally.
53. (of a young animal) Abandoned by its mother and raised by hand.
55. At or constituting a border or edge.
56. Leaf or strip from a leaf of the talipot palm used in India for writing paper.
59. North American bluebirds.
60. A city in western Germany near the Dutch and Belgian borders.
61. Jordan's port.
63. Strong lightweight wood of the balsa tree used especially for floats.
64. A republic in southeastern Europe on the southern part of the Balkan peninsula.
65. United States industrialist who manufactured plows suitable for working the prairie soil (1804-1886).
67. A ruler of the Inca Empire (or a member of his family).
68. A rich soil consisting of a mixture of sand and clay and decaying organic materials.
70. Moderate in type or degree or effect or force.
73. Any of several small ungulate mammals of Africa and Asia with rodent-like incisors and feet with hooflike toes.
74. A next in its terrestrial stage of development.
78. An honorary degree in science.

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

You have reached a certain point where you want to demand respect from someone who has respect for no one; remember that respect has to be earned. Also, there are some people who aren't capable of respecting others. Your focus is your work and success, nothing else compares at this time. It seems important to be thought well of by everyone; remember your worth when you feel down. It is in your nature to want to help people and you feel this especially now. Your logic kicks in when you have to take the initiative for an unexpected event. You find that honesty is not welcome when you answer a question asked by a coworker or friend; this could be a sticky situation. Make plans for the weekend with someone special and like minded.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You could feel emotionally blocked and unable to complete something important. Your logic is respected as you flow from one part of a project to another. You're thankful for your home and its warmth and welcoming energy; someone compliments your tastes. You desire to call the shots; this could include sex, home and work situations. You pull knowledge to you regarding investments and making extra money. A person you are close to agrees with your opinion on something intimate; finding support strengthens you. Listen to your intuition as it speaks very loudly to you this evening; a secret could be revealed if you let your spirit be your guide. You could discover that you can actually relax if you choose to do so tonight.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

You answer the call for help from family members or close friends. The group follows your lead when you figure out a way to reach a certain goal. Organic oils and foods are important new additions to your life that create health and positive energy. An event causes you to take close look at yourself and you could actually like what you see. There could be aches and pains from exerting yourself when you shouldn't; try to let this teach you how to listen to your body. Your heartstrings are pulled by someone younger that loves you; vibrations strongly indicate close family or friends sharing good times. You receive a compliment on your talents and looks. Home is where your heart is as you share the evening with someone dear.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Your morals and the way you look at life differs a great deal than those you find yourself spending time with; this could indicate younger people. You could be approached about leading a group in an effort to raise funds or create awareness. Your ideas may be just what's needed to reach the right people with the right message. Friends call on you to hand over a secret family recipe you don't want to share. You take the time to check on someone you haven't seen in a while; this person appreciates this more than you know. If someone questions your methods remember, sometimes we're the only look a person reads; you should be flattered. You could spend most of the evening dissecting your past, present and maybe even your future.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You power forward even when you feel ill or fragile in some way; working through periods of low energy proves you can do it! Later, you're invited out where you'll seek the limelight, your favorite place. When pride stands in the way of helping someone you love, you could overcome and overlook or you may decide to hold a grudge. You may deal with the sensation of your heart being in your throat as your emotions swing from high to low. Good food is high on your list of priorities just now as you discover new, tempting recipes. You spend fun time with a like-minded person who likes your quirks and silly jokes. Try not to hold the different view of someone against them at a meeting later this evening after dinner; remember to love.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Your eyes are open to new interests, hobbies and activities. Information about controversial situations and questions seems to come to you effortlessly; you could be learning about manifesting what you want! Your sense of life is exciting, as though fully living and leaning, relishing the best part of life. Your work goals are within reach; remain on your path and continue working your plan. Your entire opinion and understanding of how life on the planet actually works and how eternity is involved has taken a major turn. If someone is disturbed by your new beliefs, remember that new concepts and practices sometime frighten those who can't seem to grasp adjustments. Someone pulls at your heartstrings with a sweet, sincere note.



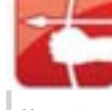
Libra (September 23-October 22)

Tensions are high and you have to keep your temper and tongue in check, especially with authority figures; disagreement is indicated strongly but you can overcome and let it pass. You may feel trapped and long to be set free of your responsibilities; you could be chosen as a winner of some type of contest at work perhaps with a prize of travel to a tropical place. You could consider taking a class to learn more about another language or country; new interests of many kinds are indicated! You witness a heated discussion of political views; this turns ugly so keep your distance. Private business comes to light that startles and shocks you. To soothe rattled nerves, you could accept an invitation to dinner with friends at a new, exciting restaurant!



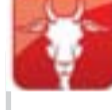
Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Someone could criticize your out there theories and beliefs. Your environment doesn't support going in new ways; be patient, this changes soon. For now, you're more than able to perform at your best using familiar, proven methods. You seem to be picking up on the issues of those around you without them speaking of them; you're careful about offering advice. You have your finger on the pulse of trends or trending topics; you discover you were right about something now receiving a lot of news. You avoid a disaster at home and realize how blessed and lucky you are to live where and how you do. Ideas and thoughts hold greater meaning than ever. You feel humbled later when someone compliments your taste in furnishings, clothes or vehicles.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You could either be offered a new dream job position in a new company or you have figured out how to make your current employment more to your liking. Your workload is completely caught up and the sense of accomplishment is strong. Your hopes and dreams appear to be fulfilled in this cycle; it seems easier to make plans for future prosperity. An energy of being grateful surrounds you as you take an honest look at your belongings. Financial security is likely now and further into the year; this could involve the stock market or real estate. Taking time to reward yourself is important and this evening could be one of those times. Allow yourself to just do nothing; someone is very willing to join you doing absolutely nothing.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Your emotions are in a state of disruption. Nothing seems right or fixable; you dislike the way you feel as it's completely opposite of what you seek. You could experience deep moments of prayer and meditation. Prepare for an unpleasant time by focusing on the positive aspects of your life and those you share it with. You could find solace in a book or favorite film! If you can't even enjoy your usual spirit-lifters, you're driven to discover something new. Your eager mind is fully engaged in historical information having to do with the mysteries of life and death. The universe, or creator, whichever you choose, is on your side and freely offers comfort. Some could criticize your dreamy, disconnected attitude, but you easily dismiss them.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

