



**5** Kuwait air transport, services witness quantum leap in 2018



**19** Red gold: Afghanistan's saffron production grows



**24** Indian voters boot out cow, happiness ministers in polls



**26** Kohli engineered Kumble's exit, leaked email suggests



# Assembly orders probe into Zour refinery, solar project

Kuwait, Saudis 'close' to neutral zone deal • Experts warn of long-term low oil price

## Thriving black market to buy 'teacher' titles

**KUWAIT:** Well-informed sources said the recent Civil Service Commission decisions banning the recruitment of holders of educational degrees who have other professions mentioned in their work permits have created a black market to purchase 'teacher' job titles. The sources added that scores of teachers who had arrived in Kuwait years earlier holding visas with other job titles are purchasing the 'teacher' title through private institutes and schools for KD 800-1,000 in return for transferring those teachers' residency visas, so that they can later apply to work at the education ministry.

Continued on Page 24

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** The National Assembly yesterday approved a motion to ask its public funds protection panel to launch a probe into allegations that the designs of Al-Zour Refinery are faulty. The Assembly gave the committee two months to complete its investigation, which should focus on alleged squandering of public funds, with MP Faisal Al-Kandari claiming that billions of dinars have been squandered. The Assembly also approved a motion to ask the Audit Bureau to examine the contract records and data of the solar energy project in the area of Shaqaya, which was launched a few years ago with the aim to produce 15 percent of Kuwait's energy by 2030 from renewable sources.

MP Khalil Abul reiterated that a grilling will be filed to question the oil minister, but he did not specify a date. The Assembly however agreed to delay a debate on the issue after a request by the government because Oil Minister Bakheet Al-Rasheed is in Saudi Arabia on an official visit. The \$15 billion Zour project is expected to come on-stream next year. The state-of-the-art refinery has a capacity of 615,000 barrels per day and

is part of a huge energy complex near the border with Saudi Arabia.

Rasheed is in Riyadh to hold talks with Saudi officials over the dispute in the neutral zone, which led to halting production at two oilfields in the zone over three years ago. Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah said the two countries are capable of sorting out the differences in the area, which used to pump over 500,000 barrels per day shared equally by the two countries.

A report in The Wall Street Journal yesterday said Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are close to restarting operations in the neutral zone after the US intervened to broker an agreement, according to oil officials familiar with the discussions. The potential return of the fields would unlock key production capacity as the US considers phasing out exemptions it awarded to some buyers of sanctioned Iranian oil, and as markets see an expected tightening next year.

Washington has been trying for months to broker a deal between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait over the contested strip of oil-rich land. The WSJ said Kuwait's foreign ministry - rather than its oil arm - has been the

staunchest opponent to any deal to resume output, according to people familiar with the matter. But the ministry's opposition softened after the US State Department promised Kuwait it would guarantee its security going forward, according to people familiar with the matter.

"We continue to encourage Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to reach agreement on restarting oil production in the Partitioned Neutral Zone," a State Department spokesperson said. If an agreement is finalized, the fields would restart pumping in the first quarter, according to people familiar with the matter. Chevron Corp, which jointly operates one of the fields with Kuwait, said it maintains "readiness for a production restart when that time comes." The US major said yesterday that it "recently undertook an operational readiness review, which tests all elements to ensure a smooth transition".

Meanwhile, experts warned yesterday that Gulf states, which depend heavily on energy exports for most of their revenues should brace for a long period of low oil prices and subdued economic growth.

Continued on Page 24

## News in brief

### Kuwait donates \$1m to UNHCR

**GENEVA:** Kuwait has donated USD one million dollars as a voluntary contribution to the 2019 budget program in support of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This came in a speech delivered by Kuwait's permanent representative to the United Nations in Geneva, Ambassador Jamal Al-Ghunaim, to the UNHCR Pledging Conference. Ghunaim expressed Kuwait's appreciation for the efforts exerted by UNHCR's top official Filippo Grandi in carrying out its efforts to help people affected by conflicts and disasters. He commended UNHCR's systematic and effective handling of humanitarian crises to reduce the impact of armed conflicts. Kuwait has been keen for many years to support the UNHCR as ties of cooperation have deepened in recent years, while Middle East conflicts have escalated and millions have been displaced from their homes. — KUNA

