

Friday Times

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PM grilling may lead to Assembly dissolution

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Diwaniyas in Kuwait



Local Spotlight

By Muna Al-Fuzai

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I have found that several Western expatriates, especially male diplomats, like to visit diwaniyas in Kuwait. But what is the secret behind this passion? This article reviews the role and importance of diwaniyas. Diwaniyas in Kuwait hold a strong position in political, social and cultural life, the formation of ideas and discussions and sometimes decision-making according to the prevailing circumstances.

I recalled the important role of diwaniyas while I was reading a statement of a new diplomat in Kuwait, in which he said he looks forward to visiting many Kuwaiti diwaniyas. I believe he will undoubtedly be welcomed. Kuwaiti hospitality is well known and diwaniyas are in fact cultural, social and political spaces to hear what Kuwaitis think and talk about daily. Also, Kuwaitis prefer to welcome visitors in diwaniyas. Visitors feel that they are welcome in their homes and this reflects the generosity and the Arab sense of hospitality.

Diwaniyas are the perfect place to share ideas and hold debates without fear or anxiety, as the diwaniya is excluded from the law of gatherings, and it is not required to take permission from the interior ministry regardless of the number of people who gather in one place. Also in recent years, Kuwaiti women have established their own diwaniyas in modern Kuwait, which is normal in light of the development of civil society.

Diwaniyas have become more luxurious with modern furniture and décor, but what matters to most Kuwaitis is their content. In the past and before the discovery of oil, men used to meet to discuss their businesses and problems. Kuwait had many diwaniyas that were well-known as powerful, such as the diwaniya of the Al-Nisf family, the diwaniya of Mulla Saleh and many others.

Another major example of diwaniyas is Diwan Marafie. It has played a fundamental economical and historical role in Kuwaiti history. Also, it's worth mentioning that Diwan Marafie played a distinctive role during the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 - it remained open and performed its national duties, helping Kuwaiti families.

Even with the advent of social media, the diwaniya maintains a strong influence in Kuwaiti society. Diwaniyas are also cultural places where attendees wear dishdashas or Western suits with ties. I know some may not like the taste of Arabic coffee because it is a bit bitter, but with good dates, it forms an acceptable mix and an icebreaker to open talks.

Kuwaiti diwaniyas have been able to adapt to volatile local situations, whether political, social or economic, and created an environment for free discussions and political criticism sometimes by Kuwaiti youth, especially in light of its use by some opposition movements to accommodate diverse opinions. I think this is normal and must be accepted. Kuwaiti diwaniyas are an example of how the values of a society can continue in the context of development, moderation and social media. I encourage visitors who want to learn about Kuwait to visit Kuwaiti diwaniyas, because they will feel the pulse of Kuwaiti society.

PHOTO OF THE DAY



KUWAIT: Aerial view of Al Shaheed Park and Tijaria Tower by Essam Gad. — KUNA

Why Kuwait's schools need PTAs

Scribber's Notebook

By Jamie Etheridge

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The school year is fast drawing to a close, and while many students are looking forward to three months of freedom, many parents feel dissatisfaction and distress. The most common complaint heard regarding schools in Kuwait is that they are too costly (private schools) or have woefully inadequate standards (public schools).

The government now seems to be addressing the matter of skyrocketing school fees. In February, Education Minister Hamed Al-Azmi officially issued a decision freezing all school fee increases for the 2018/2019 school year. It's unclear if that decision will stand, as in previous years, the ministry announced a freeze on fees only to reverse the decision later.

Regarding standards, it seems difficult for one parent to judge any but their own child's education. There are significant concerns about the quality of the education children in Kuwait are receiving in both the public and private schools. But to generalize the concerns to all schools would be unfair. There are some schools – both public and private – that provide a quality education and there are tens of thousands of teachers and school staff who work assiduously to support students and to educate them in what has become a fast-changing world of educational standards and requirements.

Perhaps one of the most important elements of schooling absent in Kuwait is the PTA system. Parent-teacher associations are an invaluable resource for building a thriving school community and providing a support net-

work to schools. They are common in most Western countries and indeed many of the 'top tier' schools in Kuwait enjoy the support of a PTA.

The arguments against PTAs that I've heard repeated often go like this: Private schools in Kuwait are for-profit businesses and we are all working parents, so why should we volunteer to support their bottom line? That may seem reasonable, but it's a flawed argument. Yes, private schools in Kuwait are for profit and shareholders have the right and expectation that the businesses they've invested in give them a return. But at the same time, these schools are educating our children.

Whatever is good for the school will ultimately be good for our kids. If the library has plenty of good quality books and reading material, our children will have more to read. If schools provide more after-school activities or options for tutoring, our children will have a greater advantage in these areas as well.

Parent-teacher associations are typically voluntary and rely on parents contributing time and effort to help the school with areas like fundraising for extracurricular activities, volunteering in classes and charity events, field trips and after-school programs. Parents can also contribute by reading to students, giving lectures on their professions and even organizing field trips to their places of work.

Studies have shown that students with parents more involved and engaged with their school tend to get better grades, have fewer disciplinary problems and have greater positive relationships with peers and teachers. This is something that can only benefit all – students, parents, teachers and schools. PTAs also help keep parents actively engaged in supporting their children's education, building relationships with school administrations and teachers and overall building a better, thriving school community to the benefit of all.

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Farewell Kuwait: A Love Letter

Dear Kuwait,

This week, my family bids you farewell. After 43 years we are closing a chapter of our lives in a small country, a beautiful desert of memories and joy. My parents arrived in 1975 as a young Pakistani American couple from Chicago with their first child. They settled on giving a little country called Kuwait a chance. My parents thought they would leave after a couple of years, but never imagined that the desert of warmth and love would become the place where they would live out the largest part of their lives, have three children and eventually retire.

All my siblings attended the American School of Kuwait. We always had two identities: Pakistani and American with Kuwait being our home. Our lives were filled with school concerts, plays, track meets, international speech competitions and friendships from every corner of the world. We grew up eating Hungry Bunny, Pizza Inn, watching Growing Pains and making grocery runs to Sultan Center to indulge our KDD addictions. We witnessed the music of the eighties on FM radio, the allowance of Coca-Cola entering into the country in 1989 and the beautiful nights of Ramadan.

In 1990, we witnessed the Gulf War while we were on vacation to the home of our other identity, the United States. We had to say goodbye to the safe, sheltered environment Kuwait provided. We adjusted fondly in the United States those two



Yasmeen Mozaffar receiving an award for her years of work for kids with special needs in Kuwait and the Pakistani Women's Forum.

years, but missed Kuwait as it was our first home, my place of birth. As Kuwait became liberated with the help of allies to rebuild itself, we waited for it to come back to what it was. Upon at which time, we returned again.

Upon our return, we came to see a lot of changes in Kuwait. This included an awakening of the Kuwaiti identity and obligation to itself. As years passed we saw a love for the representative process, more women in politics and open discus-



Mohammad Shamim Mozaffar at his farwell party at Dar Al Handasah.

Local



Yasmeeen Mozaffar is seen with her students, Pakistani Ambassador to Kuwait Ghulam Dastaghir and Kuwaiti partner Jaber Al-Enezy.

sions of human rights. Indeed the young nation was growing.

My siblings and I all moved away to the United States for college but repeatedly always came back to Kuwait, our home. In which we had home cooked meals, shawarmas and peaceful family nights.

Traditionally there is a perception that expats visit countries, accumulate wealth and then return back to their homelands. For my family, the story and expectation was quite different. My parents taught us that people from all corners of the world are the same and it is our job to be a mercy to all mankind. We were here to give.

In their own way, my parents left the footprints of their skill, contributions and hearts in the people of Kuwait. My father Mohammad Shamim Mozaffar served as head of the structural department at KEO and continued to work at Dar Al Handasah. The projects he led over his 40 years to change the skyline of Kuwait is something we can witness for years to come. Most importantly he mentored and served as a role model for so many aspiring engineers who wanted to make an impact on Kuwait.

My mother, Yasmeeen Mozaffar, made it her life's mission to help the children of Kuwait with special needs have a life of dignity and love. Every day she would give long hours of her day to uplift students and families that felt challenged by their circumstances.

She is retiring now as Head of Life Skills Department, ASDAN Coordinator at Al-Resala Bilingual School. She also started a Center for Pakistani students with special needs in Kuwait so

that they may have access to similar resources as Kuwaiti students with special needs.

My mother was also committed to uplifting women in Kuwait and founded the Pakistani Women's Forum of Kuwait, in which she shared with the international community in Kuwait the leadership skills Pakistani women have so all women could learn from them. For my mother, having a Pakistani female Prime Minister is not enough - she wants all nations to have women representation in leadership.

It has been a beautiful journey. My siblings and I are all professionals living now in the United States with our own families. As my parents now say goodbye, the moment is bittersweet. The most important gift we received from Kuwait is love. Citizenship is a document. Community is the connection of hearts. We have had deep rooted loving relationships with Kuwait and its people. We have given a lot and they have given us the same. Thank you.

Maaria Mozaffar



Mohammad Shamim Mozaffar at work.

Veganism in Kuwait: An interview with the Kuwait Vegan Society



KVS organized a two-day workshop with the Center for Effective Vegan Advocacy (CEVA) to bolster vegan advocacy in Kuwait.



Dr Abeer Al-Sharhan

By Jeri Al-Jeri

Kuwait Vegan Society is a nonprofit group made up of activists who are spreading awareness in Kuwait about veganism. A plant-based diet is exactly what the people of the restaurant capital of the world - Kuwait - need.

To learn more about veganism in Kuwait and the activities and goals of the Kuwait Vegan Society, Kuwait Times sat down with Dr Abeer Al-Sharhan, Founder of Kuwait Vegan Society, to get a more in-depth view on the society.

Kuwait Times: What are the goals and activities of the Kuwait Vegan Society?

Abeer Al-Sharhan: Kuwait Vegan Society aims to provide resources to support the community in adopting a plant-based lifestyle. Its main goal though is spreading awareness about the positive benefits of veganism and its effect on our health, the planet and animals. Our activities include holding lectures, workshops, documentary screenings, participating in exhibitions, leafleting, holding potlucks, collaborating with other volunteer groups on common issues and participating in conferences.

KT: How popular is veganism in Kuwait?

Sharhan: Veganism in Kuwait is certainly on the rise. One proof is an increase in the number of exclusively vegan restaurants in Kuwait, as well as non-vegan restaurants having clearly marked vegan dishes on their menus. Also, we are seeing more attendees at our events than before.

KT: Can you explain the difference between vegetarian and vegan?

Sharhan: A vegetarian is a person who consumes vegetables, fruits, legumes, dairy and eggs, though not meat, poultry or fish. A vegan

A vegan consumes fruits, vegetables and legumes, but does not eat meat, poultry, fish, dairy or eggs - any animal products at all.

on the other hand consumes fruits, vegetables and legumes, but does not eat meat, poultry, fish, dairy or eggs. Also, veganism is about living in a way which seeks to exclude as much as possible and practicably all forms of exploitation of and cruelty against animals, and in my opinion, humans as well. Veganism is about compassion and about treating others, including animals, like you would want to be treated. It is about taking care of our health and the planet and leaving it better than we found it for the generations to come.

KT: What are some of the challenges vegans face in Kuwait, especially from society/acceptance?

Sharhan: The good news is that there are many plant-based options in supermarkets all over the country - from affordable fresh fruits and vegetables to meat and dairy alternatives. So in that sense, vegans in Kuwait are lucky. Some though might still struggle to make their family accept their food choices. Some family members might be concerned that their children might not get enough protein or calcium from a plant-based diet. Some people I know want to be vegan but still eat at home and so cannot be fully vegan until they move out. There are many myths about a plant-based lifestyle and this is part of the confusion that people have.

KT: How many practicing vegans are there in Kuwait?

Sharhan: I do not have a number but I know that veganism is on the rise. I also know that a lot more people are eating less meat and less dairy and this is having a positive effect on their health, the planet and on the number of animals that are spared.

KT: Is this a trend in the region?

Sharhan: I think veganism is on the rise all over the world. In Kuwait, it has been on the rise for the past four years or so. More people are concerned about their health and after trying this lifestyle, they can see that it has some benefits. Others are making the connection between the food they eat and who they are. I know a few who are environmentalists, and by adopting a vegan lifestyle, are contributing to making this planet livable for others in the future. So yes, I guess veganism is trending in the region and is here to stay.

KT: Why do you think it is becoming popular as a lifestyle choice?

Sharhan: I think it is popular and appeals to people as a lifestyle because it is a way for us to live out our values and contribute positively to society and to our planet and those who inhabit it at large. There are many reasons to be vegan - for health, for animals, for the planet and the animal-agriculture impact on world hunger. In order to eat animals, we have to grow crops to feed them - food that could be given to starving people instead of animals.

KT: How many members does KVS have and what does it offer to its members?

Sharhan: The Kuwait Vegan Society is under establishment and all the members are volunteers.

KT: What are the stereotypes/misconceptions that people in Kuwait have about veganism?

Sharhan: That vegans cannot be healthy. That veganism is a Western notion (even though it has been around for thousands of years and started in the East). That vegan food is tasteless. That cows have to be milked (what do we do with all that milk?) That vegan food is expensive. That you cannot be a vegan athlete (a lot of men lift weights in Kuwait and they are afraid they will lose muscle mass). Vegan food makes you fat because most of it is carbohydrates.

KVS is a revolutionary society that is gaining more popularity as it progresses toward its ultimate goal - that each individual is convinced to decrease the consumption of animal-based products and strive to increase plant-based products in their daily meals, all for the sake of one's health and for the animals' quality of life. As they say: "Mercy for all!"

Recently, the KVS organized a two-day workshop with the Center for Effective Vegan Advocacy (CEVA) to bolster vegan advocacy in Kuwait. The training was led by CEVA hosts Dr. Melanie Joy, a Harvard-educated psychologist, celebrated speaker, organizational consultant, strategist, and award-winning author; and Tobias Leenaert, international speaker, vegan advocate and strategist.

"The workshop covered many subjects including effective communications skills, effective vegan advocacy, strategic vegan outreach and making compassion easier," explained Dr Al-Sharhan.



THE BIGGEST PAINTING COMPETITION FOR STUDENTS

Kuwait Beautiful & Green's closing ceremony on April 24, 2018

With the aim of boosting environmental public awareness, developing the sense of aesthete and caring for environmental issues in Kuwait, Kuwait Times is currently preparing for its 15th students' art competition to invest in the success so far achieved since its inception in 1994, namely in the previous cycle in 2018 where over 20,000 students aged 6 to 18 from over 220 public, private, Arab and foreign schools in Kuwait took part. We do hope participants in 2019 will exceed 25,000.

It has already been 15 years since Kuwait Times started organizing the 'Kuwait Beautiful & Green' students' art competition in collaboration with Zain as our strategic partner and main sponsor along with Hardee's and Symphony Style Hotel, with the aim of promoting students' environmental awareness, encouraging them to effectively take part in various environment-oriented activities with an ultimate aim of acquiring more knowledge and skills and a sense of responsibility as well as positive attitudes.

It also aims at boosting the principles of moderation and tolerance among students and encourages them to be ambitious, protect public resources and take sustainability-related initiatives that help protect the environment. Environmental protection is not just a motto or meaningless words. It is in fact an integral part of our history and heritage. It is a way of life because we have been and will always be committed to peaceful coexistence between man and nature.

The jury committee comprising of Abdul Karim Al-Enezi, Assaad Bu Nashi and Svetlana Arndt met on Tuesday and Wednesday to select the winners. It was very difficult for them to choose the winners from over 20,000 participants. The timeframe this year was very tight due to examinations and the upcoming holy month of Ramadan.

One of the problems that we faced from the artworks of students was that they were repeating and copying drawings published in the newspaper or on social media. The purpose of this competition is for students to be creative and show effort in their paintings. The other point is that by writing the wording Kuwait Beautiful and Green in the sheet - let the drawing send a message by itself.

Also, the concept is Kuwait - in Kuwait there are no



mountains or lakes. We have to draw about how we can keep Kuwait beautiful and green. We also found that some of the drawings had been scanned and painted - we checked this with the teachers and the students. All of these points will be raised during the awarding ceremony.

This is one of the reasons why we reduced the number of winners. However; the judges had difficulty in the final category - students 15 to 17 years old - where we needed to increase the number of winners due to the fact that schools and students tried their best. This year was amazing, as you will find out during the closing ceremony that will be held at Symphony Style Hotel.

We would like to thanks all the students, teachers, schools and parents for their effort and hard work to make this event successful. All participants received an appreciation certificate from Kuwait Times, while winners will receive prizes and certificates with their names during the award ceremony.



Local

Saudi-Russia oil alliance likely to undercut OPEC

Kuwait backs continuation of output cuts

DUBAI: Saudi Arabia hopes to bring Russia into the fold of an expanded club of global oil giants to sustain a stable market, leaving OPEC's role in question, analysts say. The new union, spearheaded by Riyadh and Moscow, is expected to be larger than the 14-member OPEC oil cartel, which has dominated the global energy market for the past six decades. But experts say an expanded group that includes Russia means OPEC's sway in global oil is fading, if not all but "dead".

In January, OPEC kingpin Saudi Arabia floated the idea of extending a cooperation agreement struck in late 2016 by 24 OPEC and non-OPEC producers to trim output and shore up prices. Top Saudi officials, including Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and Energy Minister Khaled Al-Faleh, have called for a long-term cooperation framework between oil producers. The idea received strong support from several OPEC members, mainly the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait.

A Kremlin spokesman said last month that Russia and Saudi Arabia have been discussing a "wide range of options" on cooperation in the global oil market. OPEC and non-OPEC countries will meet in Saudi Arabia's Jeddah today to assess compliance with production cuts and to discuss potential long-term cooperation. Producers have already been encouraged by the success of their broadened cooperation, which helped restore balance to the crude market, rebounding prices from as low as \$26 a barrel to above \$70 a barrel.

'A new chapter'

OPEC secretary general Mohammed Barkindo on Monday praised the cooperation agreement as a "great success" that has helped to overcome "the worst cycle in



KUWAIT: Kuwait Oil Minister Bakheet Al-Rashidi addresses an oil and gas conference on April 16, 2018. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

the history of oil". Kuwaiti oil expert Kamel Al-Harami said "it would have been difficult to achieve that success by OPEC alone". He told AFP that at its root, the new agreement "basically looks like a Saudi-Russian alliance". The deal, which cut output by 1.8 million barrels per day, has removed more than 300 million barrels of surplus oil and lowered extra crude stockpiles to just 50 million barrels.

Oil Minister of non-OPEC Oman, Mohammed Al-Rumhi, told an oil conference in Kuwait on Monday that the secret of the deal's success was compliance with production cuts. But he warned that "the game is not over yet," calling on producers to continue cooperating to maintain market conditions. "The two largest suppliers of conventional oil in the world - Saudi and Russia - can work together to maintain stable prices or fight each other by increasing production to kill the market for shale oil producers, but at the same time kill themselves," said Jean-Francois Seznec, an oil expert at US Johns Hopkins University. "The only logical and smart approach is to

keep prices stable," he told AFP.

Oil prices collapsed in mid-2014 because oil producers, mainly Saudi Arabia, refused to cut production to maintain market shares against tough competition from US shale oil - eventually resulting in a massive oil surplus. The Saudis later reversed course, cutting deeper than their required quota to ensure the deal's success. Barkindo described the Saudi-Russian alliance as a "new chapter" in the oil industry's history. In the coming months, producers will look "to institutionalize this long-term framework" with inclusive and broad-based participation, he said.

'De facto dead'

UAE Energy Minister Suhail Al-Mazrouei said last month that a "draft charter" for the new alliance would be finalized by the end of 2018 when the current agreement expires. Faleh, Saudi's energy minister, said the partnership with Russia would last for "decades and generations". He said he hoped it would send a message that the kingdom is looking to expand its partnerships beyond the OPEC circle. Analysts believe the new alliance will, at the least, weaken OPEC's role in global oil. "OPEC lost some of its shine after Russia joined the cooperation agreement... It was a simple message that it could not do the job alone," said Harami. Seznec, from Johns Hopkins University, said "OPEC is de facto dead", but still useful because it gave Saudi Arabia a forum to exchange with minor producers. Anas Al-Hajji, a Houston-based oil expert, said the new alliance would likely dominate the global oil market. "OPEC as a club for oil producers and a research center will not end, but the question is about the center of (oil) power: It is about Saudi Arabia and Russia," Hajji said. — AFP

various nationalities, in addition to modern communications means that are expanding and their role is growing daily, which makes it easier for new words to sneak into our local dialect.

Researcher in Kuwait heritage Hussein Al-Qattan told KUNA that some words and idioms in our beautiful dialect lost some words, such as - banzenekhana became mahatta banzene (gas station), saheb became duktur (doctor) and khatoon became mumarrida (nurse). Qattan said the word jeneer was replaced with amil fanni (technical worker), jetti was replaced by kart (card) and gari became darraja (bicycle), which Kuwaitis also used to call the horse of Iblees (devil), dawakhana became saidaliya (pharmacy) and karwa became ujra (fee).

He said some of the words that were changed through the years include shakh to fidda (silver), as there is an old Kuwait proverb "nussa thahab wa nussa shakh" (half gold and half silver). The word mao used to mean imitation gold, warqool means gold-plated, jit-taya means ghutra (men's headdress) and bagha means a plastic board. Qattan said other old Kuwaiti words used to describe old professions that have disappeared, including majni (one who repairs ceramic ware), dammaj (rope maker) and khassaf (someone who made mats from bamboo as well as baskets). — KUNA

The changing Kuwaiti dialect

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti local dialect is rich with many beautiful and strange words that are linked to popular heritage and the local environment. Some of these are from classical Arabic, while others are derived from foreign languages. Some of these words disappeared and were replaced, while others are still in use.

Dr Yaqoub Al-Ghunaim wrote in his book (Pronunciation of Kuwaiti Dialect in the Lisan Al-Arab book by Ibn Manzour) that the Kuwaiti dialect restored its balance and replaced alien loan-words with classical Arabic ones, such as - motor became sayyara (car), kirfaya became sareer (bed), tonbakhiya became koorra (ball), silqi became masaha (area), ranq became loun (color) and kandishan became mukayef (air condition).

Despite this, there are foreign words still in use in our local dialect, and this is not strange, since Kuwait is a country open to all civilizations and its people love to travel and discover the world. It is also the destination of hundreds of thousands of expats of

NEWS IN BRIEF

Iran quake felt in Kuwait

KUWAIT: The Kuwait National Seismic Network said yesterday that the country was slightly affected by the 5.9-magnitude tremor that hit southern Iran earlier yesterday. The aftershock of the quake was felt at 09:45 local time in Fintas, Mangaf and Mishref, said Dr Abdullah Al-Enizi, crises management director at the network. The quake hit Iran's southern region of Boushehr, home to the country's only nuclear power plant, without causing casualties or damage, media reported. The University of Tehran's seismology center said the epicenter of the earthquake was in the sparsely populated Kaki region, around 80 km from the Boushehr plant. — Agencies

Kuwait wins UN-CCPCJ membership

GENEVA: Kuwait won yesterday a three-year membership in the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ). Kuwait was elected alongside Iraq, Iran, India, and Thailand of the Asia-Pacific Group by member-states of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) during their meetings at the UN headquarters in New York. Winning such a membership is an addition to Kuwaiti diplomacy's accomplishments, Kuwaiti Ambassador to Austria and delegate to the UN organizations Sadiq Marafi told KUNA. This is Kuwait's first-ever CCPCJ's membership ever since the commission's establishment in 1992, Marafi said, adding it is consisted of 40 member-states with an office-term of three years. — KUNA

Qatar joined Gulf war games

RIYADH: Qatari forces participated in joint military exercises that ended in Saudi Arabia this week, in an apparent sign of some compromise among US-allied Arab states locked in a nearly year-long dispute. Qatari Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Ghanem bin Shaheen Al-Ghanim was present on Monday at a closing ceremony, attended by Saudi King Salman and other heads of state, for the Gulf Shield drills, the Qatari Armed Forces said in a statement. The statement did not provide details about the size of the Qatari contingent that took part in the Gulf Shield exercises which ran from March 21 to April 16. An official from one of the 23 participating countries said Qatar sent one ship with nine officers to join the drills, and had seven other officers observing. — Reuters

Vox to open multiplex in Riyadh

RIYADH: Vox Cinemas, owned by Dubai's Majid Al Futtaim, said yesterday it had received a license to operate cinemas in Saudi Arabia and would open a four-screen multiplex theatre in Riyadh "in the coming days". The first theatre - operated by AMC Entertainment Holdings - was launched this week, with public viewings expected to start today. Vox said in a statement it was investing 2 billion riyals (\$533 million) in Saudi Arabia to open 600 screens in the next five years, starting at Riyadh Park Mall which will host the kingdom's first IMAX screen. Other cinemas currently under design include Majid Al Futtaim's Mall of Saudi and City Centre Ishbiliyah. Majid Al Futtaim will be the exclusive distributor of 20th Century Fox content to all Saudi cinemas with plans to release "The Darkest Minds", "The Predator" and "Alita Battle Angel" during 2018, the statement added. — Reuters

Dubai scraps 2018 film fest

DUBAI: The Dubai International Film Festival, the top cinematic event in the Arab world, has been cancelled for 2018 but will be staged from 2019 every two years, organizers said yesterday. The announcement came a day after neighboring Saudi Arabia, a close ally of the United Arab Emirates, unveiled its first cinema after a decades-long ban. "The strategic shift aims to embrace the significant changes taking place in the region's creative and entertainment landscape," organizers said on the festival's website. The 14-year-old festival will now be held every other year, according to organizers, with the 2019 dates yet to be determined. — AFP

Local

Assembly dissolution looms as Azemi files to grill premier

PM vows response to interpellation

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly appears to be on its way out with online activists advising people to be ready for yet another parliamentary election, after MP Hamdan Al-Azemi yesterday surprised everyone by filing to grill HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah on a variety of allegations including a rise in corruption. The new grilling comes only a few days after two opposition lawmakers filed to grill Oil Minister Bakheet Al-Rasheedi over alleged corruption and mismanagement, with reports that MP Saleh Ashour is planning to file to grill Minister of Social Affairs and Labor Hind Al-Sabeeh on Sunday.

Sheikh Jaber said that he would respond to the grilling motion just as he did with earlier similar moves. In a statement to KUNA by phone, the prime minister emphasized that more attention needs to be given to vital issues that necessitate earnest work and sincere cooperation to find optimal solutions and to push forward national development, thus realizing higher national objectives.

Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said yesterday the new grilling will be placed on the agenda of the May 1 session. Next week's expected grilling will also be placed in the same session if submitted. The new grilling has prompted online activists to predict that the Assembly, elected less than two years ago, will be dissolved, although there were no official indications of this. Online activists called on voters to be ready for snap polls and also advised hopefuls to start



KUWAIT: MP Hamdan Al-Azemi arrives to file to grill HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah yesterday. — Photo by Joseph Shagra

preparing their campaign tents.

In his grilling, Azemi accused Sheikh Jaber of being responsible for the massive slide in Kuwait's position on the International Corruption Perception Index by more than 50 places from 35 in 2003 to 85 last year. He said being the head of the government, the prime minister is responsible for this slide and for the spread of corruption in the country. The lawmaker said among the factors that promoted corruption in the country is the delay in mega projects and the increase in their costs. He said the cost of two key roads linking Kuwait City and Jahra has increased from KD 275 million to around KD 560 million.

Azemi said another indicator is the appointment of senior officials in key posts through influence and not competence. The lawmaker also



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets President of Boeing Middle East, North Africa and Turkey Bernie Dunn at Seif Palace yesterday. The PM said Kuwait welcomes joint projects with Boeing to benefit the national economy and support the transfer and nationalization of modern technology, as well as provide training opportunities and building local capabilities. — KUNA

charged that the prime minister is responsible for not implementing laws issued by the National Assembly and accepted by the government and listed more than 10 legislations that the government has failed to make the necessary measures to implement. The grilling also accuses the prime minister of being responsible for revoking the citizenship of a number of Kuwaiti opposition figures who opposed government policies. It also accuses the prime minister of being responsible for the government's failure to present any solution for the plight of 120,000 stateless people, known as bedoons.

The lawmaker charged that Kuwaiti governments had in the past failed to resolve the problem but under the current prime minister, the government deliberately refused to resolve the crisis facing bedoons. He said as a result, a number of young bedoon men and women have committed suicide to escape their miserable life after they were deprived of basic services and barred from jobs. The grilling also accuses the prime minister of failing to take the necessary measures to lift the international suspension imposed on various Kuwaiti sports federations over alleged government interference.

Scientific Center marks Earth Day

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Scientific Center of Kuwait yesterday marked Earth Day, which coincides with the 18th anniversary of the center, which holds various educational, cultural and scientific programs for visitors. Director-General Rana Al-Nibari said staff at the Scientific Center have prepared a busy program to celebrate the occasion, which will spread environmental and scientific awareness. She highlighted the importance of celebrating global events related to protecting the environment and raising public awareness about the risks facing humanity.

She said a new movie "Twister" on hurricanes and their impact will be shown in the IMAX theatre. Nibari invited the public to attend the event and enjoy exciting activities today and tomorrow from 4 pm. The Scientific Center, founded by KFAS, has been a vital attraction in Kuwait since its establishment. It has interactive attractions and innovative educational programs and exhibitions that engage the minds of youth outside the classroom. Since its opening, it has attracted more than 10 million visitors, who have enjoyed and benefited from its facilities, programs and workshops.

Oil price soars to highest level on Mideast tensions

LONDON: Oil surged yesterday close to 3.5-year peaks on simmering Mideast tensions and keen US demand, while London stocks rose with drugmaker Shire boosted by a possible takeover battle. World oil prices extended Wednesday's gains on the back of data showing a drop in US stockpiles - indicating improved demand - and expectations that a Russia-OPEC output cap deal will be kept in place. The market was also propelled after OPEC kingpin reportedly stated it wanted crude prices to top \$80 per barrel as it prepares for a gigantic listing of part of its state oil company. Tensions in the oil-rich Middle East also kept prices elevated.