You're fun while sharing your humor and laughter; your verbal skills excel as you present thoughts and plans at work or home. While your thoughts are clear you make phone calls and write emails or notes to those you have a need to reach out to; old friends could reunite. Your focus is again drawn to food and exercise; a disappointment in one area leads to success in another! You're determined to feel better about yourself and all that you do; make sure these efforts are sincere and not just to boost the ego. Your kindness is well known by many, even some who don't know you at all. You're not interested in opinions, only facts; tonight you receive information that could clear up some troubling misunderstandings in the family.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You receive information regarding someone who is a large part of your emotional landscape. Activities with family members takes prominence over any other relationships. A discussion with others helps strengthen the bonds you share; if you have done or said anything you are confronted with remember it's just better to be honest so that feelings can be repaired. An older person may want you to do something that would go against your morals; remember shysters aren't right or good just because you're related. Money and control are very attractive to you; sexual acceptance and fulfillment are strongly desired. It is up to you to destroy circumstances and behaviors that are hurtful to others; look at both sides of the coin.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Treasure Island

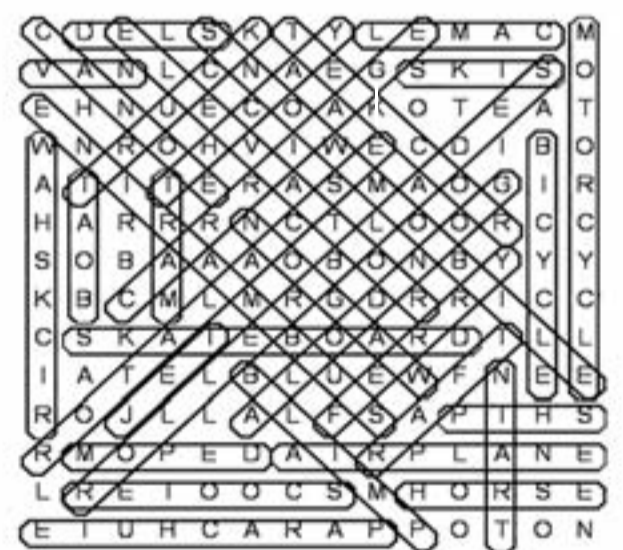
Find and circle all of the words and names from the book Treasure Island. The remaining 46 letters spell a secret message.



- | | | | |
|--------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| ADMIRAL BENDOW INN | CAPE | ISLAND | QUARTERMASTER |
| APPLE BARREL | CAPTAIN FLINT | ISRAEL HANDS | SAIL |
| ASHORE | CAPTAIN SMOLLETT | JIM HAWKINS | SCHOONER |
| BEACH | CHEST | JOLLY ROGER | SEAFARING |
| BEN GUINN | COAST | LOGBOOK | SEAMEN |
| BILLY BONES | COMPASS | LONG JOHN SILVER | SHIP |
| BLACK DOG | COVE | MARDONED | SKELETON |
| BUCCANER | CREW | MUSKET | SPY-GLASS |
| BURIED GOLD | CUTLASS | MUTINY | SQUIRE TRELAWNEY |
| CABIN BOY | DR. LIVESY | PARROT | THE BLACK SPOT |
| CANNON BALLS | GUINEAS | PIRATES | TREASURE |
| CANNONS | HISPANIOLA | PISTOL | WALRUS |

Yesterday's Solution

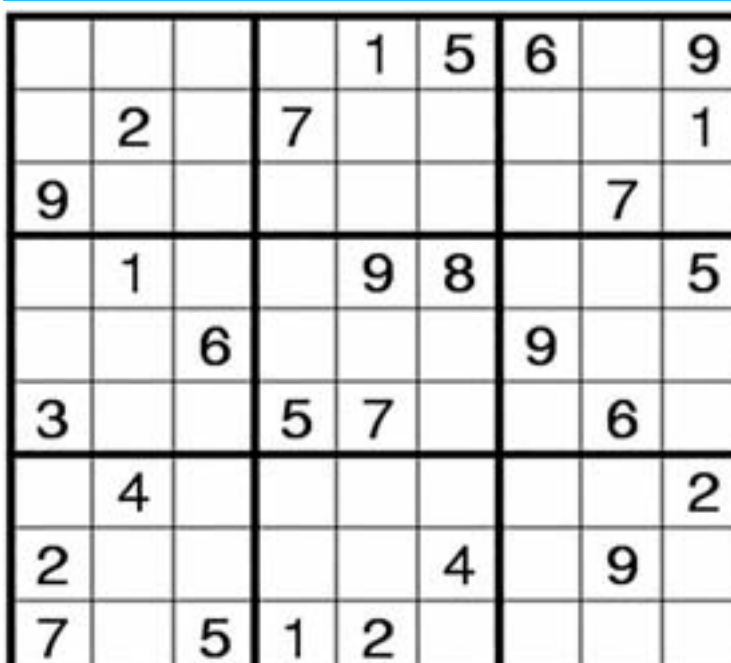
Transportation



- | | | | |
|-----------|------------|---------------|------------|
| AIRPLANE | FERRY | RICKSHAW | SNOWMOBILE |
| BICYCLE | GONDOLA | ROCKET | SUBMARINE |
| BLIMP | HORSE | ROLLER BLADES | TRAIN |
| BOAT | JET | SCOOTER | TRAM |
| CAMEL | MOPED | SHIP | TRUCK |
| CANOE | MOTORCYCLE | SKATEBOARD | VAN |
| CARRIAGE | PARACHUTE | SKIS | WAGON |
| ELEVATOR | RAFT | SLED | YACHT |
| ESCALATOR | | | |