### First papal Mass on Arabian peninsula

**VATICAN CITY:** Pope Francis will say the first Mass by a pontiff on the Arabian peninsula in February and visit one of its largest mosques when he travels to Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates. A program for the Feb 3-5 trip released yesterday showed Francis will celebrate Mass in a stadium in Zayed Sports City on the last day of the trip. Organizers of the trip said it would be the first time Mass would be held in an outdoor, public venue in the UAE. Francis will also visit Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, the largest in the country. There, he will hold a private meeting with the members of the Muslim Council of Elders. Francis will also preside at an inter-religious meeting at the Founder's Memorial, a complex commemorating the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, founding father of the UAE. — Reuters

### Mom reunited with 'dead' daughter

**WASHINGTON:** An 88-year-old American woman has been reunited with the daughter she was told had died at birth 69 years ago. The New York Times reported. Genevieve Purinton of Tampa, Florida, met her 69-year-old daughter Connie Moultrou of Richmond, Vermont, for the first time this month, the newspaper said. Purinton was 18 years old and unmarried when she gave birth to a girl in Gary, Indiana. "I was told it was a girl, but she died," she told the Times. The newspaper said that in fact, a doctor at the hospital where Purinton gave birth had arranged for the baby to be adopted. Moultrou tracked down her birth mother after taking a DNA test on Ancestry.com, the Times said. She traveled to Florida this month to meet her. — AFP



## KTV launches kids' channel

**KUWAIT:** A trial broadcast of a TV channel dedicated solely for children and backed with a simulation studio was launched yesterday. The significance of the 'children's channel' stems from Kuwait TV's national vision of ensuring young Kuwaiti generations are intellectually, culturally and educationally equipped to contribute in the country's development, said Minister of Information and Minister of State for

Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Jabri in a press release on launching the channel.

One of the channel's major objectives is to face cultural peculiarities that could challenge the moderate and authentic traditions of the Kuwaiti society, he noted, branding the launch as a "quantum leap" in terms of cooperation and coordination between the ministry and other government entities. Jabri concluded by stressing the keenness of HHH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on caring for children and the youth in a bid for this segment of society to contribute in achieving Kuwait's 'Vision 2035' plan. — KUNA

## French police hunt gunman; Amir sends condolences

**STRASBOURG, France:** Police searched through eastern France yesterday for a man suspected of killing at least two people in a gun attack on a Christmas market in Strasbourg and who was known to have been religiously radicalized while in jail. Witnesses told investigators the assailant cried out "Allahu Akbar" (God is Greatest) as he launched his attack on the market, the Paris prosecutor said. The prosecutor, Remy Heitz,

also suggested the suspect may have chosen his target for its religious symbolism. "Considering the target, his way of operating, his profile and the testimonies of those who heard him yell 'Allahu Akbar', the anti-terrorist police has been called into action," Heitz told a news conference.

HHH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences to French President Emmanuel Macron yesterday over the victims of the attack in Strasbourg. He expressed Kuwait's strong condemnation of such criminal acts which target lives of innocent people and contradict all humanitarian morals, expressing support to all measures taken by France to ensure stability and security. He asked Almighty Allah to bestow his mercy upon the deceased and wished quick recovery to the wounded.

Continued on Page 24

## Beyonce, Bollywood and Hillary as India's richest daughter weds

**MUMBAI:** Topping anything in hit film "Crazy Rich Asians", the only daughter of India's richest man tied the knot yesterday after days of lavish celebrations that included a Beyonce concert in a lakeside palace. Isha Ambani, whose father is tycoon Mukesh Ambani, wed Anand Piramal, son of Indian billionaire industrialist Ajay Piramal, in the Ambanis' 27-storey home in Mumbai. Days of pre-wedding festivities at a sprawling palace in Udaipur in the desert state of Rajasthan included a concert by Beyonce, purportedly the bride's favorite singer.