"WTI and Brent Crude have hit fresh 41-month highs after Saudi Arabia stated they would be happy for oil to reach \$80 or \$100," said market analyst David Madden at CMC Markets UK. Oil surged to summits last seen in Nov 2014, with London Brent striking \$74.74 per barrel and New York crude touching \$69.56. European equity markets meanwhile diverged amid lingering fears over Syria and a possible China-US trade war, but London moved 0.2 percent higher despite news of sliding March retail sales. — AFP

Hajraf discusses WBG cooperation

WASHINGTON: Kuwaiti Minister of Finance Nayef Al-Hajraf and the participating Kuwaiti delegation on Wednesday attended the annual spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank Group (WBG). The meetings included one with World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim, as both sides discussed means of cooperation to best serve Kuwait's interests in various fields, especially in educational and economic domains, as well as offering training courses for Kuwaitis in WBG. The Kuwaiti delegation also included Commerce and Industry Minister Khaled Al-Roudhan and Education Minister Hamed Al-Azmi.

Hajraf, in remarks to KUNA and Kuwait TV, said the meeting with Kim tackled means of boosting and developing cooperation between the World Bank and Kuwait, as Kim offered an initiative of developing and investing in human resources through linking investment with education and health sectors to reflect on the state's economy growth.

They also discussed importance of the Kuwaiti youth participation in the WBG, and means by which Kuwait would benefit from the group in the future. "We believe that Kuwaiti youth can contribute a lot to the World Bank, out of our belief in their capabilities," Hajraf noted. He hailed WBG's remarkable contribution in developing the economic infrastructure in Kuwait through periodical studies and reports it issues. Kim visited Kuwait in February and met Hajraf on the sidelines of the International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq. — KUNA

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LONDON: Britain's Queen Elizabeth II speaks at the formal opening of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) at Buckingham Palace in London.—AFP

Queen opens Commonwealth summit

Leaders from 53 Commonwealth nations attend summit

LONDON: Queen Elizabeth II, the Head of the Commonwealth, opened the Commonwealth summit for what may be the last time yesterday voicing hope that her son would be allowed to carry on her role. Queen Elizabeth, who turns 92 tomorrow, welcomed leaders from the 53 Commonwealth nations—mostly former colonies—to Buckingham Palace for two days of talks that will include discussions on trade, marine protection and tackling cyber crime.

In her opening speech, Queen Elizabeth spoke of her own “extraordinary journey” as head of the Commonwealth, which started under her father King George VI with the London Declaration of 1949. “It is my sincere wish that the Commonwealth will continue to offer stability and continuity for future generations and will decide that one day, the Prince of Wales should carry on the important work started by my father in 1949,” she said, referring to her son Prince Charles.

Queen Elizabeth, who has been the group's

symbolic figurehead since 1952, gave up long-haul travel in support of the biennial summit in 2013 and the 2020 gathering is set to be held in Malaysia. On the closing day today, leaders are expected to discuss who should follow Queen Elizabeth in the role. The position is not hereditary, but Prince Charles, who is also the heir to the thrones of 16 Commonwealth nations, is expected to get the nod, despite some unease among ardent republicans.

Charles, 69, told Commonwealth leaders the body had been “a fundamental feature of my life for as long as I can remember”. “The modern Commonwealth has a vital role to play in building bridges between our countries,” he said. Maltese Prime Minister Joseph Muscat said of

Charles: “We are certain that when he will be called upon to do so, he will provide a solid and passionate leadership for our Commonwealth.”

British Prime Minister Theresa May, the summit host, paid tribute to Queen Elizabeth's service to the Commonwealth at the opening ceremony. “You have been the Commonwealth's most steadfast and fervent champion,” May said. “You have seen us through some of our most serious challenges. “And we commit to sustaining this Commonwealth, which you have so carefully nurtured.”

Clean oceans focus

A spectacle of pomp and pageantry was staged to welcome the leaders, with a guard of

honor and flag bearers greeting arriving dignitaries. More than 100 troops from the Coldstream Guards were in the honor guard, wearing their famous scarlet tunics and bearskin hats. Born out of the former British empire, the voluntary organization, covering a third of the world's population, typically focuses on development and democracy, but is placing greater attention on boosting trade.

During the two days of talks, the group is hoping to agree an ocean governance charter, an agenda for trade and investment, and a declaration on tackling cyber crime. Given its highly diverse membership, if agreements can be struck within the Commonwealth, they can likely achieve wider support. At the last Commonwealth summit in 2015, leaders struck a deal on climate change that helped pave the way for the Paris agreement days afterwards. Today's sessions take place at Windsor Castle, west of London, where the leaders are left entirely alone to discuss whatever they wish.—AFP



The position is not hereditary

International

UN in security talks with Syria after chemical probe put on hold

Safety fears hamper plans for experts to travel to Douma

BEIRUT: UN security experts have said they were negotiating with Syrian and Russian authorities for international chemical inspectors to deploy to the site of an alleged toxic gas attack near Damascus, after a reconnaissance mission came under fire. The team from the world's chemical arms watchdog has not yet been able to begin its field work in Douma, where dozens were killed in a suspected April 7 gas attack, as Western powers warn that President Bashar al-Assad's regime may attempt to remove crucial evidence.

The United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) said it was trying to make arrangements for the fact-finding experts to travel to Douma "at the earliest possible time", according to a report to the Security Council obtained by AFP Wednesday. "UNDSS in Damascus is now engaged in further discussions and coordination with representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Russian military police on how to enhance and reinforce security arrangements in specific locations in Douma," it said.

A team from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons arrived in Syria just hours after unprecedented US-led strikes on regime targets Saturday, launched in response to the alleged gas attack. But the watchdog on Wednesday said safety fears had hampered plans for the experts to travel to Douma, a town that was controlled by rebels until Russian-backed regime forces fully retook it last week. The United States, France and Britain have accused Assad's regime of carrying out the suspected chemical attack, but Russia and Syria deny toxic gas was used in Douma.

According to the UN report, a security team travelled to two sites on Tuesday escorted by Russian military police. At the second location, "there was an explosion followed by small-arms fire directed at (the) UNDSS team and the

Russian military police," said the report, adding that the team had returned safely to Damascus. OPCW chief Ahmet Uzumcu said the incident highlighted "the highly volatile environment" in which the fact-finding team had to work.

He added he would only consider deploying the team to Douma with UNDSS approval and if the inspectors had "unhindered access to the sites". Syria's UN ambassador Bashar Jaafari told the Security Council on Tuesday that the OPCW experts would begin their investigation once they received the all-clear from the UN team.

Mission in limbo

Assad's regime in February launched a blistering assault on Eastern Ghouta, a semi-rural area within mortar range of central Damascus that had been in opposition hands for six years. Fighters from the Islamist group Jaish al-Islam held out in the enclave's main town of Douma, but the group accused the regime of forcing them to accept a deal to leave the area by deploying chemical munitions in the April 7 attack.

Grisly footage purportedly of the aftermath shocked the world, with harrowing testimony from medics of victims gasping for air and frothing at the mouth. It prompted a coordinated wave of missile strikes by the United States, France and Britain against regime targets. Syria's ally Russia was given prior notice and the missiles struck mostly empty buildings, in what many analysts saw as a hollow move that allowed all sides to save face.

The OPCW was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013 for its efforts to destroy Syria's chemical weapons stockpile. Its inspectors have a mandate to determine the circumstances of the alleged chemical attack, but not to say who is responsible. But delays and security fears have cast uncertainty over the current fact-finding mission (FFM). "At present, we do not know



NEW YORK: US ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley talks with the Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia during a UN Security Council meeting, at United Nations Headquarters in New York.—AFP

when the FFM team can be deployed to Douma," the OPCW chief said.

Western ambassadors to the organization accused the Syrian regime of obstructing the mission. The French foreign ministry has said it is "highly likely that evidence and essential elements disappear from the site". Several experts have said it was likely that Russian and Syrian forces that now control Douma have tried to remove or tampered with incriminating evidence.

Hiding evidence claims

The "White Helmets", a Syrian rescue force that works in opposition-held areas, said it was working closely with the inspectors. "We provided information on the burial place of those killed in the chemical attack," its chief Raed Saleh said. The White Helmets and local medics

were the main source of information in the wake of the alleged chemical attack. Another member of the organization said he was worried proof that toxic substances had been used was being tampered with, particularly the burial site.

"The regime is hiding all the evidence," said the member, speaking on condition of anonymity, adding it was "essential" the inspectors visit the site of the attack. He said the victims were buried in the city's east. On Tuesday, Syrian state news agency SANA said a "mass grave" had been found there, but did not specify what had been done with the bodies. Top Jaish al-Islam official Mohammad Alloush accused the regime on Wednesday of "erasing proof of the chemical (attack) in Douma." He specifically accused them of "storming cemeteries in search of the victims of chemical substances". —AFP

Iraq says it carried out air raid against IS in Syria

BAGHDAD: The Iraqi air force yesterday carried out a "deadly raid" against positions of the Islamic State group in neighboring Syria, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's office said. Abadi ordered the strike against the jihadists "because of the danger they pose to Iraqi territory," a statement said. A video released by the air force showed two F-16 fighter jets in action. "These raids demonstrate the growing capacity of our armed forces to hunt down and liquidate terrorists," it added. Iraq declared victory in December against IS, which launched a sweeping offensive in 2014 and at one point controlled a third of the country. The jihadists still control pockets of desert along the border with Syria, where Iraq had already carried out limited raids against IS before yesterday's strike.—AFP



IRAQ: A handout picture provided by the Iraqi Air Force shows an F16 fighter jet at an undisclosed location in Iraq.—AFP

Quake hits near Iran nuclear power plant

TEHRAN: A moderately strong 5.9-magnitude earthquake yesterday hit Iran's southern region of Bushehr, home to the country's only nuclear power plant, without causing casualties or damage, media reported. "The earthquake had no effect on the activity of the plant," Mahmoud Jafari, project manager at the Russian-built Bushehr nuclear plant, said according to the Telegram news channel of Iran's state television. The University of Tehran's seismology centre said the epicenter of the earthquake that hit at 0634 GMT was in the sparsely populated Kaki region, around 80 kilometers from the Bushehr plant. The head of emergency services said no one was killed or wounded in the quake, media reported. Bushehr has a 1,000 megawatt reactor built by Russia that became operational in 2011 and reached full capacity the following year. Iran sits atop several fault lines and has been hit by a series of earthquakes since November 2017, when a 7.3-magnitude tremor killed 620 people in the western province of Kermanshah and eight in Iraq.—AFP

International

Morocco's child maids suffer like 'slaves'

Underage workers suffer from degrading working, living conditions

RABAT: "Even a pet animal is better treated," sobs 17-year-old Fatima, one of thousands of young girls exploited and too often abused while working as housemaids for unscrupulous employers in Morocco. She has managed to get to the Annajda help centre for battered women in the capital, Rabat. "I only wanted to help my parents, my family was living in destitution," murmurs the teenager, who has worked as a household servant for two years.

For the volunteers who offer support, such stories are commonplace despite recent legislation to protect minors from servitude. Fatima's parents agreed to let her leave their southern village at the age of 15 to work as a domestic, with the aid of a local intermediary, or "sem-sar". A place was found and she was sent to work with a family in Rabat. "At first I was well-treated," she said. "But gradually, violence became my daily life. "The mistress used to beat me, insult me, she always had a reason." Fatima El Maghnaoui, who runs the Annajda shelter, talks of slavery and says teenage Fatima should be at school. "It's a form of slavery, a violation of the right to education and of Morocco's international commitments," she said.

Degrading conditions

There are no official figures on the employment of maids. But a study carried out in 2010 by non-governmental bodies reported that Morocco had between 66,000 and 80,000 domestic workers aged under 15. INSAF, an NGO which has campaigned for women's rights for nearly 20 years, lists "degrading working and living conditions" suffered by the girls, who are usually from the country and illiterate.

Iran arrests culture ministry official over public dance

TEHRAN: Iran yesterday arrested a senior official after a video posted online showed young boys and girls dancing in public in the northeastern holy city of Mashhad, the judiciary said. "The head of the ministry of culture and Islamic guidance in Mashhad was arrested for undermining public decency and disrespecting the laws," the judiciary's Mizan Online news agency said quoting a deputy prosecutor. Islamic law in Iran prohibits public dancing.

The video shared on social networks showed young boys and girls dancing in a shopping mall,

Latifa's story caught public attention recently after the 22-year-old was taken to hospital in Casablanca with third-degree burns and broken bones. She had been a maid since adolescence and long abused by her employer. INSAF has helped her find shelter. For Fatima, work began at 7:00 am and ended late into the night, "sometimes 3:00 am," she says. "I used to sleep on the terrace in the cold, like a domestic animal.

"I used to eat the scraps and my feet always ached from standing up." She was not even paid.

"A salary of 800 dirhams a month (nearly 70 euros, around \$85, or a third of the minimum wage) was agreed, but I didn't get a penny," she adds. After the first year she asked for what she was owed, only for the mistress of

the house to confiscate her identity papers and forbid any contact with her family.

Caught in a trap, Fatima decided to run away. "I didn't know anyone, I had no money and did not even know the address where I was working," she says. In the end, a young man who lived nearby helped her get in touch with an aunt and "bring the ordeal to a close".

Lost childhood

Omar Saadoun, who heads INSAF's program against child labor, says that the fate of maids, such as Fatima, starts with "failure at school in rural settings, poverty and parental ignorance". In some areas, "girls are considered inferior to boys and are the first in line to be married off or sent to work as a servant when extra money is needed," he said. Long awaited amid years of debate, legislation to protect maids was passed in the summer of 2016. It sets a minimum age of 18 for household work. The law covers labor con-

where a singer was performing for a huge crowd. The event took place on Tuesday. Mohsen Afshar, a spokesman for the shopping centre, told the ISNA news agency that a monthly draw is organized and a car given away to the lucky winner to attract customers. According to Afshar the singer had the necessary "official permits to perform".

The performance can attract 10,000-12,000 people, he said, including "some individuals whose behavior is contrary to the norms of the Islamic republic". But Heydari told Tasnim news agency that the mall was not authorized to organize such events. Mashhad is a holy and conservative city where in 2016 concerts were banned by the Friday prayer leader, Ayatollah Ahmad Allamolhoda, who also told music-lovers to "Go somewhere else".

Yesterday's arrest comes days after Tehran's reformist mayor, Mohammad Ali Najafi, resigned after claims he was threatened with arrest. Najafi had attracted criticism from hardliners last month after attending in March a show at City Hall for Iranian Women's Day in which schoolgirls performed a traditional dance.—AFP



RABAT: Former Moroccan underage maid Fatima, 17, is pictured inside a house in Rabat.—AFP

tracts, a minimum wage, one day off a week, annual holidays and financial penalties for failure to abide by the rules. Government has hailed the law as major social progress. However, it allows another five years for the employment of 16-18 year-olds, much to the annoyance of human rights activists, and there has been little or no assessment of implementation. "We need a global strategy... the legislation does not bring any guarantees, there is no system for support, rehabilitation, to identify families," says Saadoun. "Many maids who are minors do not even know the address of their employer." And, noted El Maghnaoui, "work inspectors are not authorised to investigate inside households where abuse can take place far from prying eyes."

Painful memories

Despite the new legislation, non-government agencies such as INSAF report that girls as young as eight or nine are still being taken on as servants. After years of servitude, many still bear the scars. Hayat, now 38, became a maid at the age of nine. "When I think back today, 30 years after, it's still just as painful," she laments. "I lost my childhood. "My first employer mistreated me, gave me leftovers to eat. He constantly humiliated me. "It was exhausting. I did not have the strength needed for housework." Today she's a mother and does "everything to take care of my children so they do not live through the same thing."—AFP

Bahrain arrests 24 Shiites, revokes nationality

DUBAI: A Bahrain court sentenced 24 Shiite citizens to prison and stripped them of their nationality after finding them guilty of forming a "terrorist group", a Bahraini judicial source said yesterday. Other charges included travelling to Iraq and Iran for "weapons and explosives training" and attempted murder of police officers. The High Criminal Court on Wednesday sentenced 10 of the defendants to life in prison, 10 to a decade behind bars and the

other four to jail terms ranging from three to five years.

The Sunni-ruled, Shiite-majority kingdom has stripped hundreds of its citizens of their nationality and jailed dozens of high-profile activists and religious clerics since protests demanding an elected government erupted in early 2011. The Bahraini government has accused Shiite Iran of backing the protests and attempting to overthrow the government. Tehran denies involvement. Authorities on Wednesday also referred to trial seven Bahrainis accused of attacking an oil pipeline to Saudi Arabia in November.

That trial is set for May 10. The blast cut off the pipeline linking Bahrain's Babco refinery with oil giant Aramco's main pumping station in neighboring Saudi Arabia's Dhahran province.—AFP

International

End of era in Cuba as Castro hands torch to Diaz-Canel

Diaz-Canel vows to continue revolution

HAVANA: Cuba is poised for the end of an era yesterday as President Raul Castro steps down, formally handing power to his long-time deputy Miguel Diaz-Canel—and thereby ending his family's six-decade grip on the island. The silver-haired Diaz-Canel, 57 — a top Communist Party figure who has served as first vice president since 2013 — will become the island's first leader born after the 1959 revolution, and the first in 60 years who is not named Castro.

Between them, father of the nation Fidel and his younger brother Raul made the Caribbean island a key player in the Cold War and helped keep communism afloat despite the collapse of the Soviet Union. Raul, now 86, has been in power since 2006, when he took over after illness sidelined Fidel, who seized power in the revolution. Diaz-Canel, who has spent years climbing the party ranks, was named the sole candidate for the presidency on Wednesday.

He was formally confirmed as the country's leader at roughly 9:00 am yesterday—the anniversary of the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, when Fidel Castro's forces defeated 1,400 US-backed rebels seeking to overthrow him. Havana has long hailed the showdown as American imperialism's first great defeat in Latin America. It is also the day before the new president's 58th birthday.

In Raul's footsteps

Diaz-Canel, who some say bears a passing resemblance to American actor Richard Gere, is a fan of The Beatles whose penchant for

wearing jeans has set him apart in Havana's corridors of power. Although he has advocated fewer restrictions on the press and a greater openness to the internet, he also has a ruthless streak, with harsh words for Cuba's dissidents and the United States. Crucially, he will remain under the watchful eye of Castro, who will continue to serve as the head of Cuba's all-powerful Communist Party.

Once sworn in, Diaz-Canel will be tasked with pursuing reforms begun by Castro to open up Cuba's economy to small private entrepreneurs and reach a rapprochement with its Cold War arch-enemy, the United States. In 2015, Havana and Washington renewed diplomatic ties, with then president Barack Obama making a historic visit to the island a year later. But, steps towards a normalization of ties have been severely curtailed since Donald Trump arrived in the White House last year.

Continuity over change

Diaz-Canel will also inherit a youthful population hungry for change on the Caribbean island—one of the world's last outposts of Communism since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Cuba watchers and domestic analysts say he will favor continuity over change in the early days of his presidency, however. As they began their momentous two-day meeting Wednesday, the 605 delegates of the National Assembly cast their votes for the new Council of State, which counts 31 members and whose head automatically becomes president.

speaking at a press conference in Sicilian capital Palermo. Police had previously told AFP that 22 people had been captured but clarified that the 22nd person would be Denaro himself. Denaro vanished in 1993, with the police seeking his arrest on a range of crimes including dozens of murders. Police also arrested a businessman involved in the online gambling industry, through which it is suspected Denaro earns some of his money. Palermo's assistant public prosecutor Paolo Guido said that six of the accused were local mafia bosses. Police told reporters that despite reports of Cosa Nostra's demise, the Trapani branch was "particularly lively and active in control of the area" and operating in the classic mafia industries of "extortion, property fraud and assignment of public works contracts."

Trigger man

Police also confirmed the existence of wire-tapped recordings of one of those arrested yesterday praising the notorious January 1996 murder and dissolving in acid of Giuseppe Di Matteo. Di Matteo, the 14-year-old son of mafia turncoat Santino, was kidnapped in 1993 in a vain attempt to stop his father from collaborating with the authorities.

"Did he not do the right thing? He did the right thing!" news agency AGI reported the suspect as saying, apparently preferring to the perpetrators. "It's right that we don't touch kids ... but why didn't you retract? You obviously didn't care about your kid." Another recording has



HAVANA: Outgoing Cuban President Raul Castro, left, waves next to Cuba's new President Miguel Diaz-Canel during a National Assembly session in Havana.—AFP

"I have the honorable mission of putting forward comrade Miguel Mario Diaz-Canel Bermudez as president of the Council of State," commission president Gisela Duarte told assembly delegates, effectively ending any suspense over the identity of Cuba's new leader.

Delegates immediately broke into applause and the two men rose to share an embrace as Cuba's two other vice presidents, both veterans of the revolution, looked on from the row behind. Yesterday's session simply formalized the vote.—AFP

Italy ramps up search for mafia godfather after dawn busts

ROME: Italian police yesterday arrested some of Cosa Nostra kingpin Matteo Messina Denaro's closest aides, uncovering a network which allowed him to marshal his mobster allies over a quarter of a century on the run. Police told reporters that 21 people were arrested in towns near the Sicilian city of Trapani where Denaro's criminal empire is based, as part of the "Year Zero" investigation that allowed authorities to uncover a system of paper notes, or "pizzini", that Denaro uses to give orders to his underlings.

Among those in custody yesterday were Denaro's closest allies, including brothers-in-law Gaspare Como and Rosario Allegra, who are alleged to manage the boss' most important affairs. "The Trapani mafia is (securely) in the hands of fugitive Matteo Messina Denaro and we can say that because its most important members are his own family," said Pasquale Angelosanto, head of the Italian carabinieri's ROS special investigative unit. Angelosanto was



PALERMO: Matteo Messina Denaro's brother-in-law, Rosario Allegra, exits the police headquarters in Palermo.—AFP

Denaro and his deceased father Francesco, once a local boss, compared to Padre Pio (1887-1968), an Italian friar and saint who was the subject of

great popular devotion in Italy. One alleged gangster says the two mafiosi should have statues dedicated to them.—AFP

International

France's Macron faces mass protests as opponents join forces

Strikes aim at torpedoing emblematic overhaul of SNCF

PARIS: President Emmanuel Macron faced mass protests yesterday as trade unionists seek to galvanize angry students, public sector workers and striking train drivers into a joint movement against his multi-pronged drive to overhaul the French economy. The hard-line CGT union has urged the broad spectrum of groups opposed to Macron's overhauls to come together on the streets, with some left-wingers dreaming of a re-run of the huge May 1968 demonstrations that shook France half a century ago.

Pressure has been mounting on Macron nearly a year since the 40-year-old centrist swept to power, with a survey by Ifop-Fiducial released Wednesday suggesting that 58 percent of voters were unhappy with his presidency. But unions have also struggled to muster public support for their opposition movements, in particular the strikes aimed at torpedoing the emblematic overhaul of the state rail operator SNCF. "They are in the street because they don't want anything to change," Macron said during a trip Wednesday to the eastern town of Saint-Die-des-Vosges, where he was booed by trade unionists.

Macron's leftwing critics accuse the business-friendly former investment banker of seeking to take a sledgehammer to public services, citing his pledge to cut 120,000 public-sector jobs over his five-year term. Various groups have staged strikes and demonstrations against

Macron over the past year, including a series of mass protests that have drawn hundreds of thousands onto the streets. Thursday will see an attempt at a joint show of force by anti-Macron groups, including students angered by plans to make university admissions more selective.

Unions at the Paris transport operator RATP said they would join Thursday's action-though services were barely affected in the morning-while energy-sector workers also pledged to participate. If tradition holds, the first bout of summer weather across much of France may also swell the protesters' ranks. But deeper unity has proven elusive, with Laurent Berger of the more moderate CFDT-France's largest union in terms of membership-refusing both the CGT's call to join the Thursday protests as well as a combined march for the traditional Labor Day show of strength on May 1.

"That's more of a political approach, which is not ours," Berger told Public Senat television yesterday, refusing any "convergence of battles". The protests are planned across the country, including a march through Paris that will leave the Montparnasse train station in the city's south at 2:00 pm before making its way to the Place d'Italie towards the east.

Train strikes easing?

Public-sector workers have called their own day of strikes and demonstrations for May 22 to denounce salaries they say are failing to keep



PARIS: Protesters known as 'black bloc' walk with a banner reading in French 'to fight' during a demonstration in Paris.—AFP

up with inflation. Air France staff meanwhile went on strike Wednesday for a ninth day since February in a separate row over salaries. Macron insisted in interviews last week, part of a media blitz ahead of his one-year anniversary that he was elected on a mandate for change and that

he was determined to see his reforms through. "I'm doing what I said I would," he told TF1 television. But Macron may take heart in signs that the promised three months of rolling train strikes are weakening-though still causing havoc for the networks 4.5 million daily users. —AFP

Senegal police fire tear gas to break up anti-gov protest

DAKAR: Police fired tear gas to break up a protest in Senegal's capital Dakar yesterday and arrested several people, including a former premier, protesting against a move to raise the bar for presidential candidates. With less than a year to go before the presidential election, the government wants to increase the number of signatures candidates must collect in order to stand for president-which the opposition says is aimed at limiting and controlling opposition. Two opposition figures-Malick Gakou of the Grand Parti and Thierno Bocoum of the Agir movement-were among those arrested, their parties said. Idrissa Seck, who headed the government between 2002 and 2004, was also arrested while "en route for the Assembly," said an official from his Rewmi party, Mbacke Seck. Kilifa, a popular rapper and political activist, was also detained. Around 100 demonstrators who had barricaded a street near parliament were dispersed by tear gas, AFP journalists reported.

Police also fired tear gas at around 50 protestors who were throwing stones at a police vehicle. Protests were also held in the northern town of Saint-Louis, Thies in the west and the central city of Mbacke. The first round of the presidential election in the West African country seen as a regional beacon of democracy is scheduled for February 24, 2019.

Meanwhile in the National Assembly, under the protection of



DAKAR: Senegalese policemen patrol during anti-government demonstrations in Dakar.—AFP

riot police, deputies started debating a law requiring all presidential candidates to collect the signatures of at least one percent of the electorate to be able to stand. The draft legislation, aimed at "furthering democracy" and drawn up by President Macky Sall, was approved in committee in the Assembly on Monday. Sall, elected in 2012, is seen as the favorite to win next year's election.

"The sole aim of this is evident to everybody: to prevent opposition candidates from contesting," the opposition coalition said. Rights monitor Amnesty International meanwhile urged Senegal to "respect the right of people to demonstrate peacefully and to air their opinions against a backdrop of repression." —AFP

Former child circus slaves tackle trafficking in post-quake Nepal

LONDON: Nepal's first contemporary circus is not just remarkable for its gravity-defying acts, but for its artists - the contortionists, aerialists and jugglers are former child slaves. Having been rescued from Indian circuses, they are now using their skills to educate communities across Nepal on the dangers of trafficking - a crime that has increased since a massive earthquake in 2015 devastated the poor Himalayan country. The story of Circus Kathmandu is told in a film "Even When I Fall" now on release in Britain.

An estimated 10,000 women and children are smuggled into India every year, making it one of the world's busiest trafficking routes, according to the directors. Shot over six years in Nepal, the film follows hula hoop performer Saraswoti and aerial artist Sheetal as they reclaim their lives, overcome the stigma faced by trafficking survivors and reconnect with the families that sold them. "There's an incredible transformation. They are inspirational women," co-director Kate McLarnon said.—Reuters

International

Macron visits Merkel in bid to salvage EU reform plans

Macron defends his bold ideas in passionate speech

BERLIN: French President Emmanuel Macron yesterday held talks with Chancellor Angela Merkel, hoping to breathe fresh life into his grand vision for EU reforms in the face of growing German resistance. In a sign of the low expectations for a breakthrough, Merkel said the leaders' brief meeting would be "another building block" on the road to finding "common solutions" ahead of a European Union summit in June.

The pair are due to give press statements at 1:00 pm before holding talks at the Berlin Palace, a historic site undergoing extensive reconstruction—an apt setting for discussions on Macron's plans for a post-Brexit overhaul of the bloc. But the Frenchman's dreams of driving through the changes with Merkel by his side were dealt a blow this week when her own conservative CDU/CSU bloc raised objections to his flagship proposals for a common eurozone budget and an expansion of the EU's bailout fund.

Macron defended his bold ideas in a passionate speech to the European Parliament on Tuesday, describing eurozone reforms as "indispensable" to challenging the rise of authoritarianism and nationalism on the continent. But observers doubted whether his lofty words changed any hearts and minds in Berlin. "Macron must feel like a suitor who tries and tries to woo his beloved, even singing under her balcony, but is fobbed off with platitudes," the Handelsblatt financial daily wrote.

North-South divide

Much of Berlin's resistance is rooted in deep-seated German wariness of any measures that could

lead to debt pooling, or German taxpayer cash flowing to spendthrift neighbors. And while Merkel has in the past voiced cautious support for Macron's ambitions, she has stayed vague on details. Having just started her fourth term as chancellor, her room for maneuver has been limited by her bloc's weak showing in last year's general election, which saw traditional parties lose millions of voters to the far-right.

With her parliamentary majority badly reduced, Merkel can't afford a rebellion by her own MPs. And although her centre-left coalition partners the Social Democrats are more openly pro-EU, Macron lost his loudest cheerleader when former European Parliament chief Martin Schulz stepped down as SPD leader in February. "The French president knows very well that not all his ideas can be realized, we are now looking at what is possible," Social Democratic Finance Minister Olaf Scholz told the Frankfurter Allgemeine daily.

Lawmakers from Merkel's CDU/CSU alliance threw down the gauntlet this week when they attached strict conditions to transforming the EU's bailout fund into a European Monetary Fund that can act as a "lender of last resort". Setting up such a fund would require a change to EU treaties, they wrote in a position paper, which would require the approval of each member state's parliament. They also said national lawmakers, not the European Commission, should have the final say over any aid disbursements.

Macron's proposed eurozone investment budget meanwhile was dismissed by Merkel's party as not "a top priority" when the bloc had yet to figure out how to plug the hole left in the wider EU budget by Britain's departure. Differences also remain on the

Latin American country are facing the same problem. Since 2016, when the crisis sparked by the fall in the price of oil began to deepen, 25 percent of teaching staff, and 40 percent of the students at Oriente University in the eastern city of Cumana have packed their bags and emigrated, according to the university's director Milena Bravo.