The hidden transportation method is: HOT AIR BALLOON

Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution



LUXURY LINER QE2 REOPENS AS FLOATING HOTEL IN DUBAI

Visitors take photos of the Queen Elizabeth II luxury cruise liner, also known as the QE2, docked at Port Rashid in Dubai, where it will be moored permanently as a newly refurbished floating hotel. — AFP photos



The Queen Elizabeth II luxury cruise liner, also known as the QE2, is seen docked at Port Rashid in Dubai.



A general view shows part of the interior of The Queen Elizabeth II luxury cruise liner.

The Queen Elizabeth 2 (QE2) ocean liner has been given a new lease of life as a floating hotel in Dubai. 10 years after the Gulf Arab emirate bought it for \$100 million. State-owned Dubai World bought the QE2 from Cunard Line in 2007, but the 2008 financial crisis delayed any plans for the 40-year-old vessel, one of the world's most famous ships. Now the QE2, permanently moored at Mina Rashid port, has been refurbished based on the original design, from its carpets to the theatre and even restaurant menus featuring dishes served in the liner's heyday.

A reception housed in a boat-shaped structure at the quay welcomed guests to yesterday's official opening. Large portraits of United Arab Emirates rulers hang opposite portraits of a young Queen Elizabeth II and Samuel Cunard, founder of the company that built the ship. "There is a huge following around the world for the QE2 because of how famous she is and what she stands for," said Hamza Mustafa, chief executive of PCFC Hotels, the Dubai World subsidiary that owns the ship.

The QE2 first entered service in 1969 and



A general view shows the interior part of The Queen Elizabeth II luxury cruise liner.

has sailed around the world 25 times, carrying more than 2.5 million passengers, the company said. In its new incarnation, it has 1,300 rooms, with rates ranging from less than \$200 to as much as \$15,000 for a suite. It also has a museum and 13 restaurants and bars. Dubai hopes the QE2 will boost tourism in the most visited city in the Middle East, which welcomed over 15 million tourists in 2017. Officials say they are targeting 20 million by 2020.

PCFC Hotels spent an additional \$100 million renovating the liner and has plans to convert Mina Rashid into a complex of luxury residences and a yachting marina. "Although we kept everything as it was in 1969, you also have the most advanced technology in the tourism industry in Dubai," said Kenneth Todd, director of sales at PCFC Hotels. "For example, you can control everything with your phone, including check-in, room key, lights and TV," he said while showing reporters a duplex suite. Cunard's Queen Mary 2, the world's largest ocean liner, was also docked at Mina Rashid yesterday and sounded its horns to mark the occasion. — Reuters



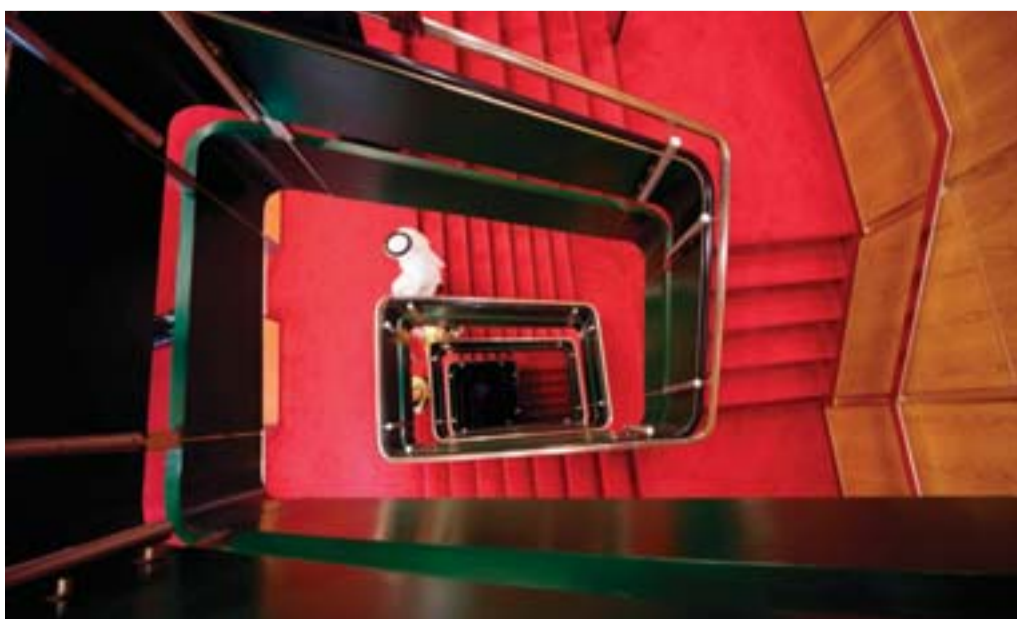
A man visits a duplex suite on The Queen Elizabeth II luxury cruise liner.



A general view shows disused slot machines in the gaming arcade.



An employee prepares a duplex suite on The Queen Elizabeth II luxury cruise liner.