Attendees included Hillary Clinton, former US Secretary of State John Kerry and dozens of Bollywood stars including Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan and Aamir Khan, as well as cricket superstar Sachin Tendulkar. Joining them was a who's-who of India's super-rich elite, arriving on dozens of specially chartered flights into Udaipur's normally sleepy airport and



MUMBAI: Newlyweds Bollywood actress Priyanka Chopra and US musician Nick Jonas (left) and Bollywood actors Aishwarya Rai Bachchan and Abhishek Bachchan with daughter Aradhya (right) attend the wedding ceremony of Indian businesswoman Isha Ambani with Indian businessman Anand Piramal yesterday. — AFP



whisked away in expensive cars. Actress Priyanka Chopra and American singer Nick Jonas, who themselves became husband and wife earlier this month, were also guests at Udaipur's City Palace on the banks of Lake Pichola.

Yesterday evening's actual wedding was a more private affair with around 600 close friends and family, and some politicians, on the guest list. There was a high

police presence in the south Mumbai area around the Ambanis' home, which is called Antilia and reportedly cost over \$1 billion when it was completed in 2010. Indian newspapers have been abuzz with speculation about the total cost of the wedding. Conservative estimates have put it around \$15 million while others insist \$100 million is closer to the truth.

Continued on Page 24



KUWAIT: Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Jabri poses with children during the launch ceremony of a TV channel yesterday. — KUNA



STRASBOURG, France: French police officers stand guard near the scene of a shooting on Tuesday. — AFP

# Amir receives senior state officials at Bayan Palace

## Austrian Foreign Minister meets Crown Prince, Prime Minister, Speaker



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.



Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem meets with the Austrian Foreign Minister Karin Kneissl.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with Foreign Minister of Austria Karin Kneissl.



National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem receives chairman of Palestine Committee of the Jordanian Parliament Yahya Al-Saud.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace yesterday. His Highness received National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem. He also hosted His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, following his return from the friendly United States of America, where he represented His Highness the Amir at funeral of the late 41st US President George HW Bush. Earlier yesterday, His Highness the Amir hosted His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Also yesterday, His Highness the Crown Prince received Ghanem, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak, and His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad.

**Austrian foreign minister**  
Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, accompanied by Austria's Minister of Foreign Affairs Karin Kneissl. The meeting was attended by head of the Protocols at the Diwan of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mubarak Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah. The visiting Austrian minister also met with Ghanem, and the two sides discussed ways to boost bilateral relations, issues of common interest and latest regional and international developments. Kuwait's Ambassador to Austria and Permanent Representative at International Organizations in Vienna Sadiq Marafi, and

Austrian Ambassador to Kuwait Sigurd Pacher attended the meeting. Furthermore, His Highness the Prime Minister received Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled and his Austrian counterpart, with the attendance of Assistant Foreign Minister for Europe Affairs Ambassador Waleed Al-Khubaizi and Ambassador Marafi.



### Crown Prince meets Al-Quds Waqf Fund board

Sabah, accompanied by Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Al-Quds Waqf Fund Prince Turki Al-Faisal

#### Al-Quds Waqf Fund

Separately, His Highness the Crown Prince received Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, accompanied by Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Al-Quds Waqf Fund Prince Turki Al-Faisal

bin Abdulaziz and board members. The reception was held on the occasion of the fund's meeting in Kuwait. His Highness thanked Prince Turki and the board members for their efforts in supporting Jerusalem in the humanitarian and development fields. In other news, Speaker Ghanem received chairman of Palestine Committee of the Jordanian Parliament Yahya Al-Saud. The meeting was attended by MP Khalaf Al-Enezi and Jordanian Ambassador to Kuwait Saqer Abu Shattal.

#### Cable of condolences

In the meantime, His Highness the Amir addressed a cable of condolences to King Hamad bin Issa Al-Khalifa, the Monarch of the sisterly Kingdom of Bahrain, on the demise of Her Highness Sheikha Nora bint Issa bin Salman Al-Khalifa. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness Prime Minister sent identical cables to the Bahraini King. — KUNA

## Al-Quds Waqf Fund plays key role in thwarting Israel's plans: Ghanem

KUWAIT: Kuwait parliament speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said Tuesday Al-Quds Waqf (endowment) Fund's Board of Trustees was playing 'an important' role in confronting Israeli plans aimed at undermining Palestinians and Arabs in Jerusalem. Kuwaiti parliament members are showing keen support for the Palestinian question in all international parliamentary conferences because they believed in its just causes, Ghanem said in a speech before a meeting of the Fund's Board of Trustees.