The country's most experienced professors, working full time, earn 3.9 million bolivars a month, equivalent to \$10 on the black market—only enough at current rates to buy five kilos of meat. Danilo Fuenmayor, fresh from completing his economics studies at LUZ, said he was relieved that he only had to turn up for lectures three days a week during his last month. "I had to walk three kilometers because I didn't have cash for the bus," he said. "Fifteen professors have left my faculty, and my tutor's car has broken down and she can't have it repaired. Transportation doesn't work," the 23-year-old said.

Budget devoured

Venezuelans struggle with cash shortages because the government can't print new bills fast enough to keep pace with the world's highest rate of inflation, estimated to reach a staggering 13,000 percent this year by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). President Nicolas Maduro, whose government is widely blamed for mismanaging the economy after oil prices plummeted, said new bills will be issued in June that lop three zeroes off current values in a bid to ease pressure on the public. —AFP



BERLIN: German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron give a joint press conference in Berlin before holding talks at the Humboldt Forum in the Berlin Palace still under construction. —AFP

completion of a eurozone "banking union", generally seen as one of the least controversial issues but viewed skeptically in Berlin, in the belief that Germany would be on the hook to save fragile banks in other countries.

Ahead of yesterday's talks, Merkel distanced herself from some of Macron's pet projects, saying the changes Europe needed were not just about the single currency or the banking union—"far from it". "Germany can bring its own contributions" to the debate, she told reporters, singling out the need to

improve the bloc's competitiveness and create a common asylum policy.

Germany is not alone in slamming the brakes on Macron's drive to bolster the eurozone. A group of smaller northern EU countries, led by the Netherlands, have also pushed back, warning that they refuse to be "railroaded" into sweeping reforms. Faced with these northern headwinds, France has stepped up efforts to win support from the bloc's southern countries, recently inviting Italy and Spain to help steer the reform process.—AFP

Economic crisis forces slowdown at Venezuela universities

CARACAS: Teachers unable to pay the bus fare to get to class, students stuck in long supermarket lines in the quest for affordable food: Venezuela's academics say the deep economic crisis is paralyzing the country's universities. Venezuela's universities have long ranked as among Latin America's best. But the acute economic and political crisis has forced students to drop out in droves, and teachers are following them out of the country.

Last month, the University of Zulia (LUZ) in northwestern city of Maracaibo cut courses to three days a week to try to ease the problems that students, professors and employees are facing just to turn up each day. "We are working every day, but we are organizing ourselves so that every teacher, student or employee comes about three times a week," said Judith Aular, the LUZ's rector. Lectures and study material are given out over the internet the rest of the time.

It's an attempt to curb Venezuela's growing brain-drain, as teachers and students seek to leave the crisis-torn country, said Aular. "We allow teachers to look for another source of income. With what they earn, they can't support their families." Universities across the oil-rich

Trump vows to work 'very, very hard' for Japanese held in N Korea

PALM BEACH, United States: US President Donald Trump said Wednesday he would work to help Tokyo bring home from North Korea Japanese citizens who were abducted in the 1970s and 1980s to help Pyongyang train its spies. Trump, who was addressing reporters with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at his side, said: "We will work very hard on that issue and we will work hard to try and bring those folks back—very, very hard."

The issue sours already strained relations between Japan and North Korea, and Abe often wears a blue ribbon to remind himself of their abduction. As he headed to the United States earlier this week, the Japanese premier said the abduction issue would be high on his agenda—and at Wednesday's press conference, he thanked Trump profusely for his support on the matter. In 2002, North Korea admitted to the kidnapping of 13 Japanese civilians, dating back to the 1970s, but Tokyo believes the true number to be higher.



PALM BEACH: US President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump greet Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his wife Akie Abe ahead of a dinner at Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida. —AFP

The Japanese government has officially listed 17 people as abductees, but there are strong suspicions that dozens more citizens were snatched to train Pyongyang's spies in the Japanese language and culture. Japanese police have said there are 800 missing people for whom the possibility of being kidnapped by the hermit state cannot be ruled out. Under an agreement brokered in Stockholm in May 2014, North Korea undertook to reinvestigate all abductions of Japanese citizens in what appeared to be a significant breakthrough. —AFP

International

Muslim nomads see rape as new sign of hostility in India

Bakarwals speed up their annual migration

UDHAMPUR, India: The Muslim nomads who lead their goats, cows and horses up and down the Kashmir hills have never felt at ease in modern India and the gruesome rape and murder of a girl from the impoverished community has heightened their fears. Many of the Bakarwals speeded up their annual migration out of the Hindu-majority Jammu region because of the national storm of controversy created by the killing of the eight-year-old girl.

Police say a group in the Hindu dominated village of Rasana tortured and killed the girl in a bid to scare the Bakarwals out of the district definitively. The nomads are now the talk of India. “The Hindus do not want the Bakarwals in this region,” said Gulam Mohammad, one of the patriarchs of the million-strong community, sat in a temporary camp among eucalyptus trees off a highway leading to the plains. “There is something in their hearts against Muslims,” the 74-year-old added.

The Bakarwals have followed with horror the accounts of the suffering inflicted on the girl. “A lot of us were traumatized,” said Mohammad, who found out about the crime by listening to his old transistor radio. “We have daughters here with us. We sleep badly at night because we set up camp on the roadside and we are worried that someone could come.” With trucks passing dangerously close, the Bakarwals lead their herds on

the main highway up to the Kashmir plains that has been their summer home for centuries.

The murder of the girl, whose name cannot be used for legal reasons, is just the latest sign of hostility, according to the Bakarwals. But it has brought the animosity out into the open as the rape has become a highly charged controversy for the government. Eight men are facing trial. Police say the girl was drugged, held in a Hindu temple for five days, repeatedly raped and killed. Her body was dumped in a forest.

Barbed wire welcome

At the Bakarwal camp, Reshna Bibi held her 10-year-old granddaughter, Shamima, close to her body. “The victim was only this big,” she said. The Bakarwals make up about 10 percent of the 12.5 million population of Jammu

and Kashmir, India’s only Muslim-majority state. But the Jammu region is mainly Hindu. The Bakarwals bring their animals down from the Kashmir plains into Jammu in September and October to avoid the tough winter and return again the following spring.

Several of the nomads said about conflicts with the local Hindu communities, particularly over the use of land where they set up their tents for the winter. Population growth and road construction has made it increasingly difficult for the Bakarwals to maintain their lifestyle. Few own land. They say local governments harass them by



UDHAMPUR, India: This photo shows a Kashmiri Muslim Bakarwal nomad posing for a photograph with livestock at a temporary camp near Udhampur, some 72km north of Jammu in northern India. — AFP

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This has got to stop

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evicting them from land and putting barbed wire around forests that they have used for camps.

The Bakarwal life is already one of deep poverty. Most of their tents are plastic sheets strung up between trees. Amongst old pots and pans strewn around the ground for upcoming meals, goats look for grass and children play. Mohammad said he left Jammu three days earlier and still has two weeks of walking with his cattle before reaching the main Kashmir city of Srina-

gar, 130 kilometers away. “Being a nomad is not a life, there is nowhere for us,” said Reshna Bibi, 55, as she watched modern cars speed by on the highway. Further up the road, Ali Mohammad and his family have been waiting for six days on waste land after their animals fell ill. He wants his children to learn to read, go to school and get identity papers. “This has got to stop,” he said, referring to the cycle of poverty and prejudice afflicting the Bakarwal. — AFP

India’s top court rejects calls for probe into judge’s death

NEW DELHI: India’s Supreme Court dismissed yesterday petitions calling for an investigation into the death of a lower court judge in 2014 when he was presiding over a case against a top political aide of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Amit Shah, president of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, had been accused of ordering extra judicial killings in 2005 while serving as home minister in the western state of Gujarat.

Shah was discharged by the judge who took over the case after the death of Judge B. Loya, having decided there was no case against the BJP president. Judge Loya died from a heart attack, but family members questioned the circumstances, alleging that he had come under political pressure in the case. Petitions were filed in the Supreme Court seeking an independent probe after judges in a lower court had dismissed the need for a probe.

The Supreme Court decision to dismiss the petitions was taken by a three-judge bench, led by Chief Justice Dipak Misra. The judgment said there was “no reason to doubt the statements of sitting judges” and the intent of the petitioners had been to “malign the judiciary”. — Reuters

Kyrgyz prime minister dismissed

BISHKEK: Kyrgyzstan yesterday jettisoned its 29th prime minister in less than three decades of independence as new President Sooronbai Jeenbekov looks to cement control over the Central Asian country. Lawmakers voted overwhelmingly to dismiss the government of Prime Minister Sapar Isakov, a 40-year-old technocrat viewed as a loyalist of the country’s former leader Almazbek Atambayev.

Jeenbekov subsequently signed an order confirming the government’s dismissal. A total of 101 legislators voted for the move with just five against, according to an official parliamentary protocol. The vote indicated broad parliamentary support for Jeenbekov, 59, who is now expected to play a key role in determining the next premier. Jeenbekov came to power in a bitterly fought presidential election last year while enjoying strong support from Atambayev, 61, who was limited to a single term in office by the constitution.

But tensions have since emerged between the pair after Atambayev criticized appointments made by Jeenbekov and called for the new president’s brother, Asylbek, to relinquish his seat in parliament in a public appearance last month. Earlier this month Jeenbekov fired key Atambayev allies in the national security service and initiated the sacking of the coun-



BRUSSELS: Sooronbai Jeenbekov, President of Kyrgyzstan, talks during a short statement with President of the EU Commission after their meeting at the EU headquarters in Brussels. — AFP

try’s state prosecutor, but has yet to make his own appointments. Known since his time as an opposition leader for a fiery and often vulgar public speaking style, Atambayev moved the impoverished ex-Soviet country away from the West and closer to traditional ally Russia while in office. On March 31 he was elected chairman of the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan that has dominated Kyrgyz politics since a violent revolution ousted authoritarian leader Kurmanbek Bakiyev in 2010, despite initially pledging to leave politics. — AFP

International

Myanmar army chief urges soldiers to obey law

Seven soldiers imprisoned for massacre of Rohingya men

YANGON: Myanmar army chief Min Aung Hlaing has told military personnel in the country that they must obey the law, citing as an example the sentencing of seven soldiers for a massacre of Rohingya Muslim men that was the subject of a Reuters investigation. In a speech at a military school in the country's north, Min Aung Hlaing told soldiers they "must abide by the military codes of conduct and international laws and conventions", according to a translation posted on his official Facebook page on Thursday.

"No one is above the law. Actions will be taken if someone breaks the law. The problems in Inn Din village ... were solved in line with the Geneva Convention and legal action was taken against military officers and other ranks who failed to respect the law," said Min Aung Hlaing, in his first direct

comment on the killings. Seven soldiers were sentenced to 10 years in prison with hard labor this month for taking part in the massacre of 10 Rohingya men in the village of Inn Din, in north-western Rakhine state, last September.

The massacre was being investigated by two Reuters journalists - Wa Lone, 32, and Kyaw Soe Oo, 28 - who were arrested in December and remain in custody accused of violating the coun-

try's Official Secrets Act. The authorities said in February the military opened an internal investigation into the killings independently and that it was unrelated to the Reuters reporters, who they said were accused of obtaining unrelated secret government papers.

The Rohingya men were buried in a mass grave in early September after being hacked to death or shot by Buddhist civilian neighbors and soldiers. Reuters published its story on the murders in February. The killings were part of a larger army crackdown on the Rohingya, beset by allegations of murder, rape, arson and looting, unleashed in response to Rohingya militant attacks on security forces in late August.

Nearly 700,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled Myanmar as a result, according to United Nations agencies. The UN and the United States described it as ethnic cleansing - an accusation that Myanmar denies. Min Aung Hlaing, one of the most powerful people in a country where the constitution requires the civilian government of Aung San Suu Kyi to share power with the military, reiterated in his speech the army's position that the Rakhine operation was a legitimate counteroffensive against "Bengali terrorists". — Reuters

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No one is above the law

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UKHIA: This photograph shows Rohingya refugees making bamboo fences at Kutupalong refugee camp in Bangladesh's Ukhia district. — AFP

No-go warning as Japan volcano erupts for first time in 250 years

TOKYO: A volcano in southern Japan erupted for the first time in 250 years yesterday, spewing steam and ash hundreds of meters into the air, as authorities warned locals not to approach the mountain. "There is a possibility that (Mount Ito) will become more active," said Makoto Saito, an official from the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA), confirming the eruption. In a televised press conference, he warned residents in the area to stay away from the mountain, part of the Mount Kirishima group of volcanoes, as major ash deposits spread from the crater.

It was the first eruption of the mountain since 1768, the JMA said. The agency warned that large flying rocks could fall over a three-kilometer radius. The eruption threw smoke and ash 400 meters into the air. Footage captured by the JMA and local media showed thick white and grey smoke rising from several areas of the mountain. There were no immediate reports of injuries, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said, adding that the



TOKYO: Japan Meteorological Agency's Volcanological Division expert Makoto Saito speaks during a press conference at the agency in Tokyo. — AFP

government was "taking all possible measures" to prevent damage and casualties.

The eruption occurred a few kilometers away from Shinmoedake, which featured in the 1967 James Bond film "You Only Live Twice" and erupted in March. Japan, with scores of active volcanoes, sits on the so-called Pacific "Ring of Fire" where a large proportion of the world's earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are recorded. In January, a Japanese soldier was killed and several other people injured after an eruption near a popular ski resort in northwest of Tokyo. — AFP

Indian workers unite to stop bonded labor

THIRUTHANI, India: Indians rescued from slavery are coming together to free others from bonded labor in brick kilns, rice mills and factories throughout the southern state of Tamil Nadu. About 500,000 laborers in 11 industries in Tamil Nadu are trapped in debt bondage, in which people must work to repay debts to employers and moneylenders, according to the International Justice Mission (IJM), an anti-slavery group.

Most work in brick kilns, said IJM in a 2017 report, though slavery is also common in other industries, including garment manufacturing. Varalakshmi Gopal, 45, spent seven years as a bonded laborer in a rice mill near the town of Thiruthani before being rescued in 2004. Since she joined

the Released Bonded Laborers Association (RBLA) in 2014, she has focused on freeing others from slavery.

"I often enter these facilities pretending to be a person looking for work, or sometimes a brick kiln owner searching for laborers who have escaped from my facility," said Gopal. "I know it is dangerous but I feel compelled to do it." Once she finds evidence of bonded labor, she tips off police. She said she has taken part in at least 10 rescue operations. Members of four RBLAs are now spread across the state to spot forced labor, especially in brick kilns and rice mills, which are busiest in April and May before the monsoon rains hit, said RBLA members.

The first RBLA was formed in 2014, and three across Tamil Nadu that have joined since then. The past year has seen a spike in membership - evidence that the movement to end debt bondage is getting stronger, said Gopal. Banned in 1976, bonded labor remains widespread, prompting the government to boost its efforts to clamp down, with plans to rescue more than 18 million people by 2030. — Reuters

International

S Korea's Moon: A peace treaty 'must be pursued'

Treaty depends on North giving up its nuclear weapons

SEOUL: A peace treaty to formally end the Korean War "must be pursued", South Korean President Moon Jae-in said yesterday, ahead of a summit with Kim Jong Un, leader of the nuclear-armed North. The 1950-53 Korean War ended in a ceasefire rather than a peace treaty, leaving the two sides technically at war, and the Demilitarized Zone between them—where Moon and Kim will meet next Friday—bristles with minefields and fortifications. "The armistice that has dragged on for 65 years must come to an end," Moon told media executives at the presidential Blue House, adding: "The signing of a peace treaty must be pursued after an end to the war is declared." But Moon signaled that a treaty would depend on the North giving up its nuclear weapons. "If the inter-Korean summit or North Korea-US summit lead to denuclearization," he said, "I think that it won't be too difficult to reach practical agreements in the big picture on creating a peace regime, normalizing North Korea-US ties, or providing international aid for the improvement of the North Korean economy."

The summit between Moon and Kim will be the biggest highlight of a whirlwind of diplomacy on and around the peninsula triggered by the Winter Olympics, and a precursor to a much-anticipated meeting between Kim and US President Donald Trump. The US leader warned earlier that his summit could still be called off, saying: "If I think that it's a meeting that is not going to be fruitful, we're not going to go. If the meeting, when I'm

there, is not fruitful, I will respectfully leave the meeting."

Trump previously offered his "blessing" for the two Koreas to discuss a peace treaty to formally close the decades-old conflict. But the question of whether the North is willing to give up what it calls the "treasured sword" of its nuclear arms will be key to any broader settlement. North Korea has long said it needs nuclear weapons to defend itself against a possible US invasion, and both South Korean and Chinese officials have cited

Kim as saying he is committed to denuclearization of the Korean peninsula - code for the withdrawal of US troops and Washington's nuclear umbrella over its security ally, something unthinkable in Washington.

For its part the US stresses it wants to see the complete, irreversible and

verifiable denuclearization of the North. "Right now, North Korea is showing the international community a willingness for a complete denuclearization," Moon said, but added it was "too early to guarantee the success of dialogue", which could only come "after a successful US-North Korea summit".

Broken promises

North Korea's state media yesterday announced it will convene a full meeting of the ruling Workers' Party of Korea central committee to make key policy decisions. The official KCNA news agency gave no indications what they might be about, saying only that today's gathering

“ I will respectfully leave the meeting ”



PANMUNJOM: This photo shows South Korean soldiers standing guard before a United Nations Command Military Armistice Commission (UNCMAC) meeting hut in the truce village of Panmunjom within the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) separating North and South Korea. —AFP

will address issues of a "new stage" in what it called "the important historic period of the developing Korean revolution". Analysts say there could be changes to its stance towards the US.

"It needs a logical explanation and justification for the shift in its ties with the 'enemy' US, which has held the North Koreans together for the past 70 years," said Kim Dong-yub, a researcher at the Institute for Far Eastern Studies at Kyungnam University. "It looks like they are ready to do that," Kim added. Even so there are multiple obstacles to reaching a final Korean War treaty, involving

both sides of the peninsula and other countries. 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. And such promises have been made before - in the joint statement after the last inter-Korean summit in 2007, they agreed to work together to have the leaders of "the three or four parties directly concerned... convene on the peninsula and declare an end to the war". —AFP

Hundreds flee homes as 4.4 magnitude quake strikes Indonesia

JAKARTA: A shallow earthquake brought down hundreds of poorly built buildings in Indonesia, forcing more than 2,000 people to flee their homes, rescue officials said yesterday. The 4.4 magnitude quake hit the Banjarnegara district of Central Java late on Wednesday, killing two people and injuring more than 20. "Victims were killed or injured by falling buildings," the national rescue agency said in a statement. "People are being treated in hospital or have been evacuated to temporary shelters." Quakes are common in Indonesia, which straddles the Pacific "Ring of Fire", a hot spot for seismic activity due to friction between tectonic plates.—Reuters

New role for wife of North Korea's Kim: First Lady

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has given his young, stylish wife the title of First Lady in what analysts say is a major boost to her status ahead of back-to-back summits with South Korea and the United States. Ri Sol Ju has often accompanied Kim to official events but made her first solo public appearance last weekend at a ballet performance by a visiting Chinese troupe. The North's state media reported the outing referring to her as the "respected First Lady"—the first time the title has been used in more than 40 years, and with the addition of an adjective usually reserved for the country's leaders.

North Korea's elderly star anchorwoman Ri Chun Hee—who is often drafted in for major announcements—delivered the news of her attendance on television, further enhancing Ri's standing. Dressed in a dusty pink two-piece skirt suit, Ri was accompanied by senior North Korean officials often seen with the leader, including Kim's younger sister, Yo Jong. Ri, a former star singer, emerged in 2012 and has been regarded as one of the most high-profile women in the isolated, deeply patriarchal nation, but with a limited role as Kim's stylish, coy wife.

Analysts say her promotion is likely to be part of an effort to paint North Korea as a "normal state" as it prepares for summits with South Korean President Moon



PYONGYANG: This undated file photo shows North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un, left, accompanied by his wife Ri Sol Ju, right, visiting a wading pool at the Rungna People's Pleasure Ground in Pyongyang. —AFP

Jae-in next Friday and later with US President Donald Trump. It also gives her a title matching that of their wives Kim Jung-sook and Melania. "Promoting Ri Sol Ju is the most effective marketing strategy," An Chan-il, a defector researcher who runs the World Institute for North Korea Studies, said.

"The summit is being held as equals, so if Melania Trump attends, Ri will attend," he said, noting that the North Korean leader's wife accompanied him when he went to Beijing last month on his first overseas trip since inheriting power.

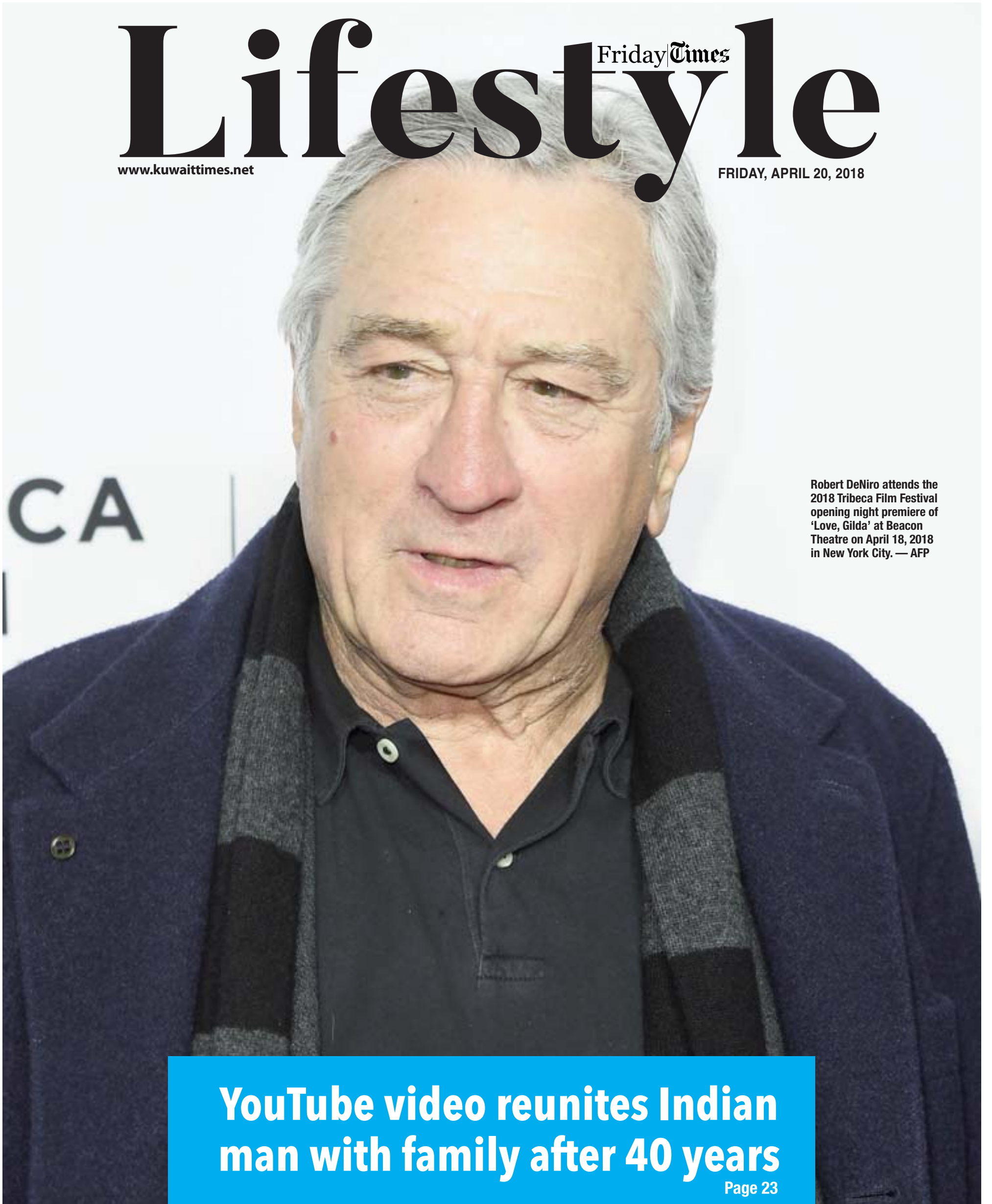
Ri was previously referred to as "comrade" by the North's state media, and the weekend report was the first time the "First Lady" title had been used to describe the leader's spouse since 1974, when it was applied to Kim Song Ae, the second wife of North Korea's founder Kim Il Sung. Little is known about Ri, who is believed to be 29 and to have three children with Kim, at least one of them a daughter. South Korean intelligence reports have described her as coming from an ordinary family with a teacher father and a doctor mother. —AFP

Lifestyle

Friday Times

www.kuwaittimes.net

FRIDAY, APRIL 20, 2018



Robert DeNiro attends the 2018 Tribeca Film Festival opening night premiere of 'Love, Gilda' at Beacon Theatre on April 18, 2018 in New York City. — AFP

YouTube video reunites Indian man with family after 40 years

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Lifestyle | Fashion

Malaysian critic slammed for 60 kg fashion show comment

A Malaysian fashion critic sparked uproar Wednesday after saying people weighing over 60 kilograms should not attend fashion shows as other guests would find it uncomfortable to sit next to their supposedly bulky bodies. "If you weigh more than 60kg (132 pounds), please don't attend fashion events," Zaihani Mohamad Zain, a regular fixture at catwalk shows in Malaysia and a celebrity stylist, posted on Facebook at the weekend. "Your huge thighs will take up so much room, making people sitting beside you uncomfortable."

Critics and designers lined up to lambast her for the remarks, which run counter to growing acceptance of plus-size women

in the fashion industry and a gradual pushback against unhealthily slim models. They were also seen as insensitive in a country where many have weight problems, with a study in British medical journal *The Lancet* showing that Malaysia has the highest rates of obesity in Asia.

Leading Malaysian designer Calvin Thoo asked in a social media post: "What right does one have to criticize plus size people and telling them not to attend fashion shows?? "I dare her to walk up to an oversize person and tell it to their face that they are fat and should not attend shows." Malaysian actress Syanie Hisham said she regretted that Zaihani had "poked fun at big

girls and guys", the *New Straits Times* newspaper reported. "Is she saying we're not qualified to be at fashion-related events, and just stay at home? That's not fair." Zaihani is an industry veteran in Malaysia and coaches young designers. The average global body weight is 62 kilograms, according to a survey several years ago by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. — AFP

Muslim Fashion Festival



Indonesian women present Batik traditional fabric to commemorate Indonesia's National Heroine day "Kartini" in Surabaya. — AFP photos



Indonesian President Joko Widodo delivers his speech during the opening of the Muslim Fashion Festival yesterday.





In this file photo Cressida Bonas poses on arrival at the British Film Institute fundraising gala and auction to celebrate British cinema and film talent in London.



Indonesian models present creations during the Muslim Fashion Festival in Jakarta.



Prince Harry's exes: The ones that got away

Before he fell for American actress Meghan Markle, Britain's Prince Harry, 33, had several other girlfriends. Here are some of the women who reportedly had a chance of becoming a princess.

First love, Chelsy Davy

Harry met Davy, the Zimbabwean-born daughter of a millionaire safari operator, in 2004 when he travelled to South Africa after school. She studied in Cape Town, before continuing her post-graduate studies in law in the English city of Leeds.

Blonde and gregarious, she seemed to enjoy partying as much as the young prince. The British tabloids loved them for it, following their every move—and his various indiscretions—in way she later admitted was “tough”. They dated on and off for seven years and she attended some major royal events, notably the 2011 wedding of Harry's older brother Prince William, prompting speculation they would marry. Later that year they broke up for good, although they remain friends and she has reportedly been invited to Harry's wedding to Markle on May 19. Davy worked for a top law firm before launching her own luxury jewelry firm.

Natalie Pinkham, old friend

The sports presenter, who is eight years older than Harry, was thrust into the limelight when *The Sun* tabloid published a photograph of him grabbing her breast. It was apparently taken at a party in 2003, but it was not until three years later that it emerged in public. The pair are known to be friends but there are rumors, never confirmed, that they had a brief affair.

Florence Brudenell-Bruce, summer fling

Harry reportedly dated aristocratic model Brudenell-Bruce, known to her friends as “Flee”, after breaking up with Davy. A former girlfriend of Formula One champion Jenson Button, who modeled for fashion labels as well as lingerie firms, she was on a break from her relationship with multi-millionaire Henry St George, whom she later married.

Cressida Bonas, the nearly fiancée

Harry dated British dancer and actress Cressida Bonas for almost two years, but their relationship came to an end as she struggled with a life in the spotlight. They were reportedly introduced by Harry's cousin Princess Eugenie, and were first spotted together in July 2012. Her mother is Lady Mary-Gaye Curzon, a darling of the London social scene during the 1960s whose late father, Richard Curzon, was an earl. There was fevered speculation about their future when Harry and Bonas attended an official engagement together, but they broke up shortly afterwards. She has since declined to talk about their relationship, saying she was focused on her acting. However, she too has reportedly been invited to Harry and Markle's wedding. — AFP



In this file photo Britain's Prince Harry and Chelsy Davy laugh before the game between South Africa and England at the Investec Challenge international rugby match at Twickenham, west of London.



In this file photo Britain's Prince Harry talks to British TV and radio presenter Natalie Pinkham on the trading floor as he attends BGC Partners' Charity Day in London.



In this file photo British model Florence Brudenell-Bruce arrives to attend the Burberry Prorsum 2013 spring/summer collection catwalk show at London Fashion Week in London. — AFP photos

Prince's glittering outfits, guitars go on sale

Outfits and instruments by late pop icon Prince, who was known for his distinct and unique style, will go under the hammer in New York next month. Julien's Auctions said Wednesday it was putting more than 150 items from the late superstar up for sale on May 18, ranging from early childhood photos to golden record trophies to some of his most eye-grabbing attire.

Highlights include a custom-made yellow "Cloud" guitar, so named for its unique twisting body, which also has Prince's signature love symbols engraved between the frets. The auction house estimated the guitar would fetch between \$60,000 and \$80,000. Last year, it sold another Cloud guitar for a surprisingly hefty \$700,000. The Cloud guitars were made for Prince by Minneapolis luthier Dave Rusan, with one appearing prominently in the 1984 film "Purple Rain" where Prince's alter ego "The Kid" receives one as a gift from his girlfriend Apollonia. Another key item on sale next month is an electric blue turtleneck with match-

ing trousers which Prince—whose best-known hits included "1999"—wore at his turn-of-the-millennium New Year's Eve party at his Paisley Park estate in Minnesota.