A general view shows a lift system and stairwell allowing guests to move between the 13 decks aboard The Queen Elizabeth II luxury cruise liner.



A general view shows a bar on The Queen Elizabeth II luxury cruise liner.

Lifestyle | Features



Female Moroccan porters use trolleys to transport bundles of goods across the El-Tarajal border from Spain's North African enclave of Ceuta into Morocco. — AFP photos

Trolleys bring relief for Moroccan 'mule women'

It's a form of hard labor that has provoked outcry—Moroccan women bent double, overburdened by goods approaching or exceeding their own bodyweight. For years, thousands of such porters have crossed the border every day into Ceuta, a Spanish enclave perched on the northernmost tip of Morocco. But now an initiative aims to ease the burden by encouraging the women—who are paid to exploit an anomaly in Moroccan law that exempts items carried by pedestrians from duties—to use trolleys.

"It's less trying than before," said Najat, one of the porters whose back-breaking work has earned them the nickname "mujeres mulas" (mule women) in Spanish. "It's a good thing, especially for those with health problems," added the mother of two, whose husband is unemployed. On a hill towering above the Mediterranean between Ceuta and the Moroccan town of Fnideq, Najat, who is in her 40s, waited to pass routine checks at a small pedestrian border post.

Ceuta emerged as a military and commercial port under Spanish rule dating back to the 15th century. Today it has a population of around 85,000, enjoying a degree of autonomy from Madrid. Najat was equipped with her new wheels. Welded locally, the device is "much more durable than trolleys sold in the shops", she enthused.

For the past five years, Najat has been entering the Spanish enclave twice a week, arriving back several grueling hours later with bundles of goods. She makes around 20 euros (\$25) for each round trip, delivering the items to merchants; approximately the same cost as her new trolley. While goods brought by vehicle

from the European Union are subject to import duties at the Moroccan border, items taken on foot are exempt. Under pressure from NGOs following a string of incidents, including deaths, traders and authorities in Ceuta launched the trolley initiative this month, to complement a raft of other reforms.

At dawn, a group of 100 women were the first to cross the frontier to a commercial zone just inside the Spanish enclave. The zone was built in 2004 to reduce congestion in the centre of Ceuta. Metal hangars house an array of mer-

chandise: clothes imported from China, cleaning products, basic foodstuffs and decorative items.

'Difficult on slopes'

"The situation is improving, thank God," said 35-year old Touria, a scarf wrapped around her



head. She had come to look for food products. Other reforms include a daily limit on the number of porters crossing the border and alternating days for men and women. At least four women porters were trampled to death last year, in stampedes at the border post—the only land frontier between the EU and Africa.



Private security agents have been employed in the commercial zone, paid by local traders and the authorities in Ceuta. "We will not see any more shameful images on TV," said a security guard, who helps ensure the porters queue for their turn in an orderly manner.

He described the efforts by authorities as "a step" forwards for human rights. Scrolling through his smart phone, the burly Moroccan showed what he called "images of chaos" taken a year ago, that he said he encountered on a near-daily basis. "All that belongs to the past," he said. But he believes more should be done to help the women. "Now we must reduce the weight of the parcels." The

exploitation of porters "began in the early 2000s and hasn't stopped growing since then", Mohamed Benaissa, president of the Morocco-based Northern Observatory for Human Rights, told AFP.

Under heavy rain, Fatima struggled to steer her trolley, piled high with 60 kilograms (130 pounds) of boxes containing a Spanish brand of sweets. The trolley does not "roll on its own, it must be steered, and it is difficult on slopes", she said. The new measure had "changed nothing". "Before, I had backache and knee pain, now I have pain in my arms," said the Fnideq resident in her 50s, adding she would prefer to work in a factory, even with lower pay. — AFP

Arcades seek to take virtual reality gaming mainstream

Gamers wearing headsets and wielding rifles adorned with flashing lights battle a horde of zombies, letting out the occasional terrified shriek. The virtual reality arcade in Singapore is part of a wave of such venues being opened as backers of the technology seek to shake off teething problems and break into the mainstream. The buzz around virtual reality (VR) gaming has seen Taiwan-based HTC, Sony and Facebook-owned Oculus VR battling to woo consumers with a range of headgear.

But it has been slow to really take off, partly due to the hefty price of top-end headsets, beginning at around \$350, and the challenges in setting up complex VR systems at home. But VR arcades, which have been springing up around the world, particularly in Asia, are now giving people the chance to try it out more easily and for a fraction of the price. "Given the complications of at-home, PC-based VR systems, pay-per-use, location-based entertainment venues can fill the gap," said Bryan Ma, from International Data Corporation (IDC), a

consumer technology market research firm, in a recent note on the industry.

Several VR gaming companies have made forays into Singapore, seeing the ultra-modern, affluent city-state that is home to hordes of expatriates as a good fit. The zombie fight-out was taking place at a center where participants stalked a room with a black floor and walls. "I did paintball before, it's quite fun... but I think the whole scene is much more interesting here," said Jack Backx, a 55-year-old from the Netherlands, who was playing with colleagues from the oil and gas industry on a work day out.

The location is run by VR gaming group Zero Latency, which started in Australia and has expanded to nine countries. It uses "free-roam" virtual reality—where gamers move around in large spaces and are not tethered to computers with cables. It's not all intense, shoot-'em-ups—VR group Virtual Room has an outlet in Singapore that transports gamers to scenarios in the prehistoric period, a medieval castle, ancient Egypt and even a lunar landing.

Asia leads the way

VR arcades have been springing up in other places. China was an early hotbed for virtual reality gaming although the industry has struggled in recent times, while they can also be found in countries across the region including Japan, Taiwan and Australia.