Ghanem said desperation should not find a way 'to our hearts,' because victory of the Palestinians would be achieved. The speaker condemned the Israeli systematic aggression in Jerusalem and occupied Palestinian territories. "We are not against any heavenly faith, rather encourage peaceful co-existence among religions. We are against a discriminatory entity which confiscate the land and displace people," said Ghanem. "Our objective is to oust the Zionist entity from the Inter-Parliamentary Union ... I am confident we can succeed in our mission but I can't promise a date, but this will be the biggest political blow to oust this entity from the world's second largest organization after the UN," he said.



KUWAIT: Parliament Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem attends the meeting of the Al-Quds Waqf Fund's Board of Trustees. — KUNA

Prince Turki Al-Faisal, Chairman of Board of Trustees, expressed gratitude for His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his relentless support of the Palestinian cause. Prince Turki, who cited Saudi Arabia's historic backing of the Palestinian people, said people were eagerly awaiting to see Jerusalem as capital of the Palestinian State. Mohammad Shatayya, representative of

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, said support of charity groups and Al-Quds University, as well as renovation of houses would contribute to protection of Arab, Islamic and Christian identity of Jerusalem. Shatayya, who thanked Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and many Arab countries for their political and economic support, warned against considering Jerusalem the capital of Israel. — KUNA

## Lessons to be learned from UN war tribunals: Kuwait

NEW YORK: The International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda provide valuable learning experiences that should be closely examined, said a Kuwaiti official yesterday. "We witnessed last year the end of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, which indicted those responsible for grave human rights violations," advisor Tariq Al-Banai said amid a UN

Security Council session over the tribunal.

Peace does not necessarily mean a world void of conflicts, rather, it is justice for the victims of war crimes and other transgressions, the Kuwaiti official explained. He applauded the UN Security Council for its efforts to ensure that the rule of law is respected, saying the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia was a successful initiative and a step towards preserving justice.

As part of efforts to reinforce the legal system, he said the UN Security Council is putting together a judicial code of conduct, in addition to other initiatives given the myriad of challenges facing the legal profession. Hailed for "irreversibly changing the landscape of international humanitarian law," the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia was a UN court of law that dealt with war crimes that took place during the conflicts in the Balkans in the 1990s. — KUNA



Tariq Al-Banai

### News in brief

#### MPs grateful for Amir's efforts

KUWAIT: The Amiri Address to the National Assembly constitutes a road map to enlighten the path of tasks for the three supreme authorities, MPs have affirmed. The MPs, who were speaking during the last part of yesterday's parliamentary session, expressed deep gratitude to His Highness the Amir for his extraordinary efforts for safeguarding Kuwait's interests. Moreover, they have emphasized that members of the executive and legislative authorities must shoulder their responsibilities for dealing with regional challenges, re-examining and updating the national parliamentary experience for sake of serving the country's interests. His Highness the Amir had addressed the MPs at opening of the third session of the 15th legislative term. — KUNA

#### Kuwait condemns 'lawless acts'

NEW YORK: Kuwait has affirmed condemnation against lawless acts in maritime safety, strengthening international and regional efforts to address maritime security threats. This came in a discussion of an item on oceans and maritime laws at the UN General Assembly by Chancellor at Kuwait's permanent mission to the UN Tahani Al-Nasser. She said that maritime transport sector is one of the largest transport activities in the world and threatening this sector causes a major concern to all countries. She added that Kuwait participated in many activities and meetings related seas and oceans, while also participated in the regular meetings of the international maritime organization. Al-Nasser praised the UN General Secretary's report, especially concerning to oceans and seas laws, adding that the Kuwaiti delegation was very keen to address this topic. — KUNA