The auction house said that it expected the outfit, which Prince also wore when jamming with Lenny Kravitz at the MTV Video Music Awards in 1999, would go for \$50,000 to \$70,000. The suit, like many of the items, were listed as coming from Prince's ex-wife Mayte Garcia, a dancer and mother of Prince's only known child—who died shortly after birth in 1996 due to a rare disorder. Many of the items including stereo equipment came out of Paisley Park, the reclusive star's studio and headquarters that has since been opened for paid tours. Prince died in April 2016 at Paisley Park from an accidental overdose of powerful painkillers. He was 57. Prosecutors are expected to announce yesterday whether they will press any charges over the death of Prince, who had been treating pain from hip surgery. — AFP



Former child circus slaves tackle trafficking in post-quake Nepal

Circus Kathmandu performer Sheetal performs her aerial work on red silks. — Reuters photos

Nepal's first contemporary circus is not just remarkable for its gravity-defying acts, but for its artists - the contortionists, aerialists and jugglers are former child slaves. Having been rescued from Indian circuses, they are now using their skills to educate communities across Nepal on the dangers of trafficking - a crime that has increased since a massive earthquake in 2015 devastated the poor Himalayan country. The story of Circus Kathmandu is told in a film "Even When I Fall" now on release in Britain.

An estimated 10,000 women and children are smuggled into India every year, making it one of the world's busiest trafficking routes, according to the directors. Shot over six years in Nepal, the film follows hula hoop performer Saraswoti and aerial artist Sheetal as they reclaim their lives, overcome the stigma faced by trafficking survivors and reconnect with the families that sold them. "There's an incredible transformation. They are inspirational women," co-director Kate McLarnon told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.



Circus Kathmandu performer Sheetal

Saraswoti was eight when she was sold into a circus where she learnt how to throw knives blindfolded. At 14 she was married off to the owner's son and by 17 she had three children. Sheetal was trafficked around the age of five. Her family were living in a cowshed when she was handed over to traffickers promising a better life. "The families are sold a lie. Mostly the children are just never seen again," said McLarnon. "The training is brutal and very dangerous, and the conditions are terrible." Members of Circus Kathmandu, which was created in 2010, are now using the skills that once enslaved them to rebuild their self-esteem. The circus has performed in Dubai and at Britain's Glastonbury music festival and will shortly visit Australia.

Stigma

Co-director Sky Neal, a former circus aerialist, began work on the film after helping set up a rehabilitation program for rescued child performers at a refuge in Kathmandu. "I was really shocked to realize there was a dark side to a world I love so much," she said. "(But) this is not a black and white story. It's full of complexity and we chose not to shy away from that." In Nepal, the troupe now raises awareness around trafficking through workshops using drama and circus skills. They will use the film in new workshops they are creating for key high risk regions. "Circus is a great tool for breaking down barriers. It's a family entertainment and it's the families you need to be talking to," said McLarnon.

The circus is also helping dispel the stigma suffered by trafficking survivors when they return home, she says, particularly girls and women. "In Nepal circus has a very bad name," one performer says in the film. "People assume that all bosses rape the girls. But circus is an art. I don't feel ashamed." — Reuters

Venice awards Canada's David Cronenberg lifetime Golden Lion

Canadian director David Cronenberg will be honored by the Venice Film Festival with its Golden Lion prize, the festival board announced yesterday, for his lifetime's work on life, death and sex wrapped up in gory horror and alienation. "Although Cronenberg was originally relegated to the margins of the horror genre, right from his first, scandalously subversive movies, the director has shown that he wants to take his audiences well beyond the cinema of exploitation, as he constructs an original and highly personal structure, movie after movie," festival director Alberto Barbera said in a statement.

Cronenberg, 75, has a list of stand-out, sometimes stomach-churning films to his credit, including "Scanners," "Dead Zone," "The Fly," "Crash" and "A History of Violence." "Revolving around the inseparable relationship of body, sex, and death, his universe is populated by grotesque deformities and terrifying couplings, a horror which reflects the fear of mutations inflicted on bodies by science and technology, of disease and physical decay, of the unresolved conflict between spirit and flesh," Barbera said. Cronenberg said he was delighted by news of the award.

"It will be almost unbearably thrilling to receive a Golden Lion of my own," he said in the statement. "I've always loved the Golden Lion of Venice. A lion that flies on golden wings - that's the essence of art, isn't it? The essence of cinema." The 75th edition of the Venice Film Festival takes place from August 29 to September 8 this year. — AFP



YouTube video reunites Indian man with family after 40 years

An Indian man missing for 40 years was to be reunited with his family yesterday after a YouTube video of him singing a popular Hindi film song went viral. Khomdrum Gambhir Singh was 26 when in 1978 he left his home in Imphal, in the remote northeastern state of Manipur, and never returned, according to reports. For four decades his family heard nothing. Then a clip showing a grey-bearded man singing a Bollywood song on a Mumbai street 3,300 kilometers (2,000 miles) away appeared online. In it the singer identifies himself as Khomdrum Singh of Manipur. A viewer brought the video to the attention of a local association in Imphal who informed Gambhir's family. They recognized him as their missing relative and contacted

Imphal police who spoke to their counterparts in Mumbai. Officers then tracked Gambhir down to the suburb of Bandra where he was living rough. "He was making money as a beggar signing old Hindi songs," Firoze Shakir, who shot the video and uploaded it to YouTube in October last year, told AFP. Shakir, a street photographer, said Gambhir, now 66, had told him that he had been a construction laborer but had suffered a couple of accidents and turned to drink. Shakir used to see him around a lot so one day decided to film him singing. The video has been viewed 55,000 times and has helped trace the missing man.

"This is something that has happened accidentally but I am hoping this video touches hearts," Shakir told AFP. On Wednes-

day Imphal officers flew to Mumbai to take Gambhir back to his family. They departed Mumbai yesterday and were due to arrive in Imphal in the afternoon. The Times of India reported that Gambhir, an ex-army officer, had separated from his wife following a brief marriage shortly before he left Imphal. "This story is a ray of hope. If a video can change a man's life there can be no bigger miracle than this," said Shakir.—AFP



This handout picture shows a blow fly during bubbling behavior. —AFP

TINY FLY BLOWS BUBBLES TO COOL OFF

Humans sweat, dogs pant, cats lick their fur. Animals have adopted an interesting array of techniques for regulating body temperature through evaporation. But for ingenuity, the Latrine blowfly may very well take the cake. To cool down, it blows bubbles with its stomach juices through its mouth, and then sucks them back in, scientists revealed yesterday. "As the fluid moves out, evaporation occurs which lowers the fluid temperature, the fly then moves the cooled droplet in, which cools off the body temperature of the fly," explained Denis Andrade of the Sao Paulo State University in Brazil, who co-authored a study in the journal Nature Scientific Reports.

This "bubbling behavior", he told AFP, appears to be "a very effective way for blowflies to promote evaporative cooling and, therefore, lower their body temperature." The Latrine blowfly is a warm-weather insect best known for depositing its eggs on dead animals. The fly's bubble-blowing has been observed before, but its function has remained a mystery up until now. Andrade and a team used infrared heat imaging cameras to look for any temperature changes on the fly's body during "bubbling behavior".

And they observed that the reddish coloured bubble-growing to almost double its head size-cooled rapidly, "down to as much as eight degrees Celsius (14.4 degrees Fahrenheit) below ambient temperature, within about 15 seconds," the researchers wrote. "Blowflies then re-ingest the cooled droplet, which lowers the temperature of the fly's head, thorax and abdomen by 1.0 C, 0.5 C, and 0.2 C respectively"—and more after repeated efforts. The flies blew more bubbles as air temperature increased, but fewer in humid surroundings where moisture in the air hampers evaporation, the team observed. Put together, the observations serve as "compelling evidence" that bubble-blowing is used, at least partly, to regulate body temperature, said Andrade. Other functions may include digestion.—AFP

Put the toolbox away - new robot assembles IKEA chairs

Sick of struggling with incomprehensible instructions and a baffling array of planks and screws? Help is at hand in the form of a new robot that can assemble an IKEA chair in minutes. The robot, developed by scientists at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University, can put together the wooden IKEA chair in just eight minutes and 55 seconds—a swift timing that may give even DIY enthusiasts a run for their money. The device, consisting of two mechanical arms with grippers, starts the process by taking photos of the parts spread on the floor with a 3D camera, which is supposed to mimic the cluttered environment after flat-pack furniture is unboxed.

Each arm has a similar range of motions to that of a human, while sensors mounted on the wrists monitor how much force is being exerted by mechanical fingers as it picks up tiny parts to expertly put the chair together. "For a robot, putting together an IKEA chair with such precision is more complex than it looks," said team leader Pham Quang Cuong, an as-

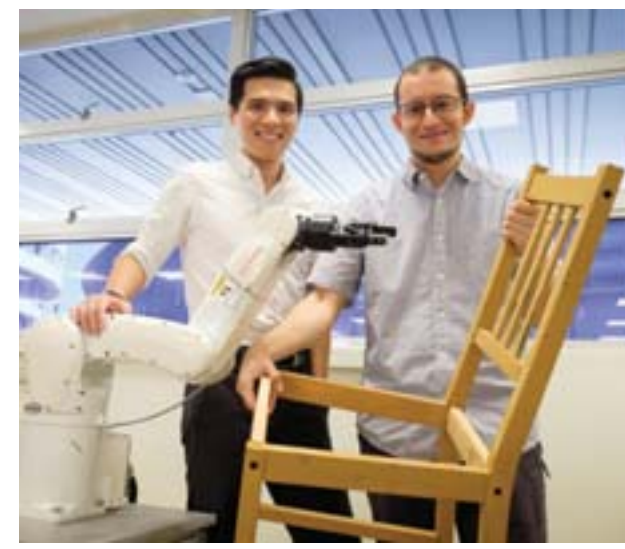
sistant professor at the university. "The job of assembly... has to be broken down into different steps, such as identifying where the different chair parts are, the force required to grip the parts, and making sure the robotic arms move without colliding into each other."

The team is now looking into further developing the robot so it can learn to construct furniture by copying humans, reading an instruction manual or even just viewing a finished product. They are also working with the automotive and aircraft manufacturing industry where the robot could be used for such tasks as drilling holes in aircraft. But those looking for help in assembling more household items from Swedish furniture giant IKEA may be disappointed—for now the unnamed robot can only construct a humble chair. — AFP



This handout photograph released by Singapore's Nanyang Technological University (NTU Singapore) shows autonomous robotic arms assembling an IKEA chair in Singapore.

— AFP photos



This handout photograph released by Singapore's Nanyang Technological University (NTU Singapore) shows NTU assistant professor Pham Quang Cuong (left) and research fellow Francisco Suarez-Ruiz posing with an autonomous robotic arm capable of assembling IKEA furniture.

Lifestyle | Features



Photo shows 18-year-old Curtis Bennett practicing his wood-chopping skills for competition on his family property in Majors Creek, a small village some 300 kilometers south of Sydney.



Photo shows 52-year-old Simon Bennett looking at his collection of axes on their family property. —AFP photos

Axe marks the sport as wood-chopping booms in Australia



Curtis Bennett practicing his wood-chopping skills for competition on his family property.



Simon Bennett sharpening an axe on their family property.

A flash of metal glinted in the Sydney sunshine as Curtis Bennett took one last swing of his axe and brought it down hard on the log at his feet. The wood split with a loud crack, triggering cheers and thunderous applause for the teenage sensation. Curtis, 18, is one of the rising stars of Australia's centuries-old sport of wood-chopping, which is enjoying a renaissance, with more women and children competing in the male-dominated activity. His proud father Simon Bennett, 52, is reveling in the new-found appeal of the highly physical pastime, which is attracting more women competitors including his 25-year-old daughter Madii.

"It's probably never been as popular as it is at the moment," he tells AFP at his home in Majors Creek, a small village some 300 kilometers (around 200 miles) south of Sydney. "We have probably one of the best group of young axemen that's been about for many years... The sport is in a really good spot."

From survival to sport

The roots of the tradition stem from European settlement of the vast island continent some two centuries ago.

Faced with the challenge of having to live in the heavily timbered Australian bush on the east coast, the settlers realized they had to become apt at wood-chopping to clear land for farming and to build homes. The knowledge of how to wield axes and cross-cut saws was handed down from generation to generation, and it was not long before the survival skill became a competitive game in the young, sporting-mad nation.

As the tale goes, the first recorded wood-chopping contest took place on the southern island state of Tasmania in 1870 when two men in a bar made a £25 bet to see who could fell a tree the fastest. The sport caught on like wildfire and as contests sprung up across the country, Sydney's Royal Easter Show—an annual extravaganza showcasing Australia's rural lifestyle—introduced wood-chopping in 1899. The events, attracting hundreds of contestants from across the globe and thousands of spectators annually, became the "Wimbledon of wood-chopping", says Sydney show judge Don Brown, a veteran axeman himself.

"We have all the world champions here because we run the world titles here, and so it attracts all the top competitors," Brown tells AFP as his cowboy hat shielded him from the scorching sun at the show. The sport is still mostly family-based, and the Bennetts criss-cross Australia to take part in contests, travelling with some of their 120 axes, several engraved with their surname. "We design our lives around our sport," adds Simon—who like Curtis works in the timber industry having followed his father Len into the trade—on how the family fits the many competitions into their calendars.

Pure brute strength is essential for a woodchopper and Len Bennett, 78, who won the world championship in 1975, is more

than two meters tall (around six foot seven) and weighs 150 kilograms (330 pounds). Simon and Curtis are just under two meters tall, with both towering over Madii. Even for these seasoned lumberjacks, every swing is a major effort. "It's bloody hard," Curtis says, as Madii chimes in: "Even now when I pick up an axe I want to start crying because I know how hard it is and just everything hurts in your body when you're doing it."



The Bennetts family (from left), 18-year-old Curtis, 78-year-old Len, 52-year-old Simon and 25-year-old Madii on their family property.

'More technical than golf'

But athleticism is also key, Simon says, adding that wood-chopping is "more technical than golf". "It is a craft. You can't just stand up there and chop a piece of wood. "You are swinging an axe on the end of a handle that is 65 centimeters long and weighs 3.5 kilos and that's absolutely razor sharp—sharp beyond most people's belief." The sport's boom has been helped by increased sponsorship of both male and female competitions worldwide. At this year's Easter show, there were 69 separate events with Aus\$230,000 (US\$176,800) in prize money on offer.

Scooping up some of the cash was Madii, who came second in the Jack and Jill Double Handed Sawing competition despite partnering with joint contestant Brayden Myer for the first time. "I think there's more women who are sick of sitting on the sidelines so they are getting involved," Madii says of the rise in the number of "lumberjills". "I think they just enjoy it, doing something different, it's a unique sport. You don't see many other girls walking down a street with an axe." — AFP



Independent Wildlife Biologist Ben Kilham is greeted by a bear named Jake on his property.



Independent Wildlife Biologist Ben Kilham and his dog Sophie relax at his home.

A black bear roams the property of Independent Wildlife Biologist Ben Kilham in Lyme, New Hampshire. — AFP photos

Ben Kilham, the American bear whisperer

Squirty and Jake are bear cubs fed by bottle, who frisk around happily. Other bear orphans perch in the trees when Ben Kilham ventures into their enclosure. Meet the American bear whisperer, who lives in the woods of New Hampshire and whose life work is understanding black bears, winning him not just international stature but greater insight into humankind. From the bear photos and paintings on the wall, to the three little wooden bears bidding visitors “welcome” at the entrance, everything in his renovated barn home exudes his passion. So does the nearby, three-hectare (7.5-acre) enclosure, where he cares for orphan cubs entrusted to him each year by the New Hampshire fish and game department.

With their mothers perhaps shot dead or knocked down by a car, the six-foot-four (1.93 meter) Kilham makes sure they grow up safe and well, before releasing them back into the wild aged 18 months. In addition he observes adult bears in the wild, including Squirty, who is now 22 years old and has had 11 litters. His dedication to black bears—the most common in North America with a population of around 750,000 — has made him such an expert that China asked for his help with the giant panda, a collaboration that inspired the recently released documentary “Pandas.” After a quarter of a century of study, Kilham has no doubt that bears are as close to humans as great apes, even if as he says, apes “were our closest genetic relative.”

He quickly realized that female bears were capable, like humans, of “reciprocal altruism”—or in other words looking after each other for the greater good. Squirty provided early proof of that. Shortly after releasing her into the wild, Kilham says another wild female false-charged him in a bid to protect Squirty, despite never having seen her before.

‘Reciprocal altruism’

“I was like ‘Wow, what’s going on?’” the 65-year-old recalls. “She is unrelated! That’s pure altruism!” he explains. “She is taking a huge risk, encountering a human which is her greatest foe, to

defend unrelated cubs from me.” Since then, Squirty has shared her resources with this wild female, and shows more aggression toward her own family members than she does from this unrelated female, he says. These are parallels that many scientists are still reluctant to draw, convinced that man is more capable than animal. “We are learning more and more,” says Kilham. “Language is probably the one thing that has brought humans where we are.”

But if language has allowed humans to develop to such an extent, Kilham also believes it has corrupted their behavior. “Squirty takes in real information,” he says. Bears “learn first-hand information and experience,” he says. “Whereas humans, we are all over the place. The quality of information as soon as the word came out became disruptive. There is air in almost everything we read. It is especially prevalent today with the internet and fake news.” Kilham says he is fascinated by the impact of language on human behavior, especially since he discovered—at age 40 — that he was dyslexic.



Revenge of a dyslexic

Dyslexia lay at the heart of his difficulties at school and, for a long time prevented him from pursuing graduate studies in wildlife that he had dreamt of since childhood.

He grew up surrounded by animals collected by his virologist father. He studied birds and for a while the family even kept a baby crocodile, brought back from a year in Uganda, in a shower in the basement.

After working as a gunsmith, Kilham’s dream took off when the department of fish and game-tipped off to his interest by a biologist friend-entrusted him with the first bear cubs, opening the way to the first bear rehab center in New Hampshire. Twenty-five years later, Kilham has released 165 bears back into the wild and documented more than 1,500 bear interactions in nature.

His work led recently to a PhD in environmental sciences, not bad for someone not great at school, whose work has been looked down on by the scientific community. He has enjoyed quite the following nonetheless, thanks to articles in National Geographic and the popularity of his book, “Among the Bears,” which came out in 2002. His commitment is to raising awareness about bears, still feared and hunted in the United States. Around 10-15 percent of New Hampshire’s 5,000 to 6,000 bears are killed every year in hunting season. “Bears are not interested in people. Zero,” he says. “They are afraid of us.”

Despite advice to the contrary everywhere, people still leave food out or fail to secure chicken coops, attracting an animal that needs to fatten up before hibernation and again in early spring. In human-bear situations, the bear is always the loser. “We can live very easily with bears, it’s a matter of educating the public,” says Kilham. “Unfortunately educating the public is like herding cats. They don’t take in information very well.” — AFP

Ben Kilham walks back to his house after visiting black bears on his property.

Lifestyle | Mix Tape

Film Review



By Aakash Bakaya

I remember playing 'Rampage' as a wee lad in the year 2000 on my clunky Playstation 1. It was a straightforward game where you and a friend can play as monsters and go berserk on cities - destroying buildings, eating people and fighting off the army. Whatever little story it had was told in between levels and was this sarcastic, tongue-in-cheek parody of the media and government scare tactics that was treated more like background filler than anything else. Fast-forward 18 years later and I'm watching the Hollywood movie adaptation of that same game, a game which had absolutely no need for a big budget studio production but here we are with 'Rampage' the movie. It ended up being exactly what I expected it to but in this case that's sadly not really a good thing.

A few days before a few friends and I decided on 'Rampage', one of them had asked - "is that the sequel to 'San Andreas'?" 'San Andreas' was a earthquake disaster film also starring Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson so as funny as that sounded at the moment, it was understandable why he thought that. In the last three years, 'The Rock' has starred in over nine films all of which were borderline unwatchable or painfully mediocre. The workload has seemed to have regressed whatever acting talents he might have had along with a persistent feeling that the only character he can play is big man with big arms. He's also constantly praised for having a lot of 'charisma' but I'm not sure how charismatic a primatologist, whose sole trait is that he does not like people is supposed to be.

Dumb and bloated

If you've watched any of the promotional material for the film you would have a basic idea of what 'Rampage' is about. Big man (The Rock) goes around screaming at CGI green screens for over 90 minutes, cracks a few jokes at awkward moments (none of which are re-

motely funny) while Saturday-morning cartoon villains ham up the big screen until their gruesome deaths. The entire plot was dumb, very dumb and it never reaches those absurd levels where its inherent stupidity becomes entertaining. There's an over bloated backstory focusing on the gene-slicing technique that created the monsters, characters played by well-known actors who have 5 minutes of screen time and scenes where Big man (The Rock) attempts to have some sort of character development but his dull, lifeless emotions just make it seem like he's reading from a teleprompter.

"Yeah it might have been stupid but that doesn't mean it wasn't entertaining" is a common audience response coming out of these types of films and there's nothing inherently wrong with that. It also doesn't mean we can't be objective of what aspects makes a big, dumb action movie greatly entertaining. Before the movie started, a trailer for the new 'Mission Impossible' played and that two and half minute trailer was more gripping and exciting than the entirety of 'Rampage'.

That's because even though the 'Mission Impossible' films maybe lacking in the story department (does anyone remember the actual plot of MI: 3 or Ghost Protocol?) the action scenes are memorable and creative. Not to mention the fact that Tom Cruise is a high caliber actor who puts a lot of effort into each of his roles. Johnson on the other hand isn't really involved in much of the films action, that was true in the 'Fast and Furious' films and that's true here as well. He'll punch a guy or display his physic in a scene or two but in comparison to his peers - Van Damme had martial art prowess and Schwarzenegger chose much better roles in his prime.

I'm pointing this out because 'Rampage' showcases the rampant lack of quality present in most of Hollywood's modern blockbusters. It's all become so generic, so bland and so inoffensive that they in turn become completely forgettable. But audiences seem to come to expect that nowadays, when they don't have to. Yes as a CGI spectacle, 'Rampage' more than passes the mark. The CGI in the first

hour is fantastic and isn't overused. It falls in quality by the time the final climatic fight scene comes around but by that time your senses are so overloaded it wouldn't bother you as much. This doesn't change the fact that the story is threadbare and boring, the confusing tone shifts are jarring and whatever sense of danger or tension vanishes after our protagonist (Big Man) shows more signs of being from Krypton than from planet Earth.

'Feel good'?

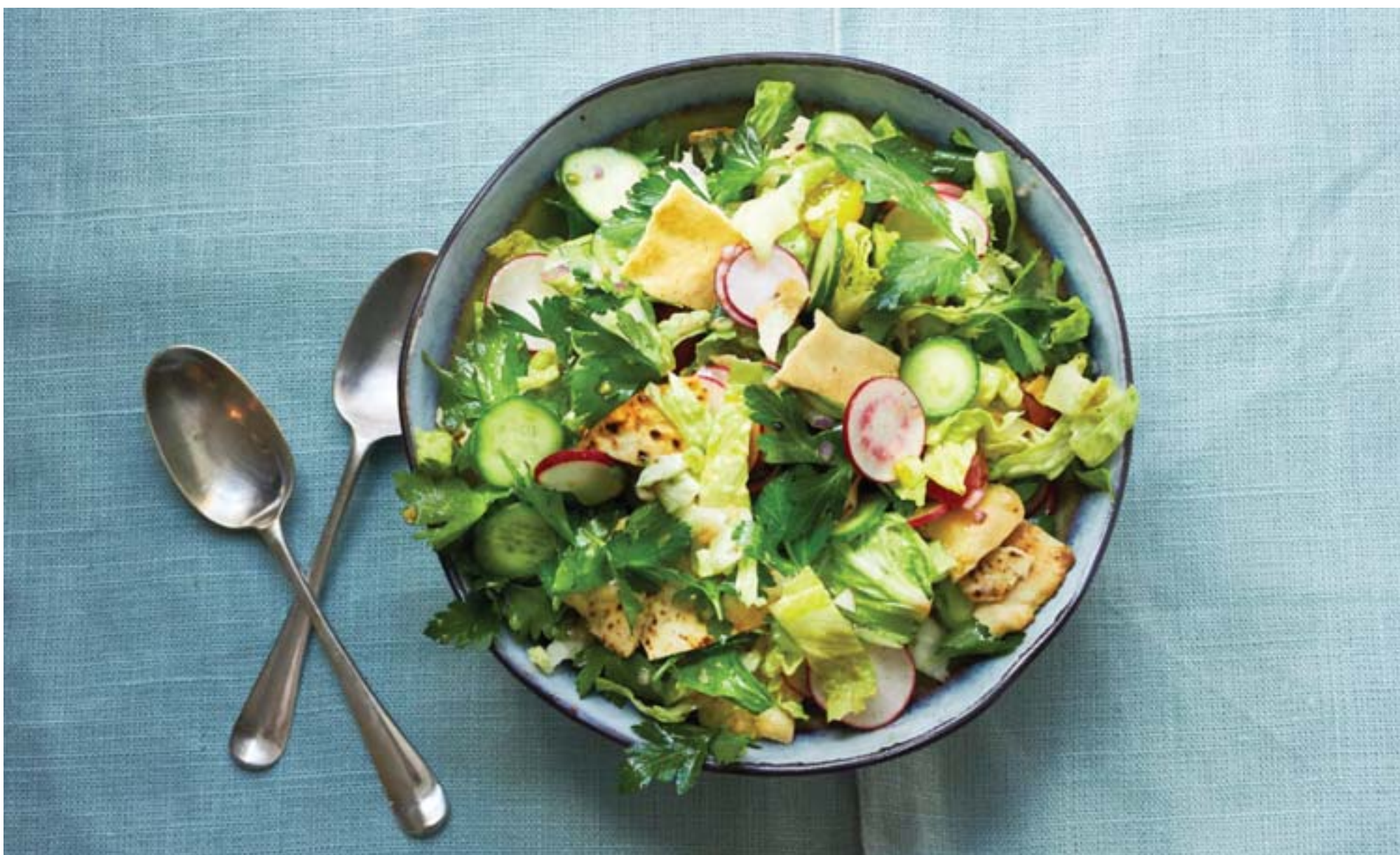
The latter half of the film is filled with such wanton destruction and death I wonder how we've reached the point where this passes for 'family-friendly' entertainment. Comic-book movies may get a pass for this but I don't see why cities getting destroyed and political power plays about the morality of bombing civilians for 'the greater good' is something kids should find 'fun'. Too extreme for kids and not extreme enough for adults - that's Johnson's recent filmography in a nut shell and 'Rampage' is no different.

Finally let me just reiterate - I love big, over-the-top and campy films. Movies like 'Predator', 'Day of The Dead' and 'Road Warrior' are all amazing in their own way even if they don't appear to match the standards of today's massively budgeted CGI affairs. They're visceral, grounded and at times legitimately funny even when the jokes were completely unintentional. I'm confident that directors and story-tellers today can still hit those high marks but for a multitude of reasons, they aren't given the chance to.

During the PR tour for 'Rampage', Johnson said - "They're gonna come to my movies and feel good". As commendable as that statement is - 'feel good' is just another replacement for 'feeling nothing'. If you come into the cinema feeling good and the movie doesn't do anything to alter that in any way - then it's failed. However, one thing it hasn't failed in doing is raising the quality of Hollywood adaptations of video-game stories from excruciatingly bad to tasteless mediocrity.

COOKING ON A DEADLINE

FATTOUSH



By Katie Workman

During the month of Ramadan, observant Muslims perform daily fasts from dawn to dusk, only breaking the fast with a meal (usually a light one) after the sun sets. Fasting is intended to cleanse the soul, allowing Muslims to turn their attention inward, toward charity work and prayer, and away from material things. One of the dishes on many tables in Levantine countries during Ramadan is fattoush. It may be served during the evening break fasts, and is often part of the celebratory spread that marks the end of the month of abstinence.

Many countries have a version of fattoush. As with many cross-cultural dishes, researching the different varieties is both fun and slightly exhausting. There's always some type of flatbread, such as pita, and tomatoes and cucumbers. But then ... lettuce or no lettuce? Vegetables sliced or diced? Radishes? Peppers? Lemon or lime juice? A bit of sweetener? Sumac? Choices to be made.

Mince your garlic as much as you can so that it really blends into the dressing. A way to get it super-fine is to chop it quite a bit, then sprinkle on a bit of salt and drag the flat side of the knife blade across the garlic several times, pressing down as you go to create a paste.

Chop some more, drag the knife over it once again, repeat, and soon you will have a fine garlic paste. I used a little pomegranate syrup in my dressing because I had a bottle lying around (which

I realize is not normal for most American cooks). Use honey if you are not as ingredient-nerdy as I am (or you can find the syrup online or in a specialty foods store).

Sumac is a spice made from berries that grow wild on bushes in Lebanon and other countries in the region; it's a classic fattoush seasoning. The flavor is tart and tangy. You could use that instead of the zaatar, which is a lovely, tangy and earthy combination of sumac, thyme, sesame and marjoram (sometimes cumin), and is often easier to find in supermarkets.

FATTOUSH**Ingredients**

Serves 6

Start to finish: 30 minutes

Pita Crisps:

2 pieces pita bread
1 tablespoon olive oil
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon zaatar

Salad:

1 heart of romaine, thinly sliced crosswise
4 Persian cucumbers, sliced, or 1 seedless or hothouse cucumber
1 pint cherry or grape tomatoes, halved
1/2 cup finely diced red onion

4 scallions trimmed and thinly sliced (white and green parts)
6 radishes, trimmed and thinly sliced
1 cup fresh parsley leaves

Vinaigrette:

1/4 cup olive oil
3 tablespoons fresh lime juice
1 teaspoon pomegranate syrup or honey
1 teaspoon very finely minced garlic (almost a paste)
3 tablespoons chopped fresh mint
1/2 teaspoon zaatar

Preparation

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F. Make the Pita Crisps. Brush the tops of the pitas with the tablespoon of olive oil, sprinkle with salt and zaatar. Place on a baking sheet and bake for 4 to 5 minutes, until toasted and crisp. Remove and let cool. Make the Salad: In a large bowl combine the lettuce, cucumbers, tomatoes, onions, scallions, radishes and parsley.