Many key industry milestones over the past two years have been in Asia but arcades have



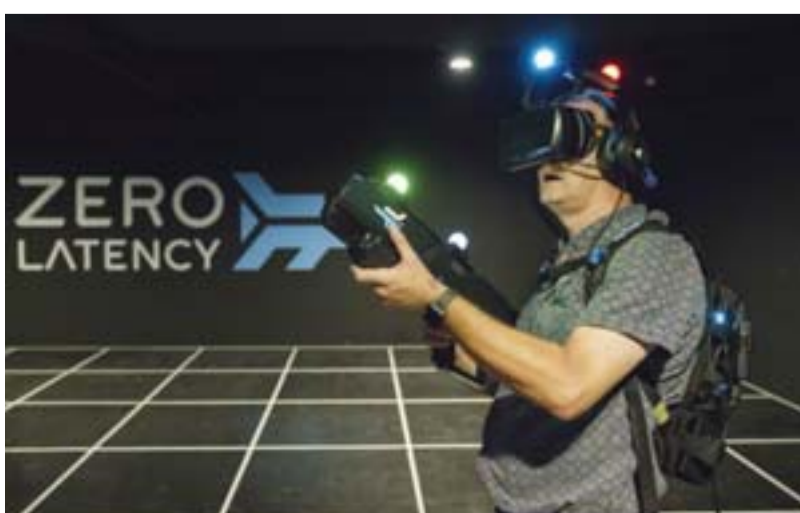
A group of gamers wearing virtual reality headsets at Zero Latency Singapore, in Singapore. — AFP photos

appeared elsewhere—London's first one opened last year while there are also some in the United States. Consumer spending on virtual reality hardware, software and services is expected to more than double from \$2.2 billion in 2017, to \$4.5 billion this year, according to gaming intelligence provider Super Data Research. For the best-quality experience, it can be relatively expensive—a session in Singapore costs Sg\$59 (\$45). "The equipment here is not cheap," said Simon Ogilvie, executive director of Tomorrow Entertainment, which runs the Zero Latency franchise in Singapore.

The industry faces huge challenges. China offers a cautionary tale—according to IDC, VR arcades have struggled there after expanding too quickly. There have also been warnings that

improvements in home-based technology may eventually lead to VR gaming centers suffering the same fate as traditional arcades that were once filled with Pac-Man and Street Fighter machines.

"The rise and fall of coin-operated videogame arcades in the 1980s suggests that such VR arcades may eventually fade in relevance as home-based computing power and prices fall within mass consumer reach," said the note from IDC's Ma. Rebecca Assice, who runs Virtual Room in Singapore, said one challenge was getting people interested in the first place as many still did not know about the arcades. "VR is still a really new industry," she said. "A lot of people just don't know this sort of activity exists." — AFP



Lifestyle | Music & Movies

Female stars dominate Cannes jury as banned Von Trier set to return

Hollywood actresses will dominate the jury at Cannes next month, the film festival's organizers said yesterday as they appeared set to lift their bar on controversial Danish director Lars Von Trier. Cate Blanchett, Kristen Stewart and Lea Seydoux will head a starry jury, with American writer-director Ava DuVernay of "Selma" fame and Burundian singer Khadja Nin completing the five women on the nine-person jury that will decide the top Palme d'Or prize.

In a year when the #MeToo movement has dominated the headlines, and with only three female directors among the 18 in competition, the organizers clearly felt the need to make a stronger gesture towards women. Yet as the majority-female jury chaired by Blanchett was unveiled, talks were under way to allow Von Trier, who has denied sexual harassment claims by singer Bjork, back into the competition. Von Trier was banned from Cannes seven years ago for saying he was a Nazi, and the Icelandic star who won best actress at Cannes in 2000 for her performance in his musical "Dancer in the Dark" claimed in October that he had harassed her on set.

'Persona non grata'

Von Trier denied Bjork's claims and his producer Peter Aalback Jensen charged that it was he and Von Trier who "were the victims" of the singer. However, with disgraced movie mogul Harvey Weinstein accused of assaulting at least four actresses over the years at Cannes, his return is sensitive. Cannes director Thierry Fremaux strongly hinted Tuesday that Von Trier was on the point of being brought back into the fold. He said that with the notoriously

demanding director finishing his serial killer flick, "The House That Jack Built", the festival's president Pierre Lescure was working hard to "lift the status of persona non grata".

Tensions between Bjork and Von Trier were clear when their film premiered at Cannes in 2000, and in the wake of the Weinstein scandal she said that on set she "became aware... that it is a universal thing that a director can touch and harass his actresses at will and the institution of film allows it". Fremaux, who has long faced criticism for Cannes' lack of female directors, admitted that "the world... and the Cannes film festival will never be the same again" after the #MeToo movement. It emerged yesterday that the French director Claire Denis could yet be a late entry with her space story, "High Life", starring Robert Pattinson and Juliette Binoche.

Highly political line-up -

The remaining male members of the Cannes jury include Taiwanese actor Chang Chen of "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" fame, Canadian director Denis Villeneuve and French director Robert Guediguian. The organizers said Tuesday that Russian auteur Andrei Zvyagintsev, the maker of such classics as "The Return" and "Leviathan", would also be one of the nine. Stewart, 28, has long been a darling of the world's top film festival, appearing in the main competition in "On the Road" by Walter Salles in 2012 and Olivier Assayas' "Clouds of Sils Maria" and Woody Allen's "Cafe Society" in 2014.