#### GCC Red Crescent Societies' meet

KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) announced hosting the 14th meeting of the heads of Gulf Red Crescent Societies' committee next Tuesday. The meeting will discuss the societies' plans for the upcoming years and boosting joint work, KRCS Secretary General Maha Al-Barjas said yesterday. It will also discuss coordination in sending humanitarian aid to countries affected by natural disasters or conflicts, she said. Barjas added that the event will discuss organizing joint annual training courses to share experience and the role of media in shedding light on the societies' efforts through publishing annual reports on the matter. — KUNA

## Local

# Beyond Kafala and Exclusion: A seminar by a former AUK student on migration

## Non-citizens born and raised in Kuwait fall under mercy of kafala system: Sadliwala

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: A seminar titled 'Beyond Kafala and Exclusion: A Network Approach to Cross-Nationality Interactions in the Arabian Gulf' was held at the American University of Kuwait's Center for Gulf Studies on Tuesday. It was presented by Batul K Sadliwala, who graduated from AUK with a BA in International Relations and has worked with NGOs in Kuwait and Lebanon.

Sadliwala challenged the conventional narrative and popular discourse about migration experiences in the Arabian Gulf, arguing they are all connected to socioeconomic development. She began her presentation by looking at the demographic imbalance between locals and migrant workers - or citizens against non-citizens, who are considered as migrants



### System encourages exploitation of workers

even as they were born and raised in the country.

"The fact is there are more than 150,000 students in the country who are non-citizens - they are non-Kuwaitis, but 17 percent of them are actually born and raised in Kuwait. Now, take a look at the kafala system - this system is so deeply rooted that to some it has become a way of life. The integration or reintegration of non-citizens has not even come up for discussion," said Sadliwala, who holds a master's degree from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in Massachusetts.

She said the kafala system was introduced only for temporary workers. Even though many have stayed in the country for more than 10 years, they are still being treated under the kafala system. "Many of these migrant workers have lived and outlived many of us here - they made this country their home, therefore they are not supposed to be staying

under the mercy of the kafala system," Sadliwala said.

The kafala or sponsorship system is a system used to monitor migrant laborers, working primarily in the construction and domestic sectors. The system is in force in Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Some of these countries however have already restructured the system, such as Bahrain and Qatar.

The kafala system requires workers to have an in-country sponsor, usually their employer, who is responsible for their visa and legal status. Human rights groups have criticized the system, claiming it encourages exploitation of workers, as many employers take away passports of their workers, with a small chance of legal repercussions.

Sadliwala's research interest includes Middle East policy, citizenship, conflict and famine-migration, which was recently published by the Migration Policy Institute in Washington. Her works illustrate unconventional approach for civil society, policymakers and scholars to engage with the role that migration plays in the Gulf.



KUWAIT: Batul K Sadliwala speaks during a seminar at the American University of Kuwait. — Photo by Joseph Shagra

## Teacher accused of causing student's death sent to court

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The public prosecution yesterday referred an Egyptian female teacher accused of causing the death of a student to the criminal court. Nine-year-old Essa Al-Bloushi was suffering from a heart condition, and he died in February 2018 after he was reportedly mistreated and beaten by the teacher, according to the indictment. The teacher is facing four charges including beating the child to death, mistreating the child and slandering him and his mother. Earlier, the child's father Thamer Al-Bloushi said his son had periodic checks at the hospital and that the school was notified about his special health case. He added that on the day he fought with the teacher, he wanted to call home because he was too tired and refused going back to school after he returned home.

The father added that many other parents had the same complaints about the teacher's behavior with pupils. "I have been a teacher for 17 years myself. I hold a master's degree in educational psychology. I would give special care to special case kids even if they keep jumping on their desks. In this case, I would make the school administration deal with the matter and summon the parents instead of assaulting a nine-year-old child as if he was an adult," the father complained, adding that the teacher slapped Essa, pushed him against the wall, pulled him by the ear and threw him out of class. "She

even insulted his mother before the school assistant manager, saying he was a rude child," he added, noting that Essa died the following day.

### Future plans

The Interior Ministry's assistant undersecretary for residency affairs Maj Gen Talal Maarafi yesterday met with residency departments' managers to discuss their future work plans, said security sources. The sources added that Maarafi stressed the significance of facilitating the process by using the e-government portal to meet the 'New Kuwait' vision with the ultimate goal of activating tourism and boosting the national economy, while at the same time being careful about Kuwait's demographic structure and security concerns.