Make the Vinaigrette: In a small bowl, combine the 1/4 cup olive oil, lime juice, pomegranate syrup or honey, garlic, mint, za'atar, and salt and pepper. Pour the dressing over the salad and toss well. Break the cooled pita into pieces about 1-inch large (they will be uneven) and add them to the salad just before serving. Give a final toss, let sit for 5 minutes so the pita starts to soften just slightly in the dressing, and serve.

Serve Green Pozole with Chicken for Cinco de Mayo

By Sara Moulton

Cinco de Mayo commemorates the Mexican army's defeat of the French army in a battle on that date - May 5 - in 1862. The holiday also happens to coincide with the start of the season for fresh tomatillos. Green Pozole with Chicken, a traditional, stew-y Mexican soup - based on a tomatillo salsa - is the perfect dish for the occasion.

Tomatillos are small round fruits native to Mexico that indeed look like green tomatoes. But they are a completely different fruit and have a unique, somewhat lemony, taste all their own. They're a key ingredient in Mexican green salsa, often served alongside red, or tomato-based, salsa, and very easy to work with. Peel off the papery husk, give them a rinse and they're ready to go. Then just combine all of the ingredients for this salsa in a food processor and pulse them until they're finely chopped. If you like it hot, use more Serrano chiles. If you like it milder, remove the serrano's seeds and ribs before adding it to the mix.

As for the pozole, there are many types - red, green, white, chicken, beef, and pork - but what they all have in common is hominy. Hominy is a kind of starchy field corn that's been dried and then treated by soaking and cooking it in a diluted solution of lye or slaked lime. It can be consumed whole (as in this recipe), coarsely ground to make grits, or finely ground to make masa for tortillas or tamales. It's the hominy in pozole that makes it so hearty. The protein here comes in the form of shredded store-bought rotisserie chicken, which simplifies its preparation. No one's going to know or care that you cheated because it's the garnishes that make this dish special.

Green Posole with Chicken

Ingredients

Start to finish: 1 hour (35 minutes active)

Servings: 4

For the salsa:

8 ounces fresh tomatillos, husked, rinsed and quartered (or cut into sixths, if large)

1/2 cup coarsely chopped scallion (white and light green part)

1/2 cup lightly packed cilantro, leaves and stems

1 1/2 tablespoons coarsely chopped serrano (with the ribs and seeds)

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

1 tablespoon fresh lime juice

1 teaspoon minced garlic

1/4 teaspoon salt

For the pozole:

1 cup finely chopped onion

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

4 cups chicken broth

3 1/2 to 4 cups shredded or cubed rotisserie chicken

One 30-ounce can hominy, rinsed and drained

Shredded sharp cheddar, tortilla chips, lime wedges and fresh cilantro for garnish

Preparation

Make the salsa: In a food processor combine all the ingredients and pulse until the mixture is almost smooth with some small chunks in it.

Make the pozole: In a large saucepan cook the onion in the oil over medium heat until the onion is softened, about 5 minutes. Add the salsa, bring to a simmer and cook, stirring occasionally for 10 minutes. Add the broth, bring to a boil and simmer, partially covered for 10 minutes. Add chicken, hominy and salt to taste; cook just until heated through. Ladle into bowls and serve with all the garnishes on the side.





Making your own breakfast sausage patties is quick and smart

By Melissa D'arabian

Lazy weekend morning meals around the table, the entire family unhurried have yielded some of my favorite moments of connection and family identity. Even quick weekday breakfasts hold the promise of a new day, and fill my soul a tiny bit. Adding the unmistakable aroma of an herby breakfast sausage is the icing on the cake of breakfasts and brunches.

Making your own breakfast sausage patties is surprisingly quick, and just plain smart: you can adjust flavors according to your preferences, and control the quality of the ingredients. Each patty offers 8 grams of protein and 64 calories (and 3 grams of fat), so adding a patty or two to any breakfast gives a nice nutrient boost. And, it's cheaper than buying sausage pre-made.

Try my recipe for Homemade Turkey Breakfast Sausage Patties for an easy take on a traditional breakfast sausage. Rosemary, sage and fennel seed work together to create that classic breakfast sausage taste, although if you find fennel too powerful, you can substitute thyme. The invisible hero of the dish is the onion pulp made cleverly from rubbing yellow onion along a microplane or fine grater - it adds needed onion flavor without actual pieces of onion to mess with the texture or overpower any one bite.

A quick note about the maple syrup: This recipe is not "maple-flavored" - I add the tiniest bit of maple syrup that drives home

the breakfast feel, taking the patty squarely from flavorful turkey burger territory into breakfast sausage. If you want to mimic the "maple sausage" versions you buy at the store, then you'll definitely want to add a bit more syrup.

The recipe as written is my go-to, but know there are options to explore. Swap out flavorings, or increase (or omit) the red pepper flakes to adjust the heat. The patties can be pan-sauteed or oven baked. Most of my family preferred the crusty exterior of the sauteed version. However, two of my kids preferred the more tender texture of the oven-baked version. And if you are pulling from a frozen stash of uncooked patties for a weekday morning, then baking works best.

Lastly, you can make these with lean ground beef or ground pork, but be aware that the ground beef version made us all feel like we were having tiny, tasty, bunless burgers for breakfast. Ground pork is wonderful, but the nutrition profile changes, and we all actually preferred the turkey version. Mixing half pork and turkey is a happy compromise, worth doing if you like pork sausage.

HOMEMADE TURKEY SAUSAGE BREAKFAST PATTIES

Ingredients

Servings: 12 patties

Start to finish: 25 minutes

1 pound of 96 percent lean ground turkey
 1 teaspoon dried crushed rosemary, or 2 teaspoons fresh
 1/2 teaspoon dried fennel, ground or seeds
 1 teaspoon dried sage (rubbed leaves), or 2 teaspoons fresh
 3 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley (or 1 tablespoon dried)
 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
 Pinch red pepper flakes (optional)
 1 egg white
 2 teaspoons maple syrup
 3 tablespoons of onion pulp
 2 cloves of garlic, minced
 1/2 teaspoon salt
 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Preparation

Mix all the ingredients in a medium bowl. Form into 12 compact patties. Spray a large nonstick saute pan with some olive oil from a mister (or use nonstick spray). Cook the patties in the pan over medium heat, until outside edges have nice deep golden crust and meat is cooked through, flipping once, about ten minutes total.

Chef's Note: The texture will be less crusty, but you can also bake the patties on parchment-lined baking sheet at 400 F for about 12-15 minutes (add a few minutes more if uncooked patties are frozen.)

A simple way to ramp up your pasta salad game



By Katie Workman

A great pasta salad is a beautiful thing. It anchors a picnic, potluck or buffet with aplomb. It's portable, flexible, easy and often vegetarian. One of the first things I made for my then-boyfriend's (now husband's) parents was a pasta salad, and for whatever reason, it won them over and became a most-requested dish.

Pasta salads are also such a nice way to play around with seasonal vegetables, so you can change things up all year. Spring and summer are peak moments to scoop up the great produce at the farmers market, grab a box of pasta and quickly turn all of it into a crowd-pleasing and easy side or main dish. I tend to pack in the vegetables, and the results are beautiful and nicely tilted toward the healthy side.

In this recipe, the asparagus and sugar snap peas get a bit more tender and keep their bright green color after a quick simmer, and the best part is that you can add them right into the pasta at the end of the cooking time; that saves a step and an extra pot. If you chop the leafy greens, they will blend into the salad more, but sometimes I like to leave them whole and have the whole thing be kind of a cross between a pasta salad and a regular salad.

You can make this salad ahead of time, up to one day. Ideally,

leave the arugula, spinach and basil out and add them right before serving. Adding the greens at the last minute keeps them from getting wilted and darkening. Also, hold off on the tomatoes: Tomatoes really should never see the inside of a refrigerator, and since you'll have to refrigerate this salad to keep it fresh, tossing in the tomatoes at the very end will keep them from getting slightly mealy.

If you have made the salad ahead, let it sit at room temperature for at least 20 minutes to take the chill off before serving, so the flavors all come shining through. Also, if you refrigerated the salad, the pasta will have absorbed the dressing a bit; add an extra drizzle of olive oil, and give it a toss to get it nice and glistening again.

SIMPLE VEGETARIAN SPRING PASTA SALAD

Ingredients

25 minutes start to finish

Serves 8

1 pound dried spiral pasta (or cavatappi, ziti, fusilli or other salad-friendly shaped pasta)
2 cups (8 ounces) halved sugar snap peas
2 cups (1-inch pieces) asparagus
2 cups baby or roughly chopped arugula
2 cups baby or roughly chopped spinach
1 bell pepper (red, yellow or orange), finely diced

1 pint cherry tomatoes, cut in half, or quarters if larger
1/2 cup sliced scallions
1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons mayonnaise
1/4 cup rice vinegar
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
1/2 cup chopped shallots
1/2 cup slivered fresh basil
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
1/3 cup finely grated Parmesan cheese

Preparation

Heat a large pot of salted water to a boil. Cook the pasta according to package directions, but 1 minute before the pasta is tender, add the sugar snap peas and the asparagus. Cook for 1 minute, then drain the pasta and the vegetables and rinse under cold water. Drain well. Place the pasta, sugar snap peas and asparagus in a bowl with the arugula, spinach, peppers, tomatoes and scallions. In a small bowl or container, combine the olive oil, mayonnaise, vinegar, mustard, shallots, basil, salt and pepper. Pour this dressing over the pasta salad and toss well to combine. Add the Parmesan and toss again. Taste and adjust the seasonings as needed.

Comic

WORD SEARCH

Trees

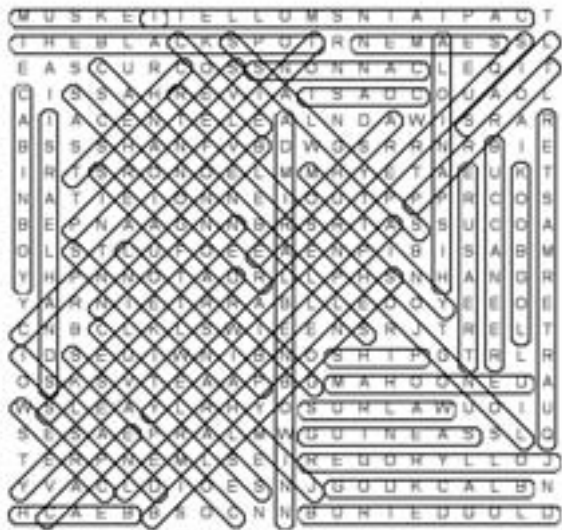
Find and circle all of the Trees that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a secret message - a Greek Proverb.

B G O L D E N R A I N A S O B C M L E
I I D T T E E T S C Y T G L U R O P H
W S R O G U R R A P U E E A T T I H S
W H B C O E N T T L R Z N L T N O E A
P L A I H W A L I R A U O D E M N M Y
O E L R N L X P E H E N C H R P A L R
P L D P P H T O H Z D B C E N A C O R
L N C A T R I C B O A E B T U T E C E
A C Y A E N T C N R E H E U T R P K H
R E P E R I E P K B E S D N R W I H C
O D R P W B L D O O W N O T T O C F R
S A E E A A O S N E R H O S H A D E E
P R S T N L H R R I K Y W E E C D Y T
L K S E N O M O V A L W W H T B A U H
U E E L P A M Y O I S H O C U P N E A
M E N I R A T C E N T L L D P L L N P
P E A R C O G K N I G A L L A S P E N
E V E Y W I L L O W R S E W L A R C H
I T S S E Q U O I A I E Y E K C U B N

- | | | | |
|--------------|------------|--------------|-------------|
| APPLE | CEDAR | LINDEN | POPLAR |
| APRICOT | CHERRY | LONDON PLANE | REDSUD |
| ASH | CHESTNUT | MAPLE | RUBBER TREE |
| ASPEN | COTTONWOOD | NECTARINE | SEQUOIA |
| ARBORVITAE | ELM | DAK | SPRUCE |
| BALD CYPRESS | FIR | PALM | SYCAMORE |
| BEECH | GINKGO | PEACH | TULIPTREE |
| BIRCH | GOLDENRAIN | PEAR | WALNUT |
| BOXWOOD | HAZELNUT | PECAN | WITCHHAZEL |
| BUCKEYE | HEMLOCK | PLUM | WILLOW |
| BUTTERNUT | HICKORY | PINE | YELLOWWOOD |
| CATALPA | LARCH | | |

Yesterday's Solution

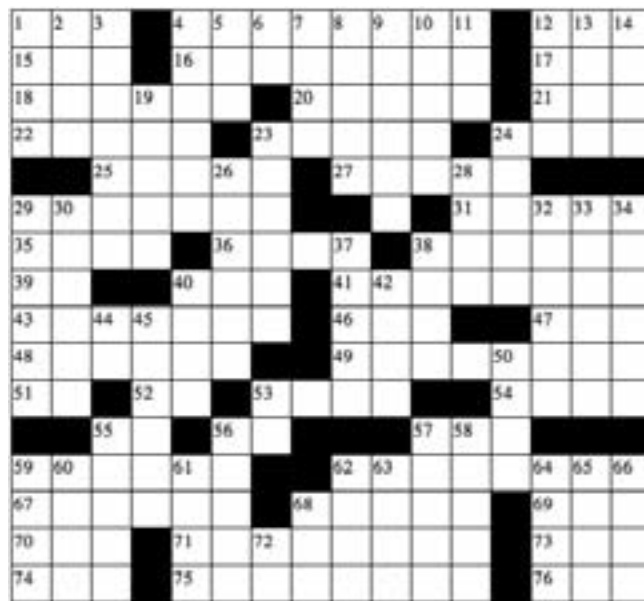
Treasure Island



- | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|---------|------------|---------|----------|---------|--------|--------|-------|---------------|------|
| ADIRAL | BENBOW | IN | CAPE | CAPTAIN | FLINT | ISLAND | ISRAEL | HANDS | QUARTERMASTER | SAIL |
| APPLE | BARREL | ASHORE | CAPTAIN | SHOLLETT | CHEST | ISRAEL | ISRAEL | HANDS | QUARTERMASTER | SAIL |
| BEACH | BEN | GUNN | COAST | COMPASS | CONVE | ISRAEL | ISRAEL | HANDS | QUARTERMASTER | SAIL |
| BELLY | BONES | BLACK | DOG | CREW | CUTLASS | ISRAEL | ISRAEL | HANDS | QUARTERMASTER | SAIL |
| BUCCANIER | BURIED | GOLD | CANNON | BOY | CANNON | ISRAEL | ISRAEL | HANDS | QUARTERMASTER | SAIL |
| BALLS | CANNONS | HISPANIOLA | | | | ISRAEL | ISRAEL | HANDS | QUARTERMASTER | SAIL |
| | | | | | | ISRAEL | ISRAEL | HANDS | QUARTERMASTER | SAIL |
| | | | | | | ISRAEL | ISRAEL | HANDS | QUARTERMASTER | SAIL |
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| | | | | | | ISRAEL | ISRAEL | HANDS | QUARTERMASTER | SAIL |
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| | | | | | | ISRAEL | ISRAEL | HANDS | QUARTERMASTER | SAIL |
| | | | | | | ISRAEL | ISRAEL | HANDS | QUARTERMASTER | SAIL |

The hidden message is: TREASURE ISLAND WAS WRITTEN BY ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

CROSSWORD 1888



- ACROSS**
- A rapid escape (as by criminals).
 - (formerly) A horse-drawn wagon that delivered ice door to door.
 - Inquire about.
 - A federal agency established to coordinate programs aimed at reducing pollution and protecting the environment.
 - Professional care for the hands and fingernails v 1.
 - Aircraft landing in bad weather in which the pilot is talked down by ground control using precision approach radar.
 - A member of a North American Indian people living in the Sacramento valley in California.
 - The usually cylindrical central vascular portion of the axis of a vascular plant.
 - Thigh of a hog (usually smoked).
 - The capital and chief port and largest city of Senegal.
 - Jordan's port.
 - Cactus having yellow flowers and purple fruits.
 - (of radiate organisms) Located on the surface or end on which the mouth is situated.
 - A Russian prison camp for political prisoners.
 - Wood of any poon tree.
 - An organization of countries formed in 1961 to agree on a common policy for the sale of petroleum.
 - Being nine more than ninety.
 - Bridge formed by the upper level of a crossing of two highways at different levels.
 - Of or in or belonging to the cavity of the abdomen.
 - Aromatic bulb used as seasoning.
 - An elegantly dressed man (often with affected manners).
 - Great coolness and composure under strain.
 - A throne that is the official chair of a bishop.
 - A white soft metallic element that tarnishes readily.
 - A Mid-Atlantic state.
 - 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.
 - Australasian kingfishers.
 - A narrow zigzag ribbon used as trimming.
 - A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
 - Canadian hockey player (born 1948).
 - A vain and talkative person (chatters like a parrot).
 - Nut of any of several trees of the genus *Corylus*.
 - Seed of a pea plant.
 - A river in northeastern Brazil that flows generally northward to the Atlantic Ocean.
 - Large brownish-green New Zealand parrot.
- DOWN**
- Suggestive of or tending to moral looseness.
 - The capital of Western Samoa.
 - A town in southern Minnesota.
 - An immunosuppressive drug (trade name Imuran) used to prevent rejection of a transplanted organ.
 - Airtight sealed metal container for food or drink or paint etc..
 - Half the width of an em.
 - A specific feeling of desire.
 - One of the proteins into which actomyosin can be split.
 - Small slender African monkey having long hind limbs and tail and long hair around the face.
 - The fourth or lowest deck.
 - (meaning literally 'born') Used to indicate the maiden or family name of a married woman.
 - Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
 - Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
 - God of love and erotic desire.
 - Large heavily built goat antelope of eastern Himalayan area.
 - A high-crowned black cap (usually made of felt or sheepskin) worn by men in Turkey and Iran and the Caucasus.
 - Eat noisily.
 - African tree having an exceedingly thick trunk and fruit that resembles a gourd and has an edible pulp called monkey bread.
 - Any culture medium that uses agar as the gelling agent.
 - A member of a North American Indian people living around the mouth of the Colorado river.
 - Port city on Atlantic coast.
 - Accumulate on the surface.
 - Talks a great deal about uninteresting topics.
 - (sports) Someone in charge of training an athlete or a team.
 - Informal terms for money.
 - An actor who communicates entirely by gesture and facial expression.
 - A small bottle that contains a drug (especially a sealed sterile container for injection by needle).
 - Angular distance above the horizon (especially of a celestial object).
 - A tenant in someone's house.
 - The persistence of a sound after its source has stopped.
 - Unknown god.
 - The capital and largest city of Ghana with a deep-water port.
 - Made from baking chocolate or cocoa powder and milk and sugar.
 - Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
 - Colonial siphonophore of up to 130 ft long.
 - A river in northern England that flows southeast through West Yorkshire.
 - An inhabitant of Lapland.
 - The form of RNA that attaches the correct amino acid to the protein chain that is being synthesized at the ribosome of the cell (according to directions coded in the mRNA).
 - A pilgrim who journeys to Mecca.
 - A large indefinite number.
 - A slender double-reed instrument.
 - A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
 - A loud harsh or strident noise.
 - A soft yellowish-white trivalent metallic element of the rare earth group.

Yesterday's Solution



Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution



TV Listings

05:00 Situation Critical
 06:00 Mega Factories
 07:00 Jane Goodall: Saving Paradise
 08:00 Years Of Living Dangerously
 09:00 Situation Critical
 10:00 Breakout
 11:00 Miracle Hospital
 12:00 Route Awakening
 13:00 Mega Factories
 14:00 Jackie Chan's Green Heroes
 15:00 Years Of Living Dangerously
 16:00 Breakout
 17:00 My Fighting Season
 18:00 Stalking Hitler's Generals
 19:00 Surrender
 20:00 Breakout
 20:50 My Fighting Season
 21:40 Stalking Hitler's Generals
 22:30 Surrender
 23:20 Situation Critical

14:36 Breadwinners
 15:00 Nicky Deuce
 16:12 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
 16:36 The Loud House
 17:00 Toon Marty
 17:24 Massive Monster Mayhem
 17:48 Hunter Street
 18:12 Henry Danger
 18:36 Nicky, Ricky, Dicky & Dawn
 19:00 School Of Rock
 19:24 Game Shakers
 19:48 The Thundermans
 20:12 SpongeBob SquarePants
 20:36 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
 21:00 Harvey Beaks
 21:24 Breadwinners
 21:48 Get Blake
 22:12 Sanjay And Craig
 22:36 Rabbids Invasion
 23:00 The Loud House
 23:24 Regal Academy
 23:48 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

19:42 Blaze And The Monster Machines
 20:05 Paw Patrol
 20:28 Shimmer And Shine
 20:51 Nella The Princess Knight
 21:14 Paw Patrol
 21:38 Rusty Rivets
 22:01 Wallykazam!
 22:24 The Day Henry Met
 22:29 Bubble Guppies
 22:53 Team Umizoomi
 23:16 Kid-E-Cats
 19:48 Shimmer And Shine
 23:44 Sunny Day

18:00 The Gifted
 19:00 Chicago Med
 20:00 Chicago P.D.
 21:00 Survivor: Ghost Island
 22:00 Once Upon A Time
 23:00 WWE Experience



00:10 The Love Guru
 01:40 The Hot Chick
 03:30 Fan Girl
 05:05 Daddy's Home
 06:45 Who Gets The Dog?
 08:25 Planes, Trains And Automobiles
 10:00 Daddy's Home
 11:40 Who Gets The Dog?
 13:20 Planes, Trains And Automobiles
 15:00 Big Momma's House
 16:40 Big Momma's House 2
 18:20 Big Mommas: Like Father, Like Son
 20:10 What's Your Number?
 22:00 The Late Bloomer
 23:40 Waiting



01:35 An Inconvenient Truth
 03:20 The Remains Of The Day
 05:45 African Safari
 07:25 Love On The Slopes
 09:00 An Inconvenient Truth
 10:45 African Safari
 12:25 Akeelah And The Bee
 14:30 The Hollars
 16:10 Days Of Heaven
 17:55 A.I. Artificial Intelligence
 20:30 The Client
 22:35 When Life Keeps Getting In The Way



00:35 Dinofroz - An Island In The Sky
 01:55 Last Wizard
 03:20 A Town Called Panic
 04:40 Ploddy Police Car
 06:00 Funny Little Cars
 07:05 Dinofroz Return To The Past World
 08:40 Zodiac: The Race Begins
 10:20 Gamba
 12:05 Nur And The Dragon's Temple
 13:25 The Emperor's Secret
 15:00 A Town Called Panic
 16:20 Ploddy Police Car
 17:40 Pacific Pirates
 19:10 Nur And The Dragon's Temple
 20:30 Mia And The Migoo
 22:10 Catcher: Cat City 2
 23:50 Pacific Pirates



00:15 Sisters
 02:20 Cops And Robbers
 04:00 Jason Bourne
 06:15 Hoosiers
 08:25 Cops And Robbers
 10:00 Life On The Line
 11:45 Jason Bourne
 13:55 Nim's Island
 15:35 The Magnificent Seven
 17:55 Alive
 20:05 Tombstone
 22:20 Bram Stoker's Dracula



00:30 How Do They Do It?
 00:55 Food Factory USA
 01:20 Street Science
 01:45 Street Science
 02:10 Curiosity: Megastorm
 03:00 Prototype This
 03:48 Mythbusters
 04:36 How Do They Do It?

05:00 Food Factory USA
 05:24 Street Science
 05:48 Street Science
 06:12 Curiosity: Megastorm
 07:00 How Do They Do It?
 07:26 Prototype This
 08:14 Mythbusters
 09:02 Curiosity: Megastorm
 09:50 How Do They Do It?
 10:14 Food Factory USA
 10:38 Street Science
 11:02 Street Science
 11:26 Prototype This
 12:14 Mythbusters
 13:02 How Do They Do It?
 13:26 Food Factory USA
 13:50 Curiosity: Megastorm
 14:38 Prototype This
 15:26 Street Science
 15:50 Street Science
 16:14 Mythbusters
 17:02 Curiosity: Megastorm
 17:50 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?

18:40 Mythbusters
 19:30 How The Universe Works
 20:20 How Do They Do It?
 20:45 Food Factory USA
 21:10 Through The Wormhole With Morgan Freeman
 22:00 How The Universe Works
 22:50 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
 23:40 Mythbusters



01:05 Arjun Pandit
 03:00 Arjun Pandit
 03:55 Koffee With Karan
 05:00 Teen Thuy Bhai
 07:25 Hawaa Hawaii
 09:40 Bandhan
 12:30 Rehnaa Hai Terre Dil Mein
 15:25 Garam Masala
 17:55 Khichdi: The Movie
 20:00 A Gentleman: Sundar, Susheel, Risky
 22:20 Mohenjo Daro



01:15 Butterfly On A Wheel
 02:45 Gambit
 04:30 Meet Bill
 06:00 Moonrise Kingdom
 07:30 Frailty
 09:05 The Conspirator
 11:00 McFarland
 13:05 Sliding Doors
 14:45 Butterfly On A Wheel
 16:15 Nine
 18:15 Reclaim
 20:00 Avengers: Age Of Ultron
 22:15 The Wedding Planner



00:00 Mistresses
 01:00 Mistresses
 02:00 Grey's Anatomy
 03:00 Married At First Sight
 04:00 Black Box
 05:00 Devious Maids
 06:00 Mistresses
 08:00 Grey's Anatomy
 09:00 Married At First Sight
 10:00 Black Box
 11:00 Devious Maids
 12:00 Mistresses
 13:00 Mistresses
 14:00 Grey's Anatomy
 15:00 Married At First Sight
 16:00 Black Box
 17:00 Along For The Bride
 18:00 The Fashion Fund
 20:00 Project Runway All Stars
 21:00 Project Runway
 23:00 Grey's Anatomy



00:20 Say Yes To The Dress
 01:05 90 Days To Wed
 01:50 90 Days To Wed: Before The

90 Days
 02:35 Unveiled
 02:57 Unveiled
 03:20 Outdaughters: Busby Quints
 04:05 The Undateables
 04:50 My 600lb Life: Where Are They Now?
 05:35 Say Yes To The Dress
 06:00 Outdaughters: Busby Quints
 08:15 Say Yes To The Dress
 09:00 Cake Boss
 09:25 Say Yes To The Dress UK
 13:10 7 Little Johnstons
 13:55 Say Yes To The Dress
 14:40 Cake Boss
 17:00 Little People, Big World
 17:50 Diva Brides
 18:50 Hair Goddess
 19:40 Cake Boss
 20:10 Say Yes To The Dress UK
 20:35 Say Yes To The Dress UK
 21:00 Hair Goddess
 21:50 Little People, Big World
 22:40 Too Ugly For Love?
 23:30 Return To Amish



00:05 This Is Not Happening
 00:30 Another Period
 00:55 Russell Simmons Presents: The Ruckus
 01:20 The Opposition With Jordan Klepper
 01:45 South Park
 02:10 South Park
 02:35 Another Period
 03:00 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
 03:25 South Park
 03:50 South Park
 04:15 Ridiculousness Arabia
 04:40 Workaholics
 06:50 Lip Sync Battle
 08:55 Friends
 09:20 Friends
 09:45 Friends
 10:10 Hillbillies For Hire
 10:35 Hillbillies For Hire
 11:00 Friendszone
 13:05 Disaster Date
 13:30 Disaster Date
 13:55 Disaster Date
 14:20 Key And Peele
 16:30 Takeshis Castle Thailand
 16:55 Takeshis Castle Thailand
 17:20 Friends
 19:20 Nathan For You
 19:45 Workaholics
 20:10 Martha And Snoop Potluck Dinner Party
 20:30 Graves
 21:00 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
 21:30 The Opposition With Jordan Klepper
 22:00 Norm Macdonald: Me Doing Stand-Up
 22:50 This Is Not Happening
 23:15 Nathan For You
 23:40 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah



00:20 Milwaukee Blacksmith
 00:45 Pawn Stars
 01:10 Battle 360
 02:00 American Pickers
 02:50 The Curse Of Oak Island
 03:40 Hoard Hunters
 04:30 Hoard Hunters
 05:20 American Pickers
 06:00 Alone
 10:10 Ice Road Truckers
 14:20 American Pickers
 15:10 American Pickers
 16:00 American Pickers
 16:50 American Pickers
 17:40 American Pickers
 18:30 Ice Road Truckers
 19:20 Forged: Iron & Fire
 19:45 Forged: Iron & Fire
 20:10 Counting Cars
 20:35 Car Hunters
 21:00 Counting Cars
 21:25 Car Hunters



00:20 Africa's Wild Kingdom Reborn
 01:10 World's Deadliest Compilations
 02:00 Dark Side Of Crocs
 02:50 My Life Is A Zoo
 03:45 Wild 24
 04:40 Animals Gone Wild
 05:35 Dark Side Of Crocs
 06:30 My Life Is A Zoo
 07:25 Wild 24
 08:20 Animals Gone Wild
 09:15 Snakes In The City
 10:10 Wild New Zealand: Lost Paradise
 11:05 The Miracle Cheetah
 12:00 World's Deadliest: Shark Frenzy!
 12:55 Africa's Wild Kingdom Reborn
 13:50 My Life Is A Zoo
 14:45 Wild 24
 15:40 Animals Gone Wild
 16:35 Snakes In The City
 17:30 Wild India
 18:25 The Naked Superhero
 19:20 Wild 24
 20:10 Animals Gone Wild
 21:00 Snakes In The City
 21:50 Wild India
 22:40 The Naked Superhero
 23:30 World's Deadliest: Shark Frenzy!