She also premiered her first short film as a director, "Come Swim", last year at the festival. French actress



This combination of recent file pictures created yesterday shows the President of the 2018 Cannes film festival Australian actress Cate Blanchett and jury members (From Top left to bottom right) Burundian singer and composer Khadja Nin, Taiwanese actor Chang Chen, American writer-director Ava DuVernay, Canadian director Denis Villeneuve, Russian director Andrei Zvyagintsev, French actress Lea Seydoux, French director Robert Guediguian and US actress Kristen Stewart. — AFP

Seydoux was a joint winner of the Palme d'Or in 2013 for the controversial lesbian love story "Blue is the Warmest Colour". The inclusion of Von Trier's new film, which stars Uma Thurman, Riley Keough and Matt Dillon, would help to give a little more star power to a highly-political Cannes line-up. Two of the directors competing for the Palme

d'Or, Iranian master Jafar Panahi and Russian director Kirill Serebrennikov, are banned from leaving their countries and look certain not to attend. This year's festival runs from May 8 to 19 in the French Riviera resort. — AFP

Amy Schumer says self-esteem, not size, rules in 'I Feel Pretty'

Comedian Amy Schumer has made a name for herself with her sharp wit and self-deprecating observations about romance, drinking and sex. But Schumer, 33, says people have got the wrong idea about her new romantic comedy "I Feel Pretty," about a woman who suffers from low self-esteem until she bangs her head and believes she has become a supermodel. An early trailer for the film, which opens in US movie theaters on Friday, was heavily criticized on social media for appearing to fat-shame women whose bodies do not conform to fashionably slim and toned ideals.

Schumer, however, says the message of the film is female empowerment and self-confidence, whatever one's size or looks. "I think that we were real careful with staying on message, which was that it's not about how anybody else sees you. It's about how you see yourself and who you are," Schumer told Reuters Television. "There was this kind of strange backlash at the trailer and it just made me excited for those people to see the movie and realize that that's not what we're doing," she added.

Schumer plays New York bachelorette Renee Bennett, who looks in the mirror and finds herself neither pretty, slim, attractive or cool enough. When she tumbles off an exercise bicycle, she falls unconscious and wakes to see herself as the woman she always wanted to be. Although her outward appearance has not changed, Renee is suffused with newfound confidence and charisma, lands a



great job, finds a boyfriend and even enters a bikini contest. But she later realizes her appearance never changed at all and comes to understand that true self-esteem comes from within.

Schumer, who chronicled her own issues with self-esteem in her best-selling 2016 memoir "The Girl with the Lower Back Tattoo," said she enjoyed playing the role. "Just living that out, playing that role, convincing myself that I was a supermodel - it was so fun. And yeah, I left feeling, I guess, the most confident I ever have," she said. "I Feel Pretty" is Schumer's third feature film after a breakout year in 2015 when she brought her writing and acting talents from television series "Inside Amy Schumer" to the big screen with the comedy "Trainwreck," which she also wrote. "I Feel Pretty" was written and directed by Abby Cohn and Marc Silverstein and co-stars Michelle Williams in a rare comedic role. — Reuters

Pink leads People's beautiful issue, Meghan Markle on the list

Pop star Pink graced the cover of People magazine's annual beautiful people issue yesterday, chosen for what the celebrity publication called "a role model who embodies honesty and confidence." The Grammy-award winning singer, 38, was pictured with her two children, 15-month-old Jameson Moon and Willow Sage, 6, in an issue re-named "The Beautiful Issue," which included Meghan Markle among more than 70 other female celebrities, and five men. The annual list used to be called "Most Beautiful Woman" but People editor in chief Jess Cagle said it had been renamed "to make clear that the issue is not a beauty contest."

It features "beautiful women (and a few men) of all shapes, sizes and colors, and celebrates the most beautiful qualities of all: strength, humanity and artistry," Cagle added. Pink, known for her acrobatic live performances, has scored hits like "What About Us" and "Raise Your Glass" over a 20-year career. But People focused on her skills as a parent with husband Carey Hart. "The thing about parenting is you never know if anything you're doing is working," she told the magazine. "That's been the most humbling thing for me."

Other celebrities on the list included "Will & Grace" actress Megan Mullally and African-American comedian Issa Rae in the "stars without make-up section." Markle, the former "Suits" actress due to marry Britain's Prince Harry next month, was included in a section called "beautiful inside and out" along with "Wonder Woman" star Gal Gadot, tennis champion Serena Williams, and the four



female stars of superhero movie "Black Panther." Canadian rapper Drake, "Hamilton" creator Lin-Manuel Miranda, talk show host Jimmy Kimmel, comedian Kumail Nanjiani and gay Olympic figure skater Adam Rippon were the five "men behaving beautifully." The Beautiful Issue hits US newstands on Friday. — Reuters



Actor and comedian Bill Cosby returns to the courtroom after a recess on the sixth day of his sexual assault trial at the Montgomery County Courthouse in Norristown, Pennsylvania. — AFP

Defense in Cosby's sexual assault trial to question detective for second day

Bill Cosby's defense team in his sexual assault trial is expected yesterday to continue its cross-examination of a detective who investigated the accusations against the 80-year-old entertainer shortly after they were first made. Cosby, best known as the star of the 1980s TV hit "The Cosby Show," is facing a retrial at a Pennsylvania court on charges of drugging and assaulting Andrea Constand at his home near Philadelphia in 2004. The jury in a first trial last year failed to reach a verdict.