### Reduced fees

Director of the Public Authority for Manpower Ahmed Al-Moussa said the authority has started implementing the decision by Minister of Social Affairs and Labor and Minister of State for Economic Development Hind Al-Sabeeh on reducing fees collected by the authority from citizens desiring to work for the private sector from KD 60 to only KD 10, plus only KD 10 in annual renewal fees. Moussa explained that the decision was made to reduce the burden on national labor and encourage more citizens to get private sector jobs.

### Labor city

Kuwait Municipality Director Ahmed Al-Manfouhi announced that the contract of the 1,015,000 sq m labor city in Jahra will be signed with the investing company during the fourth quarter of 2019. Responding to a proposal by members Humoud Al-Enezi and Abdul Wahab Buresli on transferring the labor cities projects to the manpower authority, Manfouhi stressed that it was one

of the municipality's responsibilities to support the state's plans to encourage the private sector take part in developing government projects. "Accordingly, the Municipal Council approved the labor cities' conditions, construction regulations and suggested locations, before referring the matter to the higher committee for studying development projects, pending offering the project for private sector investment," he explained. Manfouhi elaborated that Jahra labor city will be built over a total area of 1,015,000 sq m to accommodate 20,000 laborers.

### Rent allowance

The Public Authority for Housing Welfare is currently considering the suspension of the KD 150 rent allowance of citizens who had been ignoring all housing alternatives they had been offered, noting that the suspension will reveal those who do not actually need housing welfare or are not serious in getting it. Concerning the legality of the decision, the authority explained the rent allowance is temporarily paid to citizens awaiting government provided housing, and that ignoring the chances they get and the continuation of receiving the allowance involves public fund violations.

### 800,000 electricity meters

The Ministry of Electricity and Water's (MEW) energy efficiency manager Iqbal Al-Tayyar said that MEW is currently focusing on a major project to install and maintain around 800,000 smart electricity meters. Meanwhile, the official noted that the ministry is currently working on readying well-trained national technicians to run future projects that require special abilities. Tayyar added that a meeting was held in this regard with the manager of the higher institute for energy Osama Al-Duaij and teaching staff member Khaled Bohindi to discuss the needed training courses.

## Court rejects petition challenging MPs memberships' legality

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The constitutional court yesterday rejected a petition challenging the legality of the membership of MPs Waleed Al-Tabtabaei and Jamaan Al-Harbash. The court however said it will rule on the constitutionality of article 16 of the Assembly's internal charter on which MPs based their decision to keep the membership of the two MPs even after the court of cassation sentenced them to prison terms.

Meanwhile, the National Assembly agreed to ask the State Audit Bureau to study asking servicemen to work in civil jobs as secretaries for MPs amid protests by several lawmakers that the process involved serious violations of the law. MPs also approved eight agreements between Kuwait and foreign countries after a brief debate.

## 420,000 diabetic patients in Kuwait

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Chairman of Kuwait Diabetes Society Dr Waleed Al-Dhahi warned diabetes is widespread in Kuwait and the world, adding that the prevalence rate reaches 24 percent, with nearly 420,000 in Kuwait suffering from diabetes. He said 40 new cases of type 1 diabetes are registered for every 100,000 children and 4.6 cases of type 2 annually. Dhahi said diabetes is considered difficult to control, as the rate of control around the world is no more than 40 to 70 percent. It is a disease that has medications, but the most important medication for diabetes is lifestyle discipline.

Dhahi said diabetics always need to monitor their blood sugar levels, especially those who use insulin, to adjust their dosage. He added many people keep using the same dose of insulin for a long time, warning this may lead to uncontrolled sugar levels. Dhahi said there are several means to check blood sugar levels at home, and most of them depend on finger pricking, but there are new devices called diabetes sensors, which are systems placed on parts of the body which test sugar levels over a long period. These provide a chance for the patient to know the levels at various times of the day, and can help against hypoglycemia. Dhahi said the society has many activities, including educating people and holding lectures for doctors to enhance their skills and inform them on the latest developments.