00:06 Max & Ruby
 00:29 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom
 00:40 Kiva Can Do!
 00:51 The Day Henry Met
 00:57 Blaze And The Monster Machines
 01:19 Blaze And The Monster Machines
 01:42 Paw Patrol
 01:54 Kid-E-Cats
 01:59 Kid-E-Cats
 02:04 Shimmer And Shine
 02:26 Nella The Princess Knight
 02:38 Paw Patrol
 03:02 Max & Ruby
 03:25 Dora The Explorer
 03:48 Sunny Day
 04:10 Nella The Princess Knight
 04:32 Shimmer And Shine
 04:55 Wallykazam!
 05:18 Zack & Quack
 05:28 The Day Henry Met
 05:33 The Day Henry Met
 05:39 Blaze And The Monster Machines
 06:00 Rusty Rivets
 06:13 Paw Patrol
 06:37 Dora The Explorer
 07:00 Nella The Princess Knight
 07:21 Kiva Can Do!
 07:32 Kiva Can Do!
 07:42 Blaze And The Monster Machines
 08:05 Paw Patrol
 08:28 Shimmer And Shine
 08:51 Nella The Princess Knight
 09:14 Paw Patrol
 09:38 Rusty Rivets
 10:02 Wallykazam!
 10:24 The Day Henry Met
 10:30 Bubble Guppies
 10:53 Team Umizoomi
 11:16 Kid-E-Cats
 11:21 Shimmer And Shine
 11:44 Sunny Day
 12:06 Max & Ruby
 12:29 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom
 12:40 Kiva Can Do!
 12:50 The Day Henry Met
 12:56 Blaze And The Monster Machines
 13:19 Blaze And The Monster Machines
 13:42 Paw Patrol
 13:53 Kid-E-Cats
 13:58 Kid-E-Cats
 14:04 Shimmer And Shine
 14:26 Nella The Princess Knight
 14:38 Paw Patrol
 15:02 Max & Ruby
 15:24 Dora The Explorer
 15:47 Sunny Day
 16:09 Nella The Princess Knight
 16:31 Shimmer And Shine
 16:55 Wallykazam!
 17:18 Zack & Quack
 17:29 The Day Henry Met
 17:33 The Day Henry Met
 17:39 Blaze And The Monster Machines
 18:00 Rusty Rivets
 18:13 Paw Patrol
 18:37 Dora The Explorer
 19:00 Nella The Princess Knight
 19:21 Kiva Can Do!
 19:32 Kiva Can Do!



00:15 How I Met Your Mother
 00:40 How I Met Your Mother
 01:05 Seinfeld
 01:30 Seinfeld
 01:55 According To Jim
 02:20 According To Jim
 02:45 According To Jim
 03:10 Late Night With Seth Meyers
 04:00 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
 04:50 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
 05:40 Marry Me
 06:05 Til Death
 06:30 Fresh Off The Boat
 06:55 Mom
 07:20 Late Night With Seth Meyers
 08:10 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
 09:00 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
 09:50 The Simpsons
 10:15 The Last Man On Earth
 10:40 Marry Me
 11:05 Til Death
 11:30 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
 12:20 Fresh Off The Boat
 12:45 Mom
 13:10 How I Met Your Mother
 13:35 How I Met Your Mother
 14:00 Seinfeld
 14:25 Seinfeld
 14:50 Marry Me
 15:15 The Simpsons
 15:40 The Last Man On Earth
 16:05 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
 17:00 Fresh Off The Boat
 17:30 Mom
 18:00 How I Met Your Mother
 18:30 How I Met Your Mother
 19:00 Seinfeld
 19:30 Seinfeld
 20:00 The Carmichael Show
 20:30 The Carmichael Show
 21:00 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
 22:00 Better Late Than Never
 22:55 Hit The Road
 23:25 Late Night With Seth Meyers



00:45 Cars
 02:45 Inspector Gadget
 04:15 Queen Of Katwe
 06:30 Monsters University
 08:30 Cars
 10:30 Inspector Gadget
 12:00 Queen Of Katwe
 14:15 Moana
 16:15 Cars 2
 18:15 The Sorcerer's Apprentice
 20:15 High School Musical 3: Senior Year
 22:15 Moana



00:00 The Americans
 01:00 APB
 01:50 Still Star-Crossed
 02:40 Lethal Weapon
 03:30 S.W.A.T.
 04:20 The Americans
 05:20 Chicago Med
 06:10 The Gifted
 07:00 Good Morning America
 09:00 The View
 10:00 S.W.A.T.
 11:00 Chicago Med
 12:00 The Gifted
 13:00 Chicago P.D.
 14:00 Lethal Weapon
 15:00 The View
 16:00 Live Good Morning America

Stars



Aries (March 21-April 19)

You've come to a point where you're willing to stand up for your beliefs. You truly want nothing more than to gain sacred knowledge to take with you on your life's journey; enjoy and nurture this vibration. You feel drawn to traveling and exploring new people, places and ideas. Someone exhibits an unsettling attitude which could be the result of a disagreement between you. Feeling disconnected or separated could serve to help you go deep within for a quick boost through meditation. Someone needs your serious input on what looks like a healthcare issue; use your best judgement here. You're able to step away from what could turn out to be a nasty confrontation between coworkers; they could try to pull you into this, but you decline. Sneaking away, taking some time alone, creates a new you tonight.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Take your time when making decisions as this could be a period of having doubts about exactly what you want. Otherwise, your thoughts are sharp regarding a project at home or work that's finally coming together. Knowing what you want is only half the battle; figuring out how to get it is the other half. You want to tell someone something you think they need to know, but you're not sure about the timing; relax, you'll know when the time is right. Moving your body by walking or other types of exercise also refreshes your mind and the desire to move is strong. Someone urges you to attend a social function you're not sure about; think about this one before you act. You find great value in the areas of both material prosperity and spiritual abundance; you take special steps to pursue and attain both.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

The beauty you create in your environment holds your attention right now; perhaps there's been a move or one is coming. Outdoor projects take up a large portion of your time; this is where you get your best therapy. A stronger interest in organics sends you to some interesting places to shop and learn; you gain important knowledge you'll always have. Home is closest to your heart at this time; you could consider finding a position that allows you to work remotely from home. You fight the urge to shop because you feel the vibration of overspending around you; pay attention! This is a great time to let your thoughts and ideas mature. You could find that you've been volunteered to attend some sort of workshop. Later this evening, you find something creative to pass the time.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

You're in a new cycle emphasizing stable energy that supports your practical side. An ability to put correct value on people, places and things is prevalent at this time; this serves you well in business and personal dealings. You make a point of stopping to enjoy life and beauty. Interest in some sort of new flavors in your diet is forecast. An in-depth study of your life helps in making decisions that could affect the rest of your present incarnation. The way you present your message makes it easy to understand; moving forward with a project makes complete sense to you now. You no longer lack the confidence to expect the best for yourself; you're more deserving than you know! It's strongly indicated that your plans for a special event come together later this evening.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You come across as charming and witty when you find yourself socially interacting with those who think like you. If you feel blocked or disconnected, consider that you've created this energy yourself; there's nothing wrong with keeping to yourself to think, but try not to be hard on yourself. You could find your company in demand as those you spend time with seem to follow your lead. The timing's right to make changes in your career if you want something new in this area. You're happy with a large purchase you decide to make. You have strong need for emotional security and balance right now. Relax and let good things come straight to you without your lifting a finger! Home is where you prefer to be later when the weather could turn ugly; a sense of peace and comfort are dominant this evening.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Being on a nice, even keel helps as you try to work with someone who lives a completely different way from you. After thinking things through, you determine that something you want to do isn't practical just now. You feel drawn to new people and ideas that help with your efforts to learn more about things eternal. You're laying the foundation for future success with certain things in mind; some of these seem impossible, but they're not. You shine brightly when stepping up to take something over. You give your best at all times. You move into living life a whole new way during this cycle; exciting new opportunities spur this on. Taking time to look at things through spiritual eyes brings important knowledge. Using past gains to create new ones is highly likely for quite some time to come. You're in a good place.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

You appear to be comfortable on the outside, on the inside you could be experiencing high levels of frustration or anxiety. This isn't a great time for decision making, so you hold off. You tend to romanticize something you probably shouldn't; it's best to see the truth of this matter before you dive in. You receive an interesting invitation to an event you never thought of attending before. Some sort of new class could invigorate your senses. New interests are strongly indicated at this time. Dreams and intuition are at their strongest; listen to what you're being told as there's wisdom to be gained through these spiritual gifts. You could have someone from the past on your mind and this might cause you to look them up. You may have close friends from out of town as guests this evening.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You feel grateful for some decisions you made that make your house a home. A change in your work environment is definitely for the best. You consider calling someone and asking for forgiveness. Your common sense is in strong tune and it guides you down the best path to abundance; opportunities abound in the area of abundance and thriving during the phase you're in now. The heavens indicate movement toward discovering the root of a problem you want to end; this could prove to be very simple. Something regarding your health gets your total attention. You're seen as elegant and attractive by many when you make an appearance at a social event you didn't want to attend. Enjoy sincere compliments while you can! Being surrounded by very beautiful things brings out the best in you.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You answer the call of the outdoors! Your sense of independence and strength seems to be increased by the energy you find in, and draw from, nature. People feel good when they spend time with you today; your inner glow extends outwardly as you're in close union with the universe! New karmic debts are created or paid back with some plans you make today; take care you do no harm. General support and best wishes are present during this entire phase. You're a true and trusted friend. A deeper look into the spiritual side of life awakens your connection to a specific time and place; this could indicate past life memories of another incarnation. Look closely to find the underlying reason for having these memories at this time; it could be important! You continue to add nice pieces to a collection.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

The past intermingles with the present to reveal the truth; acute intuition leads you to knock down emotional walls. Your thoughts and pursuits take on a mystic tone as you contemplate your world and the different paths you've followed. Your tastes are changing drastically and you're willing to follow where this leads. The stars say you've entered a cycle of focusing on finances, health and practicalities. Your dry wit is appreciated today and may bring a valuable new friend into your inner circle. You're in the mood to let bygones be bygones. You're secure with your understanding of the person you are and how you go through life; your values support good choices. You're in a position to come to someone's aid and you're eager to do it. Creating good karma helps you drift into restful sleep tonight.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

You've entered a cycle of deep introspection, and can actually see and accurately weigh your assets; you're forming a better opinion of yourself and what you're doing for your financial and personal wellbeing; it's about time! You have respect for an elder or supervisor; an old person loves you. You let your thoughts stay on the mysteries of life such as the heavens and what comes next. Your evolution is strongly indicated during this time and those around you clearly notice the changes. You separate yourself from the mundane and ordinary facts of life to explore exciting topics. Exploring new technologies is at the fore and you could find an excellent investment opportunity, or ideas of your own could be inspired now. You're profoundly moved by hopes and by letting go of old hurts and grudges.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

The heavens open up to bestow mystical energy into your world; this is persistent throughout the new phase your sun sign has entered. Love could grow between you and a lover or child; this could even mean a pet! Intuition and dreams color your thoughts and actions as you move toward making decisions regarding a tender issue; remember you're not the only one involved in this that could be hurt. Your ability to assess situations is right on and fair if you put your personal wants and opinions to the back and let your inborn sense of fairness prevail. Plans for the week unfold flawlessly and cost much less than you thought; good times unfold regarding expenses and spending! Sex and romance could be the best way to go this evening; your mate loves you! Something you wished for could happen soon.

COUNTRY CODES

| | | | |
|--------------------------|---------|-----------------------|--------|
| Afghanistan | 0093 | Jordan | 00962 |
| Albania | 00355 | Kazakhstan | 007 |
| Algeria | 00213 | Kenya | 00254 |
| Andorra | 00376 | Kiribati | 00686 |
| Angola | 00244 | Kuwait | 00965 |
| Anguilla | 001264 | Kyrgyzstan | 00996 |
| Antigua | 001268 | Laos | 00856 |
| Argentina | 0054 | Latvia | 00371 |
| Armenia | 00374 | Lebanon | 00961 |
| Australia | 0061 | Liberia | 00231 |
| Austria | 0043 | Libya | 00218 |
| Bahamas | 001242 | Lithuania | 00370 |
| Bahrain | 00973 | Luxembourg | 00352 |
| Bangladesh | 00880 | Macau | 00853 |
| Barbados | 001246 | Macedonia | 00389 |
| Belarus | 00375 | Madagascar | 00261 |
| Belgium | 0032 | Majorca | 0034 |
| Belize | 00501 | Malawi | 00265 |
| Benin | 00229 | Malaysia | 0060 |
| Bermuda | 001441 | Maldives | 00960 |
| Bhutan | 00975 | Mali | 00223 |
| Bolivia | 00591 | Malta | 00356 |
| Bosnia | 00387 | Marshall Islands | 00692 |
| Botswana | 00267 | Martinique | 00596 |
| Brazil | 0055 | Mauritania | 00222 |
| Brunei | 00673 | Mauritius | 00230 |
| Bulgaria | 00359 | Mayotte | 00269 |
| Burkina Faso | 00226 | Mexico | 0052 |
| Burundi | 00257 | Micronesia | 00691 |
| Cambodia | 00855 | Moldova | 00373 |
| Cameroon | 00237 | Monaco | 00377 |
| Canada | 001 | Mongolia | 00976 |
| Cape Verde | 00238 | Montserrat | 001664 |
| Cayman Islands | 001345 | Morocco | 00212 |
| Central African Republic | 00236 | Mozambique | 00258 |
| Chad | 00235 | Myanmar (Burma) | 0095 |
| Chile | 0056 | Namibia | 00264 |
| China | 0086 | Nepal | 00977 |
| Colombia | 0057 | Netherlands (Holland) | 0031 |
| Comoros | 00269 | Netherlands Antilles | 00599 |
| Congo | 00242 | New Caledonia | 00687 |
| Cook Islands | 00682 | New Zealand | 0064 |
| Costa Rica | 00506 | Nicaragua | 00505 |
| Croatia | 00385 | Niger | 00227 |
| Cuba | 0053 | Nigeria | 00234 |
| Cyprus | 00357 | Niue | 00683 |
| Cyprus (Northern) | 0090392 | Norfolk Island | 00672 |
| Czech Republic | 00420 | Northern Ireland (UK) | 0044 |
| Denmark | 0045 | North Korea | 00850 |
| Diego Garcia | 00246 | Norway | 0047 |
| Djibouti | 00253 | Oman | 00968 |
| Dominica | 001767 | Pakistan | 0092 |
| Dominican Republic | 001809 | Palau | 00680 |
| Ecuador | 00593 | Panama | 00507 |
| Egypt | 0020 | Papua New Guinea | 00675 |
| El Salvador | 00503 | Paraguay | 001758 |
| England (UK) | 0044 | Peru | 0051 |
| Equatorial Guinea | 00240 | Philippines | 0063 |
| Eritrea | 00291 | Poland | 0048 |
| Estonia | 00372 | Portugal | 00351 |
| Ethiopia | 00251 | Puerto Rico | 001787 |
| Falkland Islands | 00500 | Qatar | 00974 |
| Faroe Islands | 00298 | Romania | 0040 |
| Fiji | 00679 | Russian Federation | 007 |
| Finland | 00358 | Rwanda | 00250 |
| France | 0033 | Saint Helena | 00290 |
| French Guiana | 00594 | Saint Kitts | 001869 |
| French Polynesia | 00689 | Saint Lucia | 001758 |
| Gabon | 00241 | Saint Pierre | 00508 |
| Gambia | 00220 | Saint Vincent | 001784 |
| Georgia | 00995 | Samoa US | 00684 |
| Germany | 0049 | Samoa West | 00685 |
| Ghana | 00233 | San Marino | 00378 |
| Gibraltar | 00350 | Sao Tome | 00239 |
| Greece | 0030 | Saudi Arabia | 00966 |
| Greenland | 00299 | Scotland (UK) | 0044 |
| Grenada | 001473 | Senegal | 00221 |
| Guadeloupe | 00590 | Seychelles | 00284 |
| Guam | 001671 | Sierra Leone | 00232 |
| Guatemala | 00502 | Singapore | 0065 |
| Guinea | 00224 | Slovakia | 00421 |
| Guyana | 00592 | Slovenia | 00386 |
| Haiti | 00509 | Solomon Islands | 00677 |
| Holland (Netherlands) | 0031 | Somalia | 00252 |
| Honduras | 00504 | South Africa | 0027 |
| Hong Kong | 00852 | South Korea | 0082 |
| Hungary | 0036 | Spain | 0034 |
| Ibiza (Spain) | 0034 | Sri Lanka | 0094 |
| Iceland | 00354 | Sudan | 00249 |
| India | 0091 | Suriname | 00597 |
| Indian Ocean | 00873 | Swaziland | 00268 |
| Indonesia | 0062 | Sweden | 0046 |
| Iran | 0098 | Switzerland | 0041 |
| Iraq | 00964 | Syria | 00963 |
| Ireland | 00353 | Taiwan | 00886 |
| Italy | 0039 | Tanzania | 00255 |
| Ivory Coast | 00225 | Thailand | 0066 |
| Jamaica | 001876 | Toga | 00228 |
| Japan | 0081 | Tonga | 00676 |

In Romania, distrust of vaccines kills

BOLDESTI-SCAIENI, Roumanie: Measles still claims young lives in Romania, where nearly 40 children have died in an outbreak that many blame on parents being misled by scare stories that vaccinating them is dangerous. Some 12,000 people have contracted measles since late 2016 in the European Union's second-poorest country, 46 of them died.

Among the dead, 39 were children under the age of three who had not been vaccinated, making Romania

one of the worst affected countries in the ongoing measles outbreak in Europe.

"People are mistrustful because they read all sorts of things on the internet," said Dr Silvana Dan, from the southern regional Prahova Public Health Authority, citing persistent rumours that vaccination causes autism. A girl aged just 11 months died in the region in March after her parents refused to vaccinate her. Measles is a highly contagious viral disease that affects children in partic-

ular but it has largely been brought under control.

The World Health Organization (WHO) says deaths caused by measles plunged from 550,100 in 2000, to just under 90,000 in 2016. Paradoxically, and to the horror of health authorities worldwide, this very success has seen the public let down its guard and question whether vaccination is now really necessary. Local officials say health workers are "on the barricades," doing all they can to get the message across,

especially in rural areas, that measles is a killer which can be stopped.

It is not straightforward. "The reasons for people not being vaccinated are different in different population groups," local WHO representative Miljana Grbic told AFP. "Our research shows that there are specificities such as convenience of services, education, support of family doctors, community support and peer support that play a big role here," Grbic said. —AFP

CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times
THE LEADING INDEPENDENT DAILY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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فهد علي المخيزيم
Consultant Pediatrician إستشاري أطفال
M.B. Bch. FRCPC. FAAP. PEM

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Kuwait Times Classifieds

Friday, April 20, 2018

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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Relatively hot with light to moderate north westerly wind, with speed of 12 - 35 km/h .

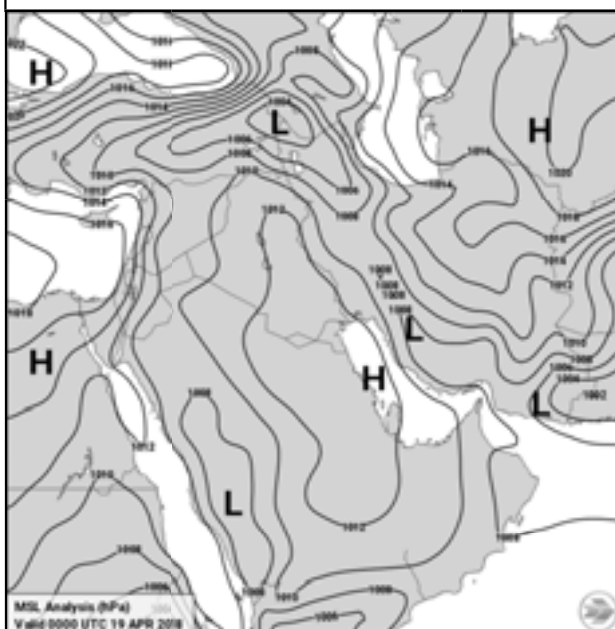
BY NIGHT: Fair with light to moderate north westerly wind, with speed of 08 - 28 km/h .

WEATHER WARNING

No Current Warnings

| STATION | MAX. EXP. | MIN. REC. |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|
| KUWAIT CITY | 34 °C | 23 °C |
| KUWAIT AIRPORT | 34 °C | 16 °C |
| ABDALY | 35 °C | 17 °C |
| BUBYAN | --- °C | --- °C |
| JAHRA | 34 °C | 20 °C |
| FAILAKA ISLAND | 32 °C | 20 °C |
| SALMIYAH | 30 °C | 24 °C |
| AHMADI | 30 °C | 23 °C |
| NUWAISIB | 32 °C | 17 °C |
| WAFRA | 34 °C | 17 °C |
| SALMY | 35 °C | 17 °C |

SFC. CHART 19/04/2018 0000 UTC



4 DAYS FORECAST

| DAY | DATE | WEATHER | Temperatures | | Wind Direction | Wind Speed |
|----------|-------|---|--------------|-------|----------------|--------------|
| | | | MAX. | MIN. | | |
| Friday | 04/20 | Relatively hot +rising dust + scattered clouds will appear later on | 35 °C | 18 °C | SW-SE | 15 - 45 km/h |
| Saturday | 04/21 | Partly cloudy | 34 °C | 22 °C | S-SE | 15 - 40 km/h |
| Sunday | 04/22 | Partly cloudy causing rising dust with a chance for scattered rain | 35 °C | 21 °C | SE | 15 - 45 km/h |
| Monday | 04/23 | Unstable and Partly cloudy causing rising dust with a chance for rain that might be thundery at | 41 °C | 22 °C | SE-SW | 25 - 50 km/h |

PRAYER TIMES

| | |
|---------|-------|
| Fajr | 03:55 |
| Sunrise | 05:18 |
| Zuhr | 11:48 |
| Asr | 15:22 |
| Sunset | 18:17 |
| Isha | 19:37 |

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------|
| MAX. Temp. | 33 °C |
| MIN. Temp. | 17 °C |
| MAX. RH | 55 % |
| MIN. RH | 09 % |
| MAX. Wind | N 46 km/h |
| TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR. | 0 mm |

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Shaikh Irfanahmed Mohammadyusuf, Passport No: J6971528, has changed my name to Bhura Irfanahmed Mohammadyusuf. (C 5393) 17-4-2018

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EMERGENCY



112

Hospitals

| | |
|---------------------------|------------|
| Sabah Hospital | 24812000 |
| Amiri Hospital | 22450005 |
| Maternity Hospital | 24843100 |
| Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital | 25312700 |
| Chest Hospital | 24849400 |
| Farwaniya Hospital | 24892010 |
| Adan Hospital | 23940620 |
| Ibn Sina Hospital | 24840300 |
| Al-Razi Hospital | 24846000 |
| Physiotherapy Hospital | 24874330/9 |

Clinics

| | |
|---------------------|----------|
| Kaizen center | 25716707 |
| Rawda | 22517733 |
| Adaliya | 22517144 |
| Khaldiya | 24848075 |
| Kaifan | 24849807 |
| Shamiya | 24848913 |
| Shuwaikh | 24814507 |
| Abdullah Salem | 22549134 |
| Nuzha | 22526804 |
| Industrial Shuwaikh | 24814764 |
| Qadsiya | 22515088 |
| Dasmah | 22532265 |
| Bneid Al-Gar | 22531908 |
| Shaab | 22518752 |
| Qibla | 22459381 |
| Ayoun Al-Qibla | 22451082 |
| Mirqab | 22456536 |
| Sharq | 22465401 |
| Salmiya | 25746401 |

Business

FRIDAY, APRIL 20, 2018

38 In Iraq's oil-rich Basra, shanty towns flourish



40 Jack Ma: Alibaba 'doing a lot of research' on driverless cars



41 China ready to deal with any fallout from US trade row



KUWAIT: In this file photo, stock traders monitor share prices on the trading floor of the Boursa Kuwait. —KUNA

Boursa Kuwait holds AGM

Saad Al-Mutawa elected as chairman, Sulaiman Al-Marzouq as VC

KUWAIT: Boursa Kuwait held its Annual General Meeting with an attendance rate of 100 percent. The Assembly approved the financial statements for the financial year ending 31 December 2017 while also electing the board of directors for the next three years.

The elected board is composed of Yacoub Yousef bin Ali, Dr Salah Abdullah Al-Othman, Saad Faisal Al-Mutawa, Basel Abdulwahab Al-Zaid, Sulaiman Al-Shaheen Al-Rabea, Hussam Abdulrahman Al-Bassam, Sulaiman Nabeel bin Salama, and Sulaiman Barrak Al-Marzouq.

Boursa Kuwait also confirmed that the Board has chosen Saad Faisal Al-Mutawa as the new company Chairman, with Sulaiman Barrak Al-Marzouq acting as Vice Chairman.

The company also disclosed that it has generated net profits of KD 4,078,062 for the financial year ending December 31, 2017, and a total revenue of KD 10,398, 996, while adding that gross profits, before discounting interest, taxes, and consumptions,

added up to KD 4,253,359.

New Chairman Saad Faisal Al-Mutawa commented at the meeting that "Boursa Kuwait will continue implementing its strategic development plan to improve the Kuwaiti capital market, adding on the tremendous progress that we have accomplished since taking over the day-to-day dealings of the Kuwait Stock Exchange. I would like to thank the previous board for their dedication and implementation of the many strategic projects and initiatives, as well as their impressive leadership of the company."

Al-Mutawa also stressed the importance of cooperation between all parties under the stewardship of the Capital Markets Authority, which helped Boursa Kuwait overcome many obstacles and challenges and assisted in many successes, chief among them the launch of phase two of Boursa Kuwait's Market Development Plan and the listing of the Kuwaiti Stock Exchange in FTSE Russell's index for emerging markets.



Saad Faisal Al-Mutawa



Sulaiman Barrak Al-Marzouq

Business

In Iraq's oil-rich Basra, shanty towns flourish

Basra's informal settlements remain an anarchic clutter

BASRA: From his small home nestled alongside train tracks in the southern Iraqi province of Basra, Sultan Nayef looks out at plumes of smoke billowing across an expanse of oil fields.

Like thousands of others, the unemployed 25-year-old moved to oil-rich Basra in the hope of finding work in the energy industry, Iraq's primary source of wealth. Instead, he and many others like him live in cramped and chaotic shanty towns in a province already suffering from a lack of infrastructure. Absent of any urban planning or public services, Basra's informal settlements are an anarchic clutter of breeze-block homes and ad-hoc electricity wires.

"All we get from oil is pollution," said Sultan who, along with his four brothers, still relies on his parents for living expenses. A small stone wall is the only thing keeping cows and sheep grazing in a grassy field behind him from wandering into oil fields where burning gas flares emit thick black smoke.

Most of the young people arriving in Iraq's only coastal oil province hoped to secure high-paying jobs with foreign companies. "But most companies import their employees from abroad," said Nayef, a resident of the Zoubeir district south of Basra city.

At least 18 percent of Iraqi youth are unemployed, with rates even higher among college graduates.

'Can't buy a centimeter'

According to the UN, Iraq's oil sector accounts for 65 percent of the country's gross domestic product but only one percent of its labor force. Even for those who work, buying a home is often only a dream.

"My husband is a civil servant, but with his salary we can't even buy a centimeter of land," said Umm Ahmed. Even though they are against "the idea of squatting", she and her family were forced to build a makeshift home on government land. The municipality has already destroyed their home once. "We had to completely rebuild it," the 48-year-old told AFP, her face framed by a long black veil. Local authorities say the land belongs to the state, denouncing the illegal structures and the theft of water and electricity.

The last study on Basra's informal settlements was completed in 2014, just a few months before the Islamic State jihadist group swept across Iraq seizing nearly a third of the country.

At the time, there were more than 48,500 informal homes in the province, said Zahra Al-Jebari, head of urban planning at Basra's provincial council. Today "there are many more, but there is no figure," she told AFP.

Illegal construction

Many internal refugees displaced by IS fled to Basra, untouched by the jihadist takeover, often finding homes in shanty towns. Nearly 10



BASRA: Iraqi boys pose for a photo on a trailer in al-Zubair, south of Basra. Informal housing settlements are flourishing in the oil-rich province of Basra, as Iraqis who have failed to find work in the energy industry and internal refugees struggle to find affordable housing. — AFP

percent of Iraqis live in informal settlements, one fifth of them in Basra, according to the ministry of planning.

The only other province hit harder by illegal construction is Baghdad. Basra authorities say they lose money every time a home is built ille-

gally, as Baghdad bases provincial budgets on the number of officially registered residents. Taxes in informal settlements are also left unpaid, said Jebari, adding the budget deficit was acutely felt in "allocations to education, health and other services". — AFP

Abu Dhabi industrial zone attracts \$1bn FDI from China

ABU DHABI: Foreign direct investments from Chinese companies in Abu Dhabi's industrial free zone has touched \$1 billion in less than a year and is expected to rise when the UAE's new investment law takes effect, officials said yesterday. Chinese companies are seizing opportunities in the Gulf as the world's second-biggest economy seeks to expand its influence overseas with its ambition to rebuild Silk Road trade routes. Last year, five Chinese companies from Jiangsu province set up base in the Khalifa Industrial Zone Abu Dhabi (Kizad) to build various industries with an initial investment of \$300 million.

Since then, 10 Chinese companies have invested in Kizad, taking the total number of companies to 15 and value of investments to \$1 billion, Mohamed Juma al Shamsi, chief executive of Abu Dhabi Ports told a business forum. Abu Dhabi Ports Co manages Kizad as well as the ports in the emirate. "Given the interest of Chinese companies, we expect more investments to flow," al Shamsi said. Three new companies in the chemicals, construction and oil sectors signed agreements on Thursday to invest and set up businesses in Kizad. — Reuters

FDI in Tunisia rises a quarter at start of 2018

TUNIS: Foreign direct investment in Tunisia rose by 27 percent in the first quarter this year compared with a year earlier, official figures showed yesterday, as the government seeks to cut red tape to attract new investment. The figure for the period from January to March was 560 million dinars (\$230 million), the Foreign Investment Promotion Agency said. The figure was driven by industrial investment, which grew by 45 percent.

Tunisia, which last year set up a new investment law, is trying to attract foreign investors after years of stagnation due to strikes and the fragile security situation since the 2011 uprising that unseated veteran ruler Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali. The new law gives foreign investors more flexibility to transfer funds, including profits, out of the country. It also establishes a fund for investment which will help finance infrastructure projects, and funding to spur investors to launch big projects in marginalized areas of the country.