Cosby denies all wrongdoing. Constand is one of about 50 women who have accused him of assaults dating back decades. Hers is the only case recent enough to be the subject of criminal prosecution. He could face 10 years in prison if convicted. Other women have filed civil lawsuits against him for defamation and assault. The new jury on Tuesday heard testimony from Cheltenham Township Police Sergeant Richard Schaffer, who read out a transcript of a 2005 police interview with Cosby in which he said that he had a consensual sexual encounter with Constand but stopped short of sexual intercourse. Prosecutors at the time declined to bring a case against Cosby. He was eventually charged in late 2015, shortly before the statute of limitations on the crime was to expire.

Defense attorneys on Monday sought to undercut Constand's credibility, pressing her about accusations that she had schemed to plant a false story of abuse to reap hush money. They are expected to continue their cross-examination of Schaffer yesterday. Cosby paid Constand \$3.38 million to settle a civil lawsuit that Constand filed after Pennsylvania prosecutors in 2005 initially declined to charge Cosby for the alleged assault. Five of Cosby's other accusers have testified in this trial. — Reuters

Drake, reigning on singles chart, announces album

Hip-hop superstar Drake teased a new album Monday, all but certain to prove a major commercial success as he dethroned himself on top of the singles chart. The Toronto artist posted on Instagram a picture of himself with his back to the camera sporting a jacket that read "Scorpion" and "June 2018." Drake, who separately put out a picture of a necklace with a scorpion pendant, did not reveal an exact release date or other details. He has often played with the traditional album format, instead putting out sprawling song collections marketed as mixtapes.

But one consistency in his prodigious output has been commercial achievement.

His song "God's Plan" topped the US singles chart for 11 weeks-until being dethroned Monday by another of his songs, "Nice for What." His latest song was streamed in the United States more than 60 million times and downloaded 88,000 times in the week through Thursday, tracking service Nielsen Music said. Drake, 31, has roots as a rapper but has increasingly gone in a pop direction and incorporated the infectious beats of Jamaican dancehall, most notably on his hit "One Dance," which is the second most-streamed song ever on Spotify. — AFP



In this file photo rapper Drake poses in the press room with his awards during the 2017 Billboard Music Awards at the T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP

MTV Video Music Awards return to New York in August

The MTV Video Music Awards, the televised gala known for headline-grabbing performances and celebrity antics, will return to New York on August 20. The music and youth culture network made the announcement with its trademark astronaut-clad "moon-person" appearing outside Radio City Music Hall, the historic theater where the awards will take place. "New York City's creative energy has always fueled those who live and work here. This is where music, film, and art collide and where the Video Music Awards were born," Mayor Bill de Blasio said in a statement.

The move comes amid intense competition between Los

Angeles and New York for cultural events, as the pop music business steadily migrates to the West Coast. The Grammy Awards held a one-off edition in New York in January after 15 years in Los Angeles, while the MTV Video Music Awards have largely alternated, taking place in New York's Madison Square Garden in 2016.

Julie Menin, New York's media and entertainment commissioner, estimated the VMAs would bring \$50 million to the city's economy. The VMAs, which will take place in New York for the 17th time, recognize top videos-but are more widely watched for eyebrow-raising pop culture moments than for the winners. Memorable past VMA inci-

dents include Madonna and Britney Spears locking lips on stage, former child star Miley Cyrus provocatively twerking her rear and Lady Gaga wrapping herself in a dress made of raw meat.

But like most award shows, the VMAs have seen viewership decline significantly in recent years as audiences enjoy greater choices online. MTV, however, pointed to Nielsen ratings which showed the channel's viewership in the key 18-34 age demographic has grown for the past three quarters, its longest expansion in seven years. — AFP



Bruce Gillmer, Global head of Music/Talent (right) with Julie Menin, Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment Commissioner and Darren Pfeffer, Executive VP of MSG Live speak to a crowd outside of Radio City Music Hall in New York. — AFP photos



A view of Radio City Music Hall marquee is seen.



People arrive at the 57th edition of the Salone del Mobile, Milan's International Furnishing and design fair. — AFP photos



The sofa "Hot Dog" designed by Studio Job for Seletti is pictured during the 57th edition of the Salone del Mobile, Milan's International Furnishing and design fair.



The sofa 'Sir-pent' designed by Andrea Stramigioli for Adrenalina.

Italy's kitchen kings

serving up success abroad



A gas cooker, kitchenware and a cooker hood are pictured at the Scavolini stand.



Metal chairs designed by Mark Sadler is pictured.



The Bidendum chair is pictured at the Riluc stand.

While design aficionados flock to Milan from around the globe for the world's largest furniture fair, Italy's kings of kitchen style are looking beyond its borders to beat a sluggish domestic market. As the six-day "Salone del Mobile" got under way in Italy's fashion capital on Tuesday, the country's kitchen design industry was celebrating a 3.2 percent growth in exports last year. The event hosts more than 2,450 exhibitors, of whom nearly a quarter are foreign. Last year, it attracted around 300,000 visitors from 165 countries.

The 779 million euros (\$961 billion) generated by the kitchen sector is behind only Germany and China. Consultancy firm Bain & Company estimates that the global design market grew four percent in 2017 to 35 billion euros, a figure that is destined to triple over the next 10 years. Milan's Centre for Industrial Studies (CSIL) says global kitchen exports are expected to reach \$6.7 billion in 2021, an increase of about 20 percent from 2016. And with the country slowly emerging from the global financial crisis, companies are capitalizing on Italy's reputation for style abroad to give themselves a place at the table. "We realized (during the crisis) that it was time for us to focus on exports," Paolo Zampieri, head of Zampieri Cucine, a small company that employs 34 people. "The domestic market was once more than enough, but the purchasing power in our country has diminished and the competition is very strong."



The Polo sofa is pictured at the Riluc stand.



People visit the Veneta Cucine stand during the 57th edition of the Salone del Mobile.