## Interior Minister, UN official discuss countering terrorism

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Lt Gen Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah and Undersecretary-General of the United Nations



KUWAIT: Interior Minister Lt Gen Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah meets with Undersecretary-General of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Office Vladimir Ivanovic. — KUNA

Counter-Terrorism Office Vladimir Ivanovic and his accompanying delegation, discussed issues of mutual concern yesterday. In a statement released by the Ministry of Interior Affairs, the minister noted, during the meeting, continuous cooperation between the ministry and the office in sharing experience and information. Meanwhile, Ivanovic hailed Kuwait's efforts in fighting terrorism, it said, adding that the two sides in their discussions focused on the need to boost coordination and develop regional and international relations in order to counter terrorism. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Interior Ministry's Assistant Undersecretary for General Security Affairs Maj Gen Sheikh Faisal Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah chaired a meeting yesterday for directors of the General Security Department. During the meeting, he discussed the directorate's current and future plans, and was briefed on the work mechanism of backup patrols and operations' room. — By Hanan Al-Saoudon

### News in brief

#### 862 companies sent to court

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Manpower has sent 862 companies to court over labor-related violations since the start of the year, Al-Jarida reported yesterday. Director of the inspection department at the authority Mohammad Al-Ansari said inspection tours resulted in referring 507 companies to court for various violations, while 355 companies were sent to the investigations department. He said the total number of fake companies that were closed during the past two months is nearly 700, with more than 2,000 workers registered on their files. He said 2,870 violating workers were arrested and deported.

#### Felony case

Ahmadi prosecutor ordered a case filed over the death of a female citizen in her family home to be registered as a felony, and sent the body to the coroner to determine the cause of death, because the body was about to decompose in her room and reason for the family's delay in informing about her death is not known. A citizen aged 39 told police about the death of his sister three days earlier.

#### Customs officer charged

Cooperation between state security and the Drugs Control General Department resulted in the arrest of a customs officer who accepted a bribe and allowed drugs in the country from Iraq. He confessed to receiving KD 30,000, adding he has previously allowed in large quantities of drugs. The suspect was sent to the public prosecution for further action.

#### Thief arrested

Detectives arrested a thief who escaped from a police station. Investigations are ongoing to find out how he escaped to take the necessary measures against negligence in guarding him. A police source said the suspect took advantage of being outside the holding cell after returning from the prosecution and escaped. Policemen informed detectives, who were able to locate him and arrested him despite fierce resistance, and he was returned to the police station.

#### Smuggling foiled

Customs officers sent a passenger who arrived from an Asian country to the Drug Control General Department (DCGD) after he attempted to smuggle 2,500 Tramadol tablets. Inspection systems at Terminal 4 (T4) building indicated presence of foreign bodies in the passenger's luggage, and the Tramadol was found. — Translated from the Arabic press

## Interior ministry's traffic film wins Arab award

TUNIS: The Kuwaiti Ministry of Interior (MoI) won the award for the 'best film on traffic safety' as part of a competition organized by the Arab Interior Council. The council secretary general, Mohammed bin Koman, handed the prize yesterday to the assistant undersecretary at the MoI, Major General Faraj Al-Zu'bi, who headed the Kuwaiti delegation at the 42nd conference, grouping chiefs of Arab police and security forces.

Earlier, Zu'bi confirmed the importance of security cooperation and coordination between Arab nations, especially 'as challenges we face are common.' He added that Kuwait's partaking in this conference is represented by the Interior Ministry and aims to strengthen security cooperation between the Arab countries. — KUNA

## Local

## Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Citizens sail using a speedboat through a flooded street in Daila following heavy rains that hit Kuwait last month. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

# Fifty loans worth \$3.4 billion to Egypt since 1964: KFAED

## Fund contributes to socio-economic development in Argentina

CAIRO/KUWAIT: Fifty loans worth \$3.4 billion have been signed with Egypt since 1964, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) said yesterday. "Projects of more than 30 of those loans were fully executed; with the first being the Suez Canal development project, which was allocated with a \$33.3 million loan, said Abdullah Al-Museibeh, KFAED's regional director for Arab countries. His statement came on the sidelines of participating in Al-Ahram second energy conference, which concluded last night in Cairo. "The Fund supports many fields in Egypt, including electricity, water, transportation, communication, irrigation and sanitation among others. Due to Egypt's distinguished status, KFAED had celebrated agreement number 1,000 with the Arab country on the sidelines of the 'Africa 2018 Forum' in Sharm Esh Sheikh," he noted.