In its first report on the North African country's economy, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) said last month urged Tunisia to improve its business climate and cut red tape to attract more investment and create jobs. Prime Minister Youssef Chahed last week ordered the cancellation of the many administrative licences that hinder the government's efforts to attract investors. This week, some documents required for projects became available online. — Reuters

Apple, P&G and chip stocks lead Wall St lower

NEW YORK: Wall Street slid yesterday morning, weighed down by a broad-based slump in technology stocks from Apple to chip-makers as well as a tumble in consumer staples such as Procter & Gamble. A warning from Taiwan Semiconductor (TSMC), the world's largest contract chipmaker and an Apple supplier, on soft demand for smartphones and on the semiconductor industry's growth this year sparked a tumble in chip stocks.

TSMC's US-listed shares fell 5.2 percent. Intel declined 2.2 percent and Nvidia sank 1.7 percent. Each of the stocks on the Philadelphia SE Semiconductor index was in the red, with the index down 2.7 percent. Apple shares also fell 1.8 percent, with at least two analysts blaming the decline on TSMC's warning. The stock was the biggest drag on the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq.

At 9:54 am EDT the Dow Jones Industrial Average was down 92.72 points, or 0.37 percent, at 24,655.35, the S&P 500 was down 13.44 points, or 0.50 percent, at 2,695.20 and the Nasdaq Composite was down 38.37 points, or 0.53 percent, at 7,256.87.

The consumer staples sector declined 2.5 percent. The biggest drag was a 12.5 percent drop in Philip Morris after its revenue missed estimates. Also weighing was Procter & Gamble, which dropped 3.2 percent after the Dow component said shrinking retailer inventories and higher commodities and transportation costs squeezed its margins. Still, not everything was gloomy. American Express was up 3.4 percent after the credit card issuer topped Wall Street profit estimates. — Reuters

Business

US recession risks seen rising sharply in 2019, 2020: Survey

US expansion part of a global upturn in industrial activity

LONDON: Energy market professionals estimate there is a 40 percent chance of the US economy entering recession before the end of next year, rising to a little over 50 percent before the end of 2020. The results are based on a survey sent by Reuters to 7,000 energy market professionals between April 13 and April 17, with responses received from 700.

There is a wide dispersion of views, and most see only a low risk of recession in 2018, but the assessed probability increases significantly in 2019 and especially 2020. The state of the global economy is one of the most important drivers for oil consumption and prices, so the economic outlook is crucial to the calculations of OPEC and other oil suppliers.

The United States now accounts for less than one-fifth of global economic activity, but the rest of the world is unlikely to grow strongly if the United States is in recession, so it makes a useful proxy for global growth. Predicting turning points in the economic and trade cycles is notoriously difficult, but the current global expansion shows increasing signs of maturity and escalating trade tensions create clear downside risks. OPEC and its allies, as well as other oil producers, need to incorporate the increasing probability of a US recession and global slowdown when projecting oil consumption and prices in 2019 and 2020.

Mature expansion

The current US economic expansion started in July 2009 and is already 106 months old, according to the Business Cycle Dating Committee of the National Bureau of Economic Research. The current expansion will become the second-longest on record

next month, surpassing the long boom of the 1960s. If the economy is still expanding in July 2019, it will become the longest on record, passing the long boom of the 1990s. The US expansion is part of a synchronized global upturn in industrial activity and trade that is lifting consumption of oil and other commodities. The global economy continues to display broad-based momentum and is predicted to remain healthy in 2018 and 2019, according to the International Monetary Fund. World output increased by 3.8 percent in 2017 and is forecast to rise by 3.9 percent in both 2018 and 2019 ("Global economy: good news for now but trade tensions a threat", IMF, April 17).

Global trade volumes increased last year at the fastest rate since 2011, when the global economy was still rebounding from the financial crisis, according to the World Trade Organisation.

The WTO forecasts trade will grow nearly as fast in 2018 and 2019, which would be the best run of growth since before the financial crisis.

Trade threats

The current cyclical expansion has considerable momentum in the short term, which should ensure that it continues in the short term, but there is increased anxiety about whether it will be sustained in 2019 and 2020. Both the WTO and the IMF have warned about potential downside risks arising from increasing trade tensions between the United States and China.

The recent exchange of tariff threats between Washington and Beijing contains a substantial element of bluffing so it is hard to estimate the risks that the threats will turn into an actual trade war.

quarters in favour of Rotterdam. The company was founded in 1930 after the Dutch margarine producer Margarien Unie merged with British soapmaker Lever Brothers. It has over 400 brands in its portfolio, including household names like yeast extract Marmite, PG Tips tea and Persil washing powder, Knorr soup as well as Dove beauty products and Magnum ice-cream.

Shareholder concerns

Until now, it has maintained a dual-headed structure, with listings on the London, Amsterdam and New York stock exchanges. But last month, the company announced it was choosing The Netherlands to host its headquarters, dealing a blow to Britain's efforts to keep multinational companies onside following Brexit. The move came in the wake of a failed hostile bid by US rival Kraft Heinz last year, which analysts said played a key role in Unilever's decision as the Netherlands has stronger takeover protection rules.

Sources told the Financial Times the company has been holding meetings with British-based shareholders to convince them it is the right move. But some top shareholders told the British financial daily they are "extremely worried" about the plans, which would likely see Unilever excluded from the FTSE 100. Unilever employs some 169,000 people around the world, but the change in its structure will have no impact on its 7,300 employees in Britain and 3,100 in the Netherlands, the company said.

As it prepares to shed its spreads, Unilever revealed that sales without that division stood at 11.9 billion euros, also a 5.2 percent drop on the first quarter in 2017.

The first quarter results failed to impress markets, with shares dropping 2.33 percent to 45.14 euros a share by 0830 GMT on the Amsterdam AEX bourse. —Reuters



BRADDOCK: In this file photo, a worker leaves US Steel Edgar Thomson Steel Works in Braddock, Pennsylvania. Despite continued economic growth, US businesses and farmers are increasingly concerned about the trade spat with China which already has pushed prices higher, according to a Federal Reserve survey released on Wednesday. —AFP

But even if the tariffs are never imposed, the increased uncertainty could have a damaging impact on business confidence and investment plans. Survey respondents were evenly divided about whether the trade tensions would have a damaging impact on global growth. Some 48 percent thought trade tensions would harm growth between 2018 and 2020, which also implies 52 percent thought they would not or were unsure. Respondents from North America were slightly less concerned than those in other regions, about the effect of trade threats, with only 45

percent thinking they would prove harmful. In contrast, respondents from other regions put the probability of trade tensions damaging global growth marginally higher at 53 percent.

U.S. respondents may be more sanguine about the use of tariff threats as a negotiating tactic and/or that tariffs would benefit the domestic economy. Respondents from the rest of the world are slightly more worried, perhaps more concerned about the risk of miscalculation and the damage to confidence. —Reuters

Unilever spreads the love from margarine sale

THE HAGUE: Anglo-Dutch consumer giant Unilever yesterday announced a six billion euros (\$7.4 billion) buy-back scheme ahead of the spin-off of its spreads division, as it braces for major company changes. Sales however in the first quarter were down 5.2 percent to 12.6 billion euros, falling from 13.3 billion euros in the same period in 2017, it reported, citing a negative impact from currency exchanges.

Chief executive Pol Polman voiced confidence however ahead of the sale of its margarine division, and amid plans to drop London as one of its two bases. "The first quarter demonstrates another good volume-driven performance across all three divisions," Polman said in a statement, highlighting a 4.0 percent sales growth in emerging markets. He revealed that a six billion euros buy-back program would be launched in May "to return the expected after-tax proceeds from the spreads disposal. We are raising the dividend by 8.0 percent, reflecting confidence in our outlook."

The company said in December that it had sealed a 6.8 billion euro deal to sell its spreads division to US private equity giant KKR, and Polman said the move was expected to be completed "in the middle of the year." Its margarine division includes such familiar names as Flora, Blue Band and Rama.

In another major shake-up, the company is also readying to end its dual-headed structure, abandoning its London head-

UK retail sales mauled by 'Beast from East' icy weather

LONDON: British retail sales slid 1.2 percent in March, as "Beast from the East" freezing weather sliced demand for car fuel but boosted online purchasing, official data showed yesterday. "The month-on-month growth rate fell by 1.2 percent due to a large fall of 7.4 percent from petrol sales; a likely consequence of adverse weather conditions, which impacted travel," the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement.

Analysts' consensus forecast had been for a drop of 0.6 percent. The ONS added that "department stores were the only sector to show positive growth in March at 0.8 percent, with feedback from retailers suggesting that online offers for Mothering Sunday and Easter boosted Internet sales more than usual during the adverse weather". Britain suffered freezing temperatures from late February through to March as blasts of icy weather from Siberia engulfed Europe. Yesterday's retail sales data had been keenly awaited by markets for further clues on the outlook for UK interest rates.

"The figures, combined with the inflation and labor market data earlier in the week won't make for easy reading for the Bank of England which has been prepping investors for a rate hike... in May," said Craig Erlam, senior market analyst at Oanda. "Softer inflation and weak consumer spending at a time when the economy is growing at a slow pace and facing the uncertainty of Brexit makes the case for a rate hike less compelling." —AFP

Business

Jack Ma: Alibaba 'doing a lot of research' on driverless cars

Alibaba joining a global race to shape the future of driving

BANGKOK: E-commerce giant Alibaba is steering resources towards driverless car technology, its CEO Jack Ma confirmed yesterday, joining a global race to shape the future of driving.

Despite fresh safety fears after a woman was hit and killed by a self-driving Uber vehicle in the US last month, many tech giants like Google as well as automakers are accelerating plans in an industry attracting billions of dollars. The competition is heating up in China, the world's largest car market, with internet firm and Alibaba rival Baidu recently predicting that self-driving vehicles will hit the road in the country within three to five years.

Both Baidu and Chinese tech giant Tencent are pursuing the technology, stirring speculation about Alibaba's plans. "We've been doing a lot of research on driverless things," Ma told reporters on Thursday while on a business trip to Bangkok. "What we want to do is (figure out) how we can make the cars more automatic, more friendly, more like a partner of human beings rather than just a driving tool," he said.

Ma was speaking at a press conference in Bangkok after signing agreements with the Thai government, including a more than \$300 million investment in a "digital hub" in eastern Thailand aimed at connecting regional markets.

"I believe our children will only work four hours a day and four days a week or maybe three days a week, but they still will tell us they are very busy. Why are they busy? They are in cars," he added.

Ma did not elaborate on the company's plans but said the purpose was not to commercially compete with rivals Tencent and Baidu. Chinese authorities approved regulations this month to allow for local driverless road tests, according to state-backed media, which reported on Wednesday that Alibaba was adding staff to work on the technology.

Self-driving cars hold the promise of being more attentive and quicker to react than humans at the wheels, while also allowing people to use travel time more productively or pleasantly. —AFP



SHANGHAI: A self-driving car is displayed at the China International Technology Fair in Shanghai yesterday. —AFP

Trump, Japan's Abe agree to intensify trade talks

PALM BEACH, Fla: US President Donald Trump and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said on Wednesday they had agreed to intensify trade consultations between the two longtime allies, with an aim to expand investment and trade between their countries.

"President Trump and I agreed to start talks for free, fair and reciprocal trade deals," Abe said at a joint news conference with Trump. Trump reaffirmed his desire at the news conference to address trade imbalances with Japan, saying he preferred one-on-one talks to negotiate a bilateral deal aimed at trimming the US trade deficit.

Japanese stocks rallied to a seven-week high, partly due to relief that Trump did not mention the value of the yen or criticize Japan's monetary policy. While the leaders said they had agreed to have top advisers pursue talks, Abe made clear that differences remained in each country's approach.

"On the US side, they are interested in a bilateral deal," Abe told reporters. "Our country's position is that TPP is the best for both of our countries," he added, referring to the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal. The TPP was sought by former Democratic President Barack Obama. Trump abandoned it during his first weeks in office, saying it was not a good deal for the United States.

"I don't want to go back into TPP, but if they offered us a deal that I can't refuse on behalf of the United States, I would do it," Trump said.

"But I like bilateral better. I think it's better



PALM BEACH: US President Donald Trump and Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe take part in a working lunch at Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida on Wednesday. —AFP

Moody's says Russian economy resilient to latest US sanctions

MOSCOW: Rating agency Moody's Investors Service said on Wednesday Russia's strong public and external finances would shield its economy from the impact of the latest US sanctions. However, the sanctions will be credit negative for some Russian debt issuers, especially Russian aluminum giant United Company Rusal Plc, Moody's said in a report.

The Russian banking system has enough earnings capacity for absorbing credit losses arising from exposures to sanctioned companies, the rating agency said. Moody's assessment is in contrast to that of Fitch Ratings, which said last week the US sanctions would limit Russia's potential economic growth and severely impact targeted companies.

The US Treasury imposed sanctions earlier this month on seven Russian oligarchs and 12 companies they own or control, as well as 17 senior Russian government officials. Moscow calls these sanctions unlawful and has warned retaliation. "Russia's sovereign credit profile—its rating is Ba1 with a positive outlook—is well positioned to withstand the impact of new sanctions," said Kristin Lindow, a Moody's Senior Vice President and co-author of the report.

"Higher oil prices will help the government to make further progress in rebuilding its fiscal savings."

The risk to Russia's credit profile comes from the possibility of Russian entities being cut off from the international capital market for some time, Moody's noted. —Reuters

for our country. I think it's better for our workers, and I much would prefer a bilateral deal, a deal directly with Japan," he added.

The next task is for US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and Japan's Economy Minister Toshimitsu Motegi to lead talks on trade and reach a conclusion that is agreeable to both sides.

The director the White House's National Economic Council, Larry Kudlow, said on Tuesday the US government wants Japan to open up its politically sensitive agriculture market, but this is a move Japan is likely to resist. Trump last month imposed a 25 percent tariff on steel imports and a 10 percent tariff on aluminum imports that have been in place for about three weeks.

He said the tariffs had brought many coun-

tries to the negotiating table and that he may take them off of steel and aluminum imported from Japan if the two countries can come to a trade agreement.

The Trump administration granted temporary tariff exemptions to several other US allies but not Japan. Just after the tariffs took effect, South Korea agreed to a permanent steel exemption in exchange for a new quota that effectively cuts its steel shipments by 30 percent.

Abe said that Japanese steel and aluminum did not "exert any negative influence" on US security. "It's our position that the quality of Japanese products is high and many of these products are difficult to be replaced with. They are greatly contributing to US industries and employment," Abe said. —Reuters

Business

China ready to deal with any fallout from US trade row

Beijing sees little impact on Chinese industries

BEIJING: China is well prepared to handle any negative effects from its trade dispute with the United States, the commerce ministry said yesterday, adding that Beijing's tariff hikes on US imports will not have a big impact overall on its domestic industries. It would be a miscalculation by the United States if its intention is to contain China's rise, ministry spokesman Gao Feng said at a regular media briefing in Beijing.

"If the US attempts to use protectionist trade policies to contain China's development and force China to make concessions even at the costs of companies' interests, it has taken a miscalculated step," Gao said. In the latest escalations in the widening trade row, the US said this week it had banned American companies from selling parts to Chinese telecom equipment maker ZTE for seven years, while China on Tuesday announced hefty anti-dumping tariffs on imports of US sorghum and measures on synthetic rubber imports from the US, EU and Singapore yesterday.

"We are capable of resolving the challenges created by China-US trade frictions," said Gao.

Responding to a Reuters question, Gao said Beijing hopes Washington will not underestimate China's resolve to fight back. "We will relentlessly fight back," he said, adding that China will take any necessary measures at any time in response to the US move against ZTE.

Most analysts believe the two sides will

eventually reach a compromise and avoid a full-blown trade war. But so far, China and the US have held no formal trade talks, Gao said.

On April 2, China slapped additional import taxes on 128 US products including frozen pork and wine, in response to US duties on imports of aluminum and steel. Two days later, China warned it was considering increasing duties on an additional 106 US imports, hitting back at the US's plan to levy duties on \$50 billion of Chinese goods following a months-long intellectual property probe.

A full-scale trade war between the world's two economic superpowers would hurt both Chinese and US exports and have a negative impact on growth in the two countries, as well as probably lead to collateral damage for other countries.

The global economy will expand this year at its fastest pace since 2010, but trade protectionism could quickly slow it down, the latest Reuters polls of over 500 economists worldwide suggest. China's economy grew at a slightly faster-than-expected pace of 6.8 percent in the first quarter. But a surprise move by China's central bank to cut the amount of cash that lenders must keep in reserves on the same day rattled investors who took it as a sign Beijing is worried about economic growth momentum.

Earlier yesterday, China's foreign exchange



NANTONG: Chinese employees packaging duck eggs at a factory in Nantong in China's eastern Jiangsu province. China's economy grew a forecast-beating 6.8 percent in the first quarter, official data showed. —AFP

regulator said that any potential impact on the nation's cross-border capital flows stemming from Sino-US trade frictions can be controlled,

and vowed to continue with plans to further open up capital markets in the world's second-biggest economy. —Reuters

More than half of world's wealthy expect to live to 100: Survey

LONDON: More than half of wealthy investors around the world expect to live to the age of 100, with almost two in three planning to work longer in life to afford a comfortable retirement, according to a survey yesterday.

The UBS Investor Watch, which tracks the sentiments of more than 5,000 people with at least \$1 million in assets, showed nine out of 10 were adjusting spending habits and making long-term investments to finance their longevity. But around one-in-four respondents based in the United States and Britain said they were not making any such financial changes, highlighting a shortfall in retirement planning in two of the world's most important economies as life expectancy rises, especially among the rich.

"The idea of living to 100 would have seemed absurd up until recently. Now, it's destined to become commonplace," Nick Tucker, Head of UK Domestic at UBS Wealth Management, said. Tucker said prospective centenarians needed to plan for a 30 or 40-year retirement. That meant making and protecting wealth across all market cycles during that time, and deciding how to share their money more effectively with descendants. —Reuters

Fire-ravaged Russian mall cuts costs under financial squeeze

KEMEROVO, Russia: The company behind a Russian shopping mall where a fire recently killed 64 people, most of them children, had sought to slash costs amid financial losses according to interviews with former employees, their relatives, and owners of retail space in the mall.

Investigators also say the company appears to have cut corners on construction that may have contributed to the loss of life. The mall's management company, Kemerovskiy Konditerskiy Kombinat, or KKK, replaced long-serving workers with less experienced ones and reduced staff, according to interviews with two people who had worked for the company. In one instance, it cut the number of security guards at the four-storey shopping center to three from seven, according to the security company and people who had worked for KKK.

KKK's parent company, Konditerus Kom, in a statement said it is working with investigators and wouldn't comment while the probe was ongoing. Konditerus Kom confirmed the mall is partly owned by KKK but wouldn't provide the size of the stake. It said shareholders of Konditerus Kom, including Denis Shtengelov, were not involved in the operational management of the mall. The com-

pany didn't identify the other owners.

Shtengelov is director and co-owner of Russian snack food company KDV Group, which Konditerus Kom is also the parent of. Shtengelov, who is based in Australia, didn't respond to requests for comment. KDV referred questions to Konditerus Kom. KKK couldn't be reached by phone for comment and a message sent to a publicly-listed email address bounced back. In a March 26 interview with Russian newspaper Vedomosti, Shtengelov said he had been the main investor in the shopping complex and after some of it was sold to parties he didn't disclose he continued to own just under half via Konditerus Kom.

"Illegal development"

When fire broke out on Sunday, March 25, during the first weekend of a school holiday, the mall's alarm system failed to activate leaving people without warning and engulfing visitors in floods of thick, black smoke. Emergency exit doors remained closed and dozens died trapped inside a cinema.

Russian investigators, whose probe is ongoing, say the most likely cause of the fire was an electrical short circuit. Investigators have said the Winter Cherry mall was an "illegal development" because it opened without a construction permit, and that "resulted in the death of visitors."

The chief national fire safety inspector at the Ministry of Emergency Situations said the ministry had rejected the building's permit request in 2013

because it wasn't in line with safety norms.

Investigators point to problems in the building's construction, including high-voltage cables laid through the middle of the hall, which they say violates regulations. They also cite witnesses saying cables hung down over a children's ball pit, exactly where they believe a short circuit sparked the fire.

KKK's general director Yulia Bogdanova, who faces charges of violating fire safety demands that resulted in the death of multiple people, denied she was guilty in court. "I did everything to make sure the mall's visitors were safe and comfortable," she said. Bogdanova didn't respond to attempts to contact her prior to her arrest. Contacted by Reuters for this story, a lawyer for Bogdanova had no further comment. Five others, including Bogdanova's technical director, three contractors and the manager of the mall's entertainment department, have denied charges of manslaughter and violating safety regulations.

A government official responsible for monitoring construction has denied an abuse-of-office charge. A fireman has also been charged with negligence. The fireman's lawyer said her client was "absolutely not guilty" and said they had appealed the decision to charge him.

Heavy loss

Developed on the site of a former factory, Kemerovo's Winter Cherry mall opened its doors in 2013. A newly-built wing, which doubled the size of the property, was where the fire started. —Reuters

Sports

Japan female mayor battles 'sexist' men-only sumo rule

Treat men and women equally at ceremonies and events

TOKYO: A female mayor at the centre of a fierce debate over allowing women into the sumo ring vowed yesterday never to back down as she lodged a formal protest. "I won't give up this time around... I'm determined to make a petition every six months," Tomoko Nakagawa said before taking her case to the sumo authorities in Tokyo. "I want them never to leave this issue vague. I want the association to hear this voice clearly and start a debate on a review" of the practice of not allowing women into the sumo ring.

Nakagawa later held a 30-minute meeting with senior sumo officials to urge them to treat men and women equally at ceremonies and events. The officials told her the ban on women entering the ring was "tradition but not discrimination" but

promised to discuss the issue at a meeting of executive officials, Nakagawa told reporters after the closed-door meeting. Nakagawa said the officials were "sincere" and "gentle" but she also felt a "strong" determination to respect the status quo.

The association was not immediately available for comment. The issue hit the headlines nationally and internationally when women, including at least one nurse, were shooed out of a sumo ring as they tried to help a man during a

medical emergency. In footage that was widely broadcast on national news bulletins, several women rushed into the ring in Maizuru, northwest of Kyoto, after a local mayor collapsed while giving a speech.

But as the women attempted to help the mayor, multiple announcements were made over loudspeakers asking them to leave the ring. The rings where sumo is practiced, known as sumo dohyo, are seen as sacred places. Sumo is closely interlinked with the native Shinto faith,

which considers women to be ritually unclean, meaning they are barred from stepping into the ring. But Nakagawa, the administrative head of the western city of Takarazuka, described this as "discrimination". "While emphasizing sumo's prestige and its

being the 'national' sport, they are ousting women to promote nationalism," she said.

She has been battling for the right to make a speech from the sumo ring, something her male counterparts have regularly done. Earlier this month, Nakagawa lost her fight to speak from a sumo ring but slammed the ban as she delivered a speech from a podium outside the ring. "I'm a female mayor but I am a human being ... but because I am a woman, despite being a mayor, I cannot make a speech in the ring." "It is regret-

“ Tradition but not discrimination ”



TOKYO: Tomoko Nakagawa (top C), the mayor of the western Japanese city of Takarazuka, answers questions during a press briefing after submitting her request to the Japan Sumo Association. —AFP

table and mortifying," she said, drawing cheers from the crowd. Two days later, a male mayor delivered a speech from a ring.

'Safety concerns'

Citing "tradition" is just a way of keeping a lid on discussing the habit, Nakagawa said. "Japanese society has been putting off discussions on issues that should be discussed," said Nakagawa, one of only 19 female mayors among around 700 cities across the country. "If you

don't change unreasonable things, Japan will forever be lagging behind when it comes to women's issues," she told reporters.

The head of the sumo association, who goes by the name Hakkaku, apologised after the female nurses were ordered to leave the ring, describing it as "an inappropriate act" in a situation that involved someone's health. But the association sparked fresh controversy after it requested girls be prevented from participating in sumo events, citing "safety concerns". —AFP

IOC monitors Samsung's lobbying claims

NEW DELHI: The Olympics ethics watchdog will "monitor" developments after South Korean media said Samsung carried out illicit lobbying for Pyeongchang to be awarded this year's Winter Games, IOC president Thomas Bach said yesterday. Samsung, a top Olympics sponsor, has denied the claims made by the SBS television network that the company offered incentives to get votes from International Olympic Committee members.

Bach told a press conference during a visit to New Delhi that the allegations "have been clearly denied by Samsung, this is all that we know so far. "But I am sure that our ethics commission will monitor the situation," he added. SBS TV said it had obtained copies of 137 emails including messages between Samsung ex-

ecutives and Papa Massata Diack—the son of the scandal-tainted former International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) president Lamine Diack.

The mails included one listing 27 IOC members with voting rights in the decision for the 2018 Games, which was contested by Pyeongchang, Munich in Germany and Annecy in France. The report said Papa Diack had promised to convince each of the named members to vote for Pyeongchang. In one 2010 mail Diack requested \$12 million in funds—including a three-year, \$9.5 million sponsorship for the IAAF's Diamond League athletics meetings. He also asked for a "success fee".

The emails were confiscated by South Korean prosecutors last year during a graft investigation into former president Park Geun-hye, SBS said. As a top level Olympics sponsor, Samsung is not allowed to lobby for Games venue candidates. It strongly denied the allegations last week. "Samsung has never engaged in any illegal lobbying activities to have Pyeongchang win the bidding", the South Korean tech giant said in a statement. —AFP

All Blacks slam Folau anti-gay comments

WELLINGTON: All Black halfback TJ Perenara has become the highest-profile rugby player to condemn Wallaby Israel Folau's anti-gay comments, with New Zealand legend Michael Jones also saying he disagreed with the Australian player's stance. Perenara, who shares Polynesian heritage with Folau, said homophobic remarks from an athlete of Folau's stature were particularly hurtful to young Maori and Pacific islanders struggling with their identity.

"You don't need to look far to know that young Maori/PI are overrepresented in youth suicide statistics and, as I understand it, even more so when you look to those who are part of the Rainbow community," he tweeted late Wednesday. "Comments that cause further harm cannot be tolerated." The 45-Test All Black added: "As professional rugby players, whether we like it or not, we are role models for a lot of young people."

Folau wrote on social media this month that God's plan for gay people was hell unless they repent their sins. He later explained that his remarks were prompted by deeply-held religious beliefs and Rugby Australia decided against

sanctioning him. Jones, the loose forward who fired the All Blacks to victory in the inaugural World Cup in 1987, said his own faith did not prevent him from accepting gays.

A devout Christian from a Polynesian background who refused to play on Sundays during his international career, Jones said his heart went out to Folau. "There's members of my family from those (gay) communities and we love them, they're integral in our lives and they're a big part of who we are," he told reporters. "Being able to express yourself is important, but doing it respectfully, with wisdom. There needs to be a lot of love and grace, particularly as Christians."

Waikato Chiefs back Brad Weber became the first player to challenge Folau about his comments this week, saying they left him disgusted. Perenara said young people should ignore them and realise "it's OK to be you, you are perfect as you are". "I am 100 percent against the comments that were made by Israel. It was not ok to say that," he tweeted. "It's not an attitude I want to see in the game I love."

New Zealand Herald rugby writer Gregor Paul welcomed the fact that players now felt comfortable calling out intolerance, rather than shying away from controversy. "The dumb jock card may now be consigned to history, no longer valid or appropriate for players to use," he wrote. "They are professional athletes some of the time, but human all of the time and because of that, players have the same responsibility as everyone else to speak out against wrongdoing." —AFP

Sports

Modi forecasts IPL players will earn '\$1 million a game'

Could earn as much as English Premier League footballers

LONDON: Indian Premier League founder Lalit Modi believes there will come a time when players will earn \$1 million dollars per game while warning that the traditional program of matches between countries "will disappear". A Twenty20 domestic franchise competition launched a decade ago, which has spawned a host of imitators worldwide, the IPL is now the most lucrative of all cricket tournaments.

"The IPL is here to stay," Modi told Britain's Daily Telegraph newspaper in an interview published Thursday. "It will be the dominant sporting league in the world." IPL teams are bankrolled by wealthy businessmen operating

in an environment where the passion for cricket in India, the world's second-most populous nation, makes the game an attractive target for sponsors and broadcasters.

At present there is a team salary cap, with the likes of England all-rounder Ben Stokes earning \$1.95 million per season from the Rajasthan Royals. But Modi believes that if that \$12 million cap is relaxed, leading IPL players could earn as much as English Premier League footballers and even NFL stars. That would have a huge impact on international cricket, with players torn between making an IPL fortune and representing their countries. "You will see players making \$1-\$2m a game," said Modi. "It will happen sooner rather than later. "In a free market the person

with the deepest pockets will win. The players will gravitate towards who pays the biggest salary."

'Irrelevant' ICC

Meanwhile, in a chilling argument for cricket traditionalists, London-based Modi forecast the end of country versus country contests, which effectively finance professional cricket structures all round the world and the demise of the International Cricket Council, the sport's global governing body.

"Today international cricket does not matter," he said. "It is of zero value to the Indian fan. "Tomorrow you will see bilateral cricket disappear," Modi added. "Big series will happen once every three or four years like the World Cup. "The ICC will become an irrelevant body. It will be full of fat lugs who have no power. They can scream and shout now and in the future they will threaten to throw India out if they try to expand the IPL but India has the power to stand on its own feet...They have a domestic league that it is going to be 20-times the size of international cricket."

Modi said the only way five-day international Test cricket, long regarded as the pinnacle of the sport, could survive was if the ICC introduced a long talked-about championship. "I think there is a window for Test cricket and a World Test championship will survive if all nations get to-

gether and make it a proper tournament," he explained. "But it has to be a championship. If the ICC does not do it I see no reason why the IPL would not do it instead as a knockout IPL Test championship."

Modi left India to live in London and has not returned home since 2009. The Board of Control

and sparked reviews into the culture within Australian cricket. Then Captain Steve Smith and his deputy David Warner have been banned from international and domestic cricket for a year, while Cameron Bancroft was exiled for nine months, leaving the squad badly weakened. They have all apologized and accepted the sanctions. Paine said all three would be welcomed back to the national side but in a new environment that met public expectations. "Certainly playing international cricket you have to be as competitive as you possibly can be, but we just have to look at different ways of doing that," said, "more respectful ways of putting opposition teams under the pump."

Australia has been under heavy scrutiny for sledging and Paine said on-field talk with the opposition "will be very different going forward". Cricket Australia (CA) announced a meeting Friday to discuss who will replace head coach Darren Lehmann, who despite being cleared of any wrongdoing resigned amid the scandal fallout. But it denied media reports that former Aussie opener Justin Langer had already been selected for the job.