'Release Valve'
The crisis has sped up the concentration of the sector. "Twenty years ago, there were 300 kitchen companies in Italy, today there are around 100. Six companies account for around half of production and 30 percent of exports," CSIL research director Aurelio Volpe told AFP. After being almost invisible abroad for the best part of a decade, exports account for 35 percent of Zampieri Cucine's sales. The company is experiencing double-digit growth and others in the sector are benefiting from a more outward outlook.

"These companies have found a release valve in the export market. Even small businesses have found niches abroad," says Volpe. Veneta Cucine is one of Italy's big six, and group controller Denise Archiutti says that the "companies that have managed to survive the crisis have become bigger, more productive and more technologically flexible". "Production logic has changed, with increasingly personalized products made to measure and at the moment of order," she adds.

France is the industry's largest export market—as it is for the furniture sector as a whole—and where last year it saw a 10.7 percent increase in sales, followed by the United States and Switzerland. Volpe notes that Italy is playing to a more refined market than number one exporter China, which mostly sells low-cost kitchens to the United States. Meanwhile Volpe says that Italian exports to China "have recorded an increase of 50 percent in a year." — AFP



French designer Philippe Starck shows a chair from his collection made from wood at the Kartell stand.



A kitchen is pictured at the Haecker stand.



People visit the Veneta Cucine stand during the 57th edition of the Salone del Mobile.



Lifestyle

THURSDAY, APRIL 19, 2018



A picture shows "Plasticus", a 10-metre installation depicting a whale created by "Sky Ocean Rescue-A Sea to Save", and made up of 250 kg of plastic waste, in front of the Auditorium Parco della Musica in central Rome. — AFP

Rebellious fashion: Saudi women embrace sports abayas

Colorful and oozing defiance, a sports-friendly version of the abaya gown was once considered a symbol of cultural rebellion in conservative Saudi Arabia, but it is fast becoming the new normal. Pictures of female athletes running in the garb in the Red Sea city of Jeddah went viral last month, setting off a new debate on sartorial freedoms for women in a country where the typically all-black, body-shrouding garment is obligatory in public.



Saudi women pose for a selfie after a jog in the streets of Jeddah's historic Al-Balad district.

Some cultural purists vented fury online, calling it a breach of tradition, but opposition has been largely muted following recent comments from powerful Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman that the abaya—any abaya—is not mandatory in Islam. Until a formal edict comes however, designers such as Eman Joharjy are cashing in on the growing popularity of the so-called sports abayas, as many women push back against traditional attitudes of equating chastity with dress code. "There is a big demand," Joharjy told AFP at her fashion studio in Jeddah. "Having them in different colors is empowering."

Akin to a zippered jumpsuit, sports abayas envelop a woman's body but offer greater mobility for sporting activities, in contrast to the classic baggy version where tripping on the hem of the flowing garment is a common risk. The 43-year-old's designs come in colors like pistachio green, beige and white—more tolerable in the kingdom's scorching heat—and she uses natural fabrics, including French poplin, that do not cling to a sweating body. One of the early pioneers of the trend, Joharjy said she was branded a social outlier and jeered by some as



Saudi women jog in the streets of Jeddah's historic Al-Balad district.— AFP photos

"batman" when she began designing—and donning—sports abayas publicly in 2007. "There was a little bit of rebellion but I designed it for myself, because it's practical," she said. "You zip up and are ready to go."

'Soccer-themed abayas'

Joharjy has defied a popular maxim in Saudi Arabia: "If it's not black, it's not an abaya." Abayas have evolved

kingdom's austere religious police, which has largely been neutered in recent years. And the once-unthinkable idea of doing away with the abaya appears to now be gaining traction.

"The laws are very clear and stipulated in the laws of Sharia: that women wear decent, respectful clothing, like men," Prince Mohammed told CBS Television last month. "This, however, does not particularly specify a black abaya. (It) is entirely left for women to decide what type of decent and respectful attire to wear."

'Modest look'

Muslim cleric Sheikh Ahmed bin Qassim Al-Ghamdi added a new wrinkle to the debate when he dismissed the long-held view that black was the only color for abayas permissible in Islam. "The cloak is meant for maintaining a modest look and it does not have to be black," the former chief of the religious police in the holy city of Mecca, told Saudi-owned Al-Arabiya television last month. But the risk of a social backlash is real in a society steeped in conservatism.

"They look like cleaners!" a tweet said, in response to viral images of athletes dressed in sports abayas. "Their purpose is not sports. We have all been running in full body veil," tweeted another. Back at Joharjy's studio, a longtime client Marwa Al-Hadi walked in wearing one of her designs with magenta sneakers. "Abaya is like the Indian saree, it is part of our identity," Joharjy told her, as they weighed in on the future evolution of the garment. "But at the same time, if God did not want women to do sports, we would not have muscles or a body." Hadi nodded. "It is no one's business to stop and question what I'm wearing," she said. — AFP

“ It is no one's business to stop and question what I'm wearing ”

over the years, with new patterns, fabrics and embellishments, and they are sometimes worn in the kingdom with baseball-style caps over headscarves. The latest fad is an eye-catching ensemble of "soccer-themed abayas"—in the colors of the local teams, a new way for female sporting fans to cheer for their favorite players. Such fashion trends are gaining momentum amid the kingdom's liberalization drive, including a historic royal decree allowing women to drive from June and enter sports stadiums for the first time.

The government is also seeking to jump-start women's sports and is moving toward compulsory physical education classes for girls, after a ban was lifted in 2014. Saudi officials recently announced that women would be able to participate next year in the Riyadh international marathon, previously a male-only event.

Women exercising in public were long a target for the