"The process to be undertaken for the appointment of a new Australian men's head coach will be discussed and agreed at the CA board meeting this Friday," a spokesperson said in a statement. —AFP

New era: Australia captain promises to rebuild trust

SYDNEY: Australia Test captain Tim Paine pledged yesterday to embark on a new era of "respectful" cricket and rebuild public trust after the ball-tampering scandal that rocked the sport. The newly appointed leader said the fallout from the tampering episode was greater than players had anticipated and promised a different style of cricket in the future.

"Going forward we have a clean slate. We can rewrite the way we play a little bit," the 33-year-old told reporters in Tasmania's capital Hobart. "The main thing for us is to bring the fans back to Australian cricket and make sure they like the way we are going about it, they want to come and watch and be proud of the Australian cricket team," he added.

The ball-tampering scandal during the third Test in South Africa last month stunned the sport



JAIPUR: Kolkata Knight Riders cricketer Robin Uthappa plays a shot during the 2018 Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Rajasthan Royals and Kolkata Knight Riders at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium. — AFP

together and make it a proper tournament," he explained. "But it has to be a championship. If the ICC does not do it I see no reason why the IPL would not do it instead as a knockout IPL Test championship."

Modi left India to live in London and has not returned home since 2009. The Board of Control

for Cricket in India found him guilty of eight offences relating to irregularities in the administration of the IPL. He has never been charged by the Indian government with a crime and denies all accusations, but Modi has repeatedly insisted he cannot go back to India because of underworld threats to his life. — AFP

Bangladesh cricket drop six, freeze pay rise

DHAKA: Bangladesh axed six players from national contracts after a year of poor performances with players who escaped the chop being denied a pay rise, an official said yesterday. Opening batsmen Soumya Sarkar and Imrul Kayes were among the six to miss out on a contract as Bangladesh cricket warned players to shape up, selector Habibul Bashar said. The Bangladesh Cricket Board late Wednesday decided to retain just 10 players on contract, with three others to be added at a later time. "For contracts, we mostly preferred players who would perform regularly over the next one year," Bashar said. "Some players have lost their regular spot in the team. They needed to be sent a message. Getting dropped does not mean the door is closed for them. Everyone will get a fair

chance in future." Mosaddek Hossain, Sabbir Rahman, Taskin Ahmed and Kamrul Islam Rabbi were the four others whose contracts were not renewed. Sabbir was already excluded from a contract on disciplinary grounds.

Shakib Al Hasan, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mashrafe Mortaza, Tamim Iqbal, Mahmudullah Riyad, Mominul Haque, Rubel Hossain, Mustafizur Rahman, Taijul Islam and Mehedi Hasan were the 10 players awarded contracts. BCB president Nazmul Hassan told reporters that contracted players would not be given a pay rise this year. The top remunerated players—Shakib, Mushfiqur and Mortaza—are paid 420,000 taka (\$5,121) per month from the board.

The board also said it would review contracts for around 80 first-class players. Bangladesh lost Test series against New Zealand, India and South Africa in 2017, and just managed to scrape a draw against Sri Lanka and Australia. Their limited-overs side made the semi-finals of the ICC Champions Trophy in the UK but were drubbed in all but four of their 14 one-day international matches. Bangladesh won just one of seven Twenty20 internationals over the same year. — AFP

Sports

James' epic start helps Cavs even the series with Pacers

'He did a great job of just being aggressive and attacking the basket'

LOS ANGELES: LeBron James crystallized his reputation as one of the best playoff performers in NBA history on Wednesday as the Cleveland Cavaliers rebounded from a game one rout with a 100-97 win over the Indiana Pacers. James scored 20 of his 46 points in the opening quarter, getting off to a torrid start in which he singlehandedly outscored the Pacers 13-0 and 16-1 to begin game two of the first round Eastern Conference series.

"My mentality was we got to go back to Indiana tied 1-1," James said. "We hadn't scored like we are accustomed to doing so far so I wanted to see if I had a good hand to start. "My

guys kept coming to me and I was able to make a few buckets." In the late game, the Houston Rockets crushed the Minnesota Timberwolves 102-82 to seize a 2-0 series lead.

Chris Paul had 27 points as the Rockets drained 16 three pointers compared to just five threes for the Timberwolves. Nemanja Bjelica led the Timberwolves with 16 points. Cleveland bounced back from an embarrassing 98-80 loss at home in game one and the mighty James set the tone early Wednesday, giving credence to coach Tyrone Lue's pre-game prediction that if he showed up, the Cavs would level the series.



Rebounded from a game one rout

He did exactly that, shooting 17 of 24 field goals and delivering 12 rebounds and five assists as the Cleveland had to survive a late fourth-quarter charge by the Pacers. "He did a great job of just being aggressive and attacking the basket for our team. LeBron did a great job setting the tone offensively," Lue said. The 33-year-old James also helped put the game away with two clutch free

throws with 18 seconds left to make it 99-92.

Pacers star Victor Oladipo made a 26 foot jumper at the buzzer to close out the scoring. Oladipo finished with a team high 22 points in the loss. The series now shifts to Indiana for game three on Friday. James has

never lost a first round series and being down 0-1 marked another first for James, whose teams have always managed to come out firing on all cylinders before.

Game one was so one-sided the Cavs recorded the second-fewest points of their season. But these are not normal times for Cleveland as the highs and lows have become more acute, leaving fans wondering which version will show up on any given night. James' consistency has kept it somewhat together as he enjoyed one of his best seasons, averaging 29.5 points, 9.8 rebounds and 10.0 assists during the regular season. Even in the game one



CLEVELAND: LeBron James #23 of the Cleveland Cavaliers goes to the basket against the Indiana Pacers in Game Two of Round One of the 2018 NBA Playoffs on April 18, 2018 at Quicken Loans Arena. — AFP

loss, he still managed a triple double with 24 points, 10 boards and 12 assists.

Roster shakeup

Lue shook up his starting lineup for game two, going with Kyle Korver and J.R. Smith over Jeff

Green and Rodney Hood. Green didn't score in the opener and Hood only started because Korver had an injured right foot. Kevin Love scored 15 points but with 3:43 left he hurt his left hand, the same one he broke earlier in the season. Lue said the injury is not serious. — AFP

Boston marathon winner to quit his day job

TOKYO: The Japanese high school clerk who sensationally won the Boston Marathon despite having neither a coach nor a sponsor announced yesterday he was packing in his day job and turning pro. An overnight media star, Yuki Kawauchi, 31, told reporters waiting for him at Narita Airport: "From April next year, I am thinking about resigning as a civil servant and turning pro. I want to use the (prize) money to do that."

Kawauchi scooped \$150,000 when he became the first Japanese man to win the race since 1987, the year he was born. His victory stunned the marathon community at the prestigious race in Boston, where runners braved the coldest start in 30 years in steady rain and hard wind. By turning professional, he said he wants to compete with the world's top talents and beat his current personal best time of 2hr 8min 14sec—something he has been unable to achieve over the past five years.

School events, like enrolment ceremonies and graduations, have also prevented him from competing in spring-season races, like in Paris and Rotterdam. "Unless I change my environment, I won't be able to best my personal best. As a Japanese runner, I want to compete with top marathon talents from around the world," he said. "I saw the Japanese flag flying in the Boston sky. There is nothing like it. I was truly happy. I don't have words to describe how I felt," he said. — AFP

Zverev edges Struff to reach quarters

MONACO: Third seed Alexander Zverev came through a three-set tussle with fellow German Jan-Lennard Struff yesterday to set up a possible Monte Carlo Masters quarter-final with his brother Mischa. The 20-year-old, who won two Masters titles last season, became frustrated in the second set but came through 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 and will play either his older brother Mischa or Richard Gasquet in the last eight.

"Hopefully my brother will win and it will be an amazing day tomorrow," said the younger Zverev. The world number four claimed the opening set thanks to a break in game seven, before a bizarre second set in which both players struggled on serve. Zverev became increasingly frustrated as he constantly gave away leads, complaining that advertising cushions on the side of the court were dangerous.

Struff claimed the set to level the match with the seventh break of serve in only eight games, as Zverev hurled his racket to the ground in anger. He reformed his range in the decider, though, racing into a 5-2 lead with a double break. Zverev was broken to love when serving for a place in the last eight and then missed a match point in Struff's following service game, but finally got over the line as his opponent fired wide.

Belgian sixth seed David Goffin held off a late fightback from Roberto Bautista Agut to reach the last eight with a 6-4, 7-5 win, in a match that saw the Spaniard accidentally hit a ballboy with the ball. The 11th seed was broken to slip 4-1



MONACO: Germany's Alexander Zverev celebrates after winning his tennis match against Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff during the Monte-Carlo ATP Masters Series Tournament. — AFP

down in the second set, and when returning the ball to the other side of the net, saw it strike a ball boy as he ran across the front of the net.

"I just saw the ball going straight to the ball boy. I was surprised he only had a warning. For me, if you send a ball at the head of a ball boy, you're out," said Goffin. "I don't know what the rules are exactly and how he could only get a warning. He was saying the ball bounced, and the ball boy just happened to be there. Unlucky for him." — AFP

Sports

Russia probes new monkey chants ahead of World Cup

Sure to fuel fears of racism marring the tournament

MOSCOW: Russian football chiefs said yesterday they will probe apparent monkey chants directed at Cape Verdean midfielder Nuno Rocha during a domestic cup semi-final this week. The incident comes less than two months before Russia hosts the World Cup and is sure to fuel fears of racism marring the tournament. Wednesday's game in Moscow culminated with a penalty shootout between hosts Spartak and the small Russian Premier League side Tosno. Rocha scored the winning spot-kick for Tosno before running past Spartak supporters while celebrating the upset. Footage of the episode posted on the Championat.ru sports site showed the 26-year-old cupping his hand to his ear as what sounded like a chorus of ape noises rang down from the crowd.

The Russian Football Union's (RFU) anti-discrimination department chief Alexei Smertin said the chants came from Spartak fans. "We are currently studying game material, including the chanting that was heard from the Spartak supporters' stand after Nuno Rocha's penalty," he told Russian media. Football officials are expected to issue their ruling during a disciplinary committee meeting next week. The investigation comes with concern about racial abuse in Russia already running high after a spate of recent incidents.



A chorus of ape noises

89 racist and far-right incidents

The world football governing body FIFA has opened disciplinary proceedings against Russia over monkey chants heard at a World Cup warm-up against France last month. Manchester United midfielder Paul Pogba and Barcelona winger Ousmane Dembele were allegedly targeted during the match in Saint Petersburg. Racism has been plaguing Russian football since clubs began purchasing foreign players after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991.

The Football Against Racism in Europe (FARE) anti-discrimination network reported 89 racist and far-right incidents at Russian games in the 2016/17 season. The number was about the same as that recorded in the preceding three seasons—a sign that Russia's campaign to clean up its game has not had the desired effect. The World

Cup final will be played on July 15 in Moscow while Saint Petersburg will host one of the semi-finals. Both cities are home to large groups of hardcore nationalist supporters and have witnessed numerous ugly episodes during games. Spartak have already been fined for monkey chants and other racial abuse heard after its July 2017 Super Cup victory against city rivals Lokomotiv. — AFP



MOSCOW: A picture taken on March 31, 2018 shows Tosno's Cape Verdean midfielder Nuno Rocha during Spartak and the small Russian Premier League side Tosno football match. — AFP

Wolves hungry for success after reaching PL

LONDON: Wolverhampton Wanderers may have clinched their first Premier League campaign for six years, but the club's ambitious Chinese owners have no intention of resting on their laurels. Since buying Wolves for £45 million (\$64 million) in 2016, the Fosun International group has bankrolled the team's bid to return to the top-flight.

That investment paid rich dividends last weekend when the Championship leaders saw their promotion confirmed by Fulham's draw with Brentford. A place in the Premier League is worth a minimum of £170 million. And now they have made it, the Chinese investors are determined to consolidate Wolves' lucrative place among the elite for the long term. "This is just the first step. We have a long-term plan and we have to fulfil that step by step," Wolves chairman Jeff Shi told the BBC.

While Wolves are steeped in the history of their famous title-winning sides of the 1950s, the team from the Black Country in England's west midlands have been unable to hold their own during their intermittent spells in the big time. Wolves, who were playing in the third tier just four years ago, have finished in the top 10 in the English top-flight once since 1973, with their last two stays ending in relegation after one and three seasons respectively.

It might be asking too much to recapture the halcyon days of the legendary Billy Wright, who captained Wolves to their three English titles and inspired memorable wins over the great Hungarian side Honved—results that spurred the creation of the European Cup.

But Wolves managing director Laurie Dalrymple is convinced his club has the potential to shake off their 'sleeping giant' tag by becoming a Premier League mainstay and eventually qualifying for Europe. "We are going into the Premier League to compete and compete hard," Dalrymple said. "We don't just want to be one of the 20 teams that is there to make up the numbers. There shouldn't be any limits to what we can achieve as a club."

Spending power

Achieving that ambition will be easier for Wolves due to their connection with super-agent Jorge Mendes, who counts Jose Mourinho and Cristiano Ronaldo among his clients. Mendes's Gestifute agency is part-owned by a Fosun subsidiary and he has flooded Wolves with talent from his roster that would likely have been out of the reach of their Championship rivals. Ruben Neves, a £15.8 million signing from Porto, and Diogo Jota, the Atletico Madrid loanee who joins permanently in the close-season, have been key players in Wolves' rise under manager Nuno Espirito Santo, who is also represented by Mendes. The Mendes link has angered other Championship clubs, with Leeds owner Andrea Radrizzani especially vocal, while Premier League clubs reportedly raised the issue at their shareholders' meeting.

But, as many other second tier clubs have discovered, investing in foreign players doesn't always bring success in such a cut-throat league. Wolves' promotion is as much a tribute to the astute man-management of former Porto coach Nuno as it is an inevitable result of their spending power. "It is always about us. It is not about us adapting to another team and I think that is reassuring as players," Wolves goalkeeper John Ruddy said. "It's all right spending the money but if you're not bringing in the right personalities and mentalities then it doesn't matter. "If they are not working in unison then you are never going to succeed. We have got a great group." — AFP

Happy losers! Four East Africa clubs advance in CAF Cup

JOHANNESBURG: East African clubs Al Hilal of Sudan, Gor Mahia of Kenya, Rayon Sports of Rwanda and Young Africans of Tanzania won CAF Confederation Cup play-offs Wednesday, despite second-leg losses. It means that a quarter of the 16 teams in the group draw this Saturday in Cairo will come from the cinderella region of African football. CAF club final victories by east African sides have been rare, with the last in 1989 when Al Merrikh of Sudan won the now defunct African Cup Winners Cup.

But the many heartbreaks of the past were forgotten in Khartoum, Nairobi, Kigali and Dar es Salaam as supporters celebrated aggregate victories. Hilal fell 3-1 to Akwa United of Nigeria in Uyo, but squeezed through on away goals. The aggregate advantage of the Sudanese stretched to three goals when Mohamed Bashir scored after 25 minutes only for Akwa to hit back. Denis Nya equalised on the stroke of half-time and a Michael Ibe brace had the Nigerians 3-1 ahead with 30 minutes to play. Akwa needed one more goal to progress, but it eluded them, leaving twice African champions Enyimba as the only one of four Nigerian clubs in the play-offs to survive. Gor became the first Kenyan club to reach the group stage of a CAF competition despite conceding an own-goal in a 2-1 loss at 2017 runners-up SuperSport United of South Africa. Haron Shakava put the ball into his net on the hour, but Francis Kahata levelled almost immediately for the east Africans. Thabo Mnyamane put SuperSport ahead again on 68 minutes in Pretoria, but they were eliminated on away goals.

Rayon had the three-goal lead they built at home to thank for their survival after going down 2-0 to Costa do Sol of Mozambique in Maputo, where the home team missed a penalty. Nelson Nesto and Liberian Terence Tisdell scored for Costa, but they could not prevent the Kigali outfit becoming the first Rwandan club to qualify for the mini-league phase of a CAF competition. — AFP

Sports

Underwhelming Real held by Athletic Bilbao at home

Zidane may at least be concerned by a loss of momentum

MADRID: Real Madrid may be the favorites for the Champions League but a 1-1 draw against Athletic Bilbao on Wednesday will hardly have struck fear into Bayern Munich. Zinedine Zidane's side started complacently at the Santiago Bernabeu and ended frantically, with Cristiano Ronaldo's 87th-minute equalizer cancelling out a delightful early chip from Athletic's Inaki Williams in between.

Barcelona's commanding lead at the top of La Liga, which now stands at 12 points over Atletico Madrid and 15 on Real, means these matches carry reduced significance and inevitably lack a certain edge. But Zidane may at least be concerned by a loss of momentum, particularly given this side is likely to be very close to the one that starts the semi-final first leg at the Allianz Arena in a week's time.

Real have managed to hit a different gear in the Champions League knock-out stages but this draw means they have now won only once in their last four matches, having strung together 11 victories from their previous 12. "The result wasn't what we wanted today and mentally also, we were a little off," Zidane said. "What we have to do is rest, we have five days

before the game on Wednesday, we will prepare well and then we will give everything. We have a semi-final and we will fight to the death to defend our title."

Ronaldo's late flick was his 22nd goal in 12 games and with the Portuguese in this sort of form, almost any performance can be salvaged.

But Real's night was better summed up by one moment in the second half when Sergio Ramos repeatedly failed to clear and then turned to face the crowd's jeers with his arms outstretched. The jeers grew louder.

"No problem with Gareth"

If the Real team that faced Malaga on Sunday was aimed at resting players ahead of Bayern, this looked more like a dress rehearsal. Ronaldo, Luka Modric, Toni Kroos, Raphael Varane and Marcelo all returned but there was no place for Gareth Bale, who had also been left out against Malaga. His preserved energy was deemed only valuable enough for 30 minutes off the bench. "There is no problem with Gareth," Zidane said. "I have 25 players and I have to be attentive to everyone. Bale is one of them. There are others who play and do well too."

Despite the strong picks, Real were sloppy



Real were sloppy from the outset



MADRID: Athletic Bilbao's Spanish defender Inigo Martinez (L) and Athletic Bilbao's Spanish defender Unai Nunez (R) vie with Real Madrid's Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo (C) during the Spanish league football match Real Madrid CF against Athletic Club Bilbao at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium. — AFP

from the outset, full of heavy touches and misplaced passes while Athletic delivered an early warning for what was to come when Mikel San Jose skipped in behind but was denied by Key-

lor Navas. Ronaldo's bullet header rattled the bar from a Dani Carvajal cross but Athletic were slipping through Real's midfield with ease and in the 14th minute they took the lead. —AFP

Napoli keep Serie A title hopes alive as Juventus held

MILAN: Napoli kept their title hopes alive with a 4-2 win over Udinese on Wednesday as champions Juventus' path to a seventh consecutive Serie A title was stalled 1-1 at Crotona. Nigerian forward Simy grabbed the equalizer for relegation-threatened Crotona after 65 minutes with a spectacular overhead bicycle kick with shades of that scored by Cristiano Ronaldo in the Champions League in Turin last month.

"We didn't do so well tonight, even though the guys did everything possible," said Juventus coach Massimiliano Allegri. "Tonight was decisive for the Scudetto. These are the games you need to bring home. The thing to do is stay calm, and play this championship until the end." Napoli came from behind twice to cut the gap on Juventus to four points with five games remaining including next Sunday's top of the table clash between the two teams in Turin.

Maurizio Sarri's side were given an early scare at home with Czech Jakub Jankto putting Udinese ahead after 41 minutes. Lorenzo Insigne pulled Napoli back just before the break only for Swedish midfielder Svante Ingelsson to again give Udinese the advantage ten minutes into the sec-

ond half. But Raul Albiol, Arkadiusz Milik and Lorenzo Tonelli all scored in a ten-minute spree in the second half to condemn Udinese to their 20th defeat of the season—and tenth in a row.

"We are mathematically second, the goal is reached, now we can have fun," said Sarri. "Obviously it's difficult to go to Turin and try to get the victory, as in terms of strength in depth, I think Juventus are the most complete team in Europe. We'll give it our best shot." Napoli had fallen six points adrift of the leaders after last weekend's goalless draw at AC Milan with the champions closing in on the title.

Gianluigi Buffon was rested ahead of Sunday's game with Wojciech Szczesny in goal and Juventus looked to be on track after Alex Sandro headed in a Douglas Costa cross after 16 minutes in Calabria. But Simy struck on 65 minutes to earn a precious point for the southerners third from bottom of the table with 57 points fewer than Juventus' 85.

'Remarkable Lazio'

Behind the leading duo the race for Champions League football next season continues with AS Roma—already through to the semi-finals of this year's competition—remaining third after a 2-1 win in Genoa. Lazio put their Europa League exit behind them and remain fourth with the same number of points as their city rivals, after coming back from two goals down to beat Fiorentina 4-3, ending the Tuscan side's eight-match unbeaten run.

In a crazy first half in Tuscany both sides were reduced to ten men after Marco Sportiello and Alessandro Murgia were sent off within the first 15 minutes. Jordan Veretout scored all three goals for Fiorentina.—AFP

PSG seal French Cup final spot

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe struck a brace and Christopher Nkunku added a late third as Paris Saint-Germain marched into the French Cup final thanks to 3-1 win at Caen on Wednesday. PSG travelled to the Normandy coast with the French league title already wrapped up and looking to take another step towards what would be a fourth consecutive Cup triumph—a record—if they beat third division Les Herbiers at the Stade de France on May 8.

But while dominant throughout, Unai Emery's men were kept on their toes in an at times messy encounter in which they had one goal chalked off by the Video Assistant Referee (VAR), and Mbappe's second fall under its scrutiny before it was confirmed nine minutes from time. PSG should have opened the scoring early but Angel Di Maria saw a weak rolled shot collected by 'keeper Brice Samba on 17 minutes.

But despite poor pitch conditions, the French champions were quickly into their stride with Mbappe, outstanding on the night, opening the scoring on 21 minutes. A textbook move from midfield saw Edinson Cavani in possession to the left of the area. When the Uruguayan striker rolled across the area, Samba misjudged his lunge to leave Mbappe with an easy tap in from yards out.—AFP

Sports

United give Mourinho selection dilemma ahead of Spurs semi

United manager rang the changes against Bournemouth

BOURNEMOUTH: Jose Mourinho admitted Manchester United had given him an FA Cup semi-final selection dilemma after their 2-0 win at Bournemouth on Wednesday. Goals from Chris Smalling and Romelu Lukaku sealed the points at Dean Court after Mourinho made seven changes in the aftermath of United's shock defeat to struggling West Bromwich Albion on Sunday.

That limp surrender had gifted the Premier League title to Manchester City, prompting Mourinho to accuse his players of complacency. In a bid to shake up his under-performing stars and rest key players, the United manager rang the changes against Bournemouth, with Lukaku, Alexis Sanchez and Juan Mata among the big names left out of the starting line-up ahead of Saturday's FA Cup semi-final against Tottenham.

Paul Pogba kept his place despite mounting speculation Mourinho is ready to sell the out-of-form France midfielder in the close-season. Mourinho's hardline stance appeared to sting his players into action as Smalling opened the scoring in the first half. Lukaku came off the bench to seal the points in the closing stages as United consolidated second place in the Premier League.

Mourinho was impressed with the work done

by his new-look side and claimed he would have to think hard before deciding his Cup line-up. "Everything was good, I am happy. Every player on the pitch was positive and put himself available for Saturday," Mourinho said. "The players were in the right positions and not trying one more flick, one more trick. I will not play this 11 at Wembley but all of them told me (with their performances) that they want to play and they are ready. Obviously I will bring back Lukaku, Antonio Valencia, Nemanja Matic."

Pogba was widely criticized for his lackluster display against Albion—the latest in a long line of disappointing efforts from the former Juventus star since his move to United two seasons ago. That sparked talk that Mourinho has told

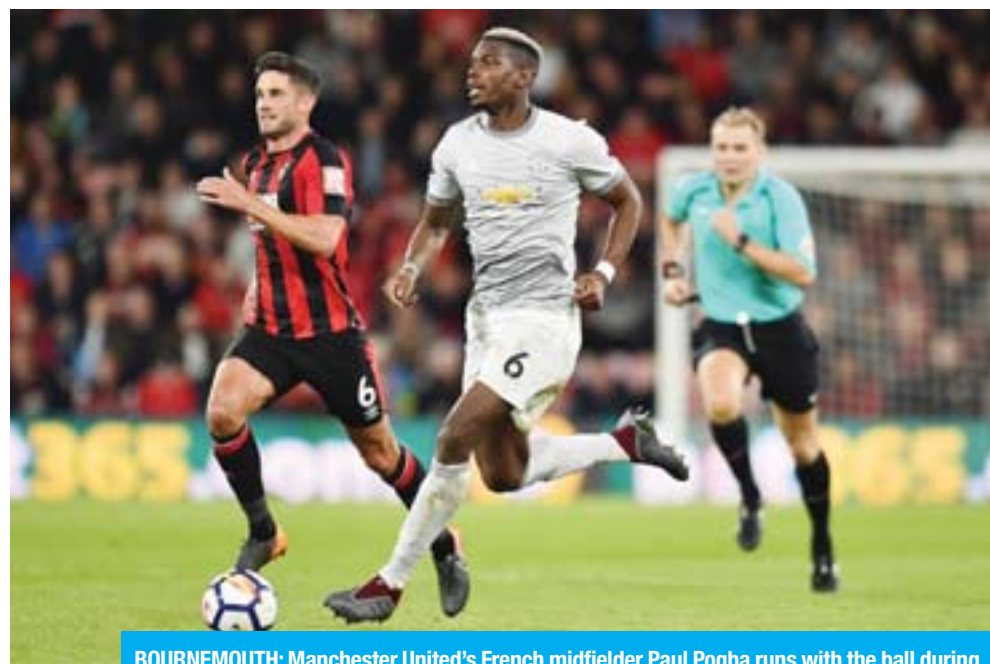
United to put Pogba up for sale, just days after Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola said he had been offered the chance to sign the midfielder by his agent in January.

Whether Pogba features at Wembley this weekend will go some way to showing whether he is still part of Mourinho's long-term plans, but he at least impressed his boss for one night after winning the man of the match award. "I'm not very good on man of the match, I'm not a big fan of it, but Paul Pogba played very well," Mourinho said. "Against Man City he was phe-

the 23-year-old could become one of the best players in the world. Sterling, who has scored 22 goals, 17 in the Premier League, is relishing the opportunity to work with the former Barcelona and Bayern Munich boss. "It's all about the basics with him. He pushes you to be better at the small things and that improves your performance," said Sterling. "It's been great for me to learn in this environment and improve as a player under him. He's one of the best managers in the world. It's special to be part of." Guardiola's transfer policy addressed the need to bring down the average age of the squad, with Leroy Sane one of those bought in the summer of 2016 to do just that. The Germany international has provided a cutting edge on the opposite flank to Sterling while also chipping in with 13 goals.

With his first title now in the bag the 22-year-old is looking forward to a period of sustained success. "We have a young team but also a lot of experience within the squad as well. It's a good mix," he said. "It's been a great season, but we can still always improve. I hope we can win many more trophies. The team is ambitious and we want to compete for everything. We didn't win everything we wanted this season, and this is something to motivate us when we start again in the summer." —AFP

“ Everything was good, I am happy ”



BOURNEMOUTH: Manchester United's French midfielder Paul Pogba runs with the ball during the English Premier League football match between Bournemouth and Manchester United at the Vitality Stadium. —AFP

nomenal but today he was very, very good. A good choice."

Mourinho's side are 14 points clear of fifth placed Chelsea and will be guaranteed to qualify for the Champions League if the Blues fail to

beat Burnley. "The first ambition was to finish in the top four and now one point is probably enough. When we have that resolved we can think about third and second place," Mourinho added.—AFP

Sterling hungry for more after PL win

LONDON: Manchester City forward Raheem Sterling says he is hungry to win the Premier League again, warning the champions against complacency as they chase more glory. Pep Guardiola's men were confirmed as champions with five matches still to play on Sunday when Manchester United were beaten by West Brom.

"This is my first Premier League title so who cares how you win it, whether it was on the pitch or on my sofa, I'm just delighted to win the title," said the England international. "It's been a dream ever since I was a kid growing up playing football with my mates and winning it means everything. It's important we don't get complacent though. It's amazing to win it, but now it's about the next one."

The England international, who joined City from Liverpool in 2015, has progressed rapidly this season and Guardiola said at the weekend

Salah seeking silver lining with Golden Boot

LONDON: Liverpool forward Mohamed Salah hopes to stay clear at the top of the scoring charts to claim this season's Premier League Golden Boot award, the Egypt international adding that his team mates were eager to help him achieve the goal. The 25-year-old has scored 30 goals in 32 league appearances during a spectacular debut season at Liverpool with Salah tallying 40 strikes in total across all competitions in 45 outings.

Salah holds a four-goal cushion over Tottenham Hotspur's Harry Kane in the race for the Golden Boot with four league matches remaining. "The players are trying to help me a lot now to score goals, because they know now I am in for the Golden Boot. In the end it is an individual award, but it also helps the team get the points," Salah told Sky Sports. "The way

we play is very good, and you can see the fans are very happy and I feel very good about that, I feel they want me to win something.

"It's the last four games, so it's very clear, I play for it. In the beginning I played for it, but it's always for the team. I want to score for the team." The forward also said that while he would always welcome individual honours, helping the team achieve their targets was of greater importance. Liverpool have benefited from Salah's exploits with the club fighting to finish second in the league and also in contention to reach the Champions League final after drawing AS Roma in the semi-finals.

Salah could also break the league scoring record for the most goals in a 38-game season (31) while even surpassing the 34-goal record for a 42-game campaign. "Now it's very clear, I want to break the Premier League (record). 31 goals in a 38-game season. One goal to go, right? I want to break both records! It's just four goals and four games," he added. Liverpool travel to basement side West Bromwich Albion in the league on Saturday before hosting the first leg of the Champions League semi-final against Roma at Anfield on Tuesday.—Reuters

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CLEVELAND: LeBron James #23 of the Cleveland Cavaliers shoots the ball against the Indiana Pacers in Game Two of Round One during the 2018 NBA Playoffs on April 18, 2018 at Quicken Loans Arena. — AFP

James' epic start helps Cavs even the series with Pacers