The latest agreement between the Fund and Egypt took place last week, when the Fund extended a \$50 million loan to participate in the financing of the establishment of the Four Sea Water Desalination Plants Project and a supplementary loan of \$85 million for financing the construction of Bahr Al Baqar Water Drainage Systems Project. KFAED is the first institution in the Middle East that took an active role in the international development efforts, extending loans on concessionary term to finance develop-

ment projects in developing countries. The Fund also provides technical assistance to finance the costs of the feasibility studies of projects, as well as the training of nationals of the borrowing countries.

Meanwhile, KFAED Adviser Dr Mohamad Sadiqi stressed the depth of partnership between Egypt and KFAED, noting that



### Kuwait, Argentina sign KD 15 million loan deal

Egypt is one of the first countries to benefit from the fund's resources. This came in a statement at the conclusion of the second Al-Ahram Energy Conference in Egypt. Sadiqi affirmed the importance of this partnership between the Egyptian side and the Kuwaiti Fund in supporting Egypt's economy, especially the electricity sector. He pointed out that 18 out of 48 projects financed by the KFAED in Egypt were electricity projects. Egypt is one of the main beneficiaries of KFAED's loans and grants. KFAED funds to Egypt make up 28 percent of funds provided

to Arab countries and 16 percent of the total funds to world countries, he added.

#### Water network

In other news, KFAED signed a loan agreement with the Argentinian government to finance the main potable water network in the central province of Cordoba. The project will contribute to the socio-economic development in the South American country through meeting the rising demand for drinkable water in nearly 26 towns in the province, according to a KFAED statement. The construction works of project, including the rehabilitation and expansion of the existing water networks, will cost KD 15 million (some \$49.3 million) which will be covered by KFAED, the statement said. This is the fifth such loan by KFAED to Argentina; the previous four, amounting in value to KD 93 million (\$307 million), were channeled to projects in the areas of transport, water and drainage.

#### Boosting relations

Kuwait's Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and the visiting Argentinian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Worship Jorge Faurie had held talks Tuesday over means to ameliorate bilateral cooperation in various domains. Following the meeting, agreements on the loan and guaranteed loan worth KD 15 million (\$49.3 million) were signed to help finance the water projects in Argentina's Cordoba province. The meeting and signing



KUWAIT: Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) Adviser Dr Mohamad Sadiqi. — KUNA

ceremony were attended by Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah, Assistant Foreign Minister and Office Director of the Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr. Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, Assistant Minister for Economic Affairs Amal Al-Hamad,

Assistant Minister for Ceremonial Affairs Dhari Al-Ajran, Assistant Minister and Office Director of Deputy Foreign Minister Ayham Al-Omar, Assistant Minister for Affairs of the Americas Reem Al-Khaled and Ambassador to Argentina Abdullah Al-Ehaya. — KUNA

## Malaysian Senate President invited to visit Kuwait

KUALA LUMPUR: President of the Malaysian Senate SA Vigneswaran yesterday received a written invitation from Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem to visit Kuwait at the head of a parliamentary delegation. The invitation was handed by Kuwaiti Ambassador to Malaysia Saad Al-Assousi.

Speaking after a meeting with Vigneswaran, Assousi said that the Malaysian official promised to respond to this invitation at the earliest opportunity along with a delegation that will include representatives of all polit-

ical parties in the Malaysian government. He pointed out that the Malaysian official stressed his keenness to discuss ways to develop bilateral relations in all fields with the Kuwaiti side, stressing that the Malaysian Senate will work hard to develop relations between the two countries, especially in matters related to the cooperation of ministries and government agencies.

He added that the President of the Malaysian Senate is continuously following the developments in the Kuwaiti National Assembly, where he praised the Kuwaiti parliamentary experience, describing it as unique in the region. He conveyed his greetings to the Speaker of the Kuwaiti National Assembly. Ambassador Assousi said that the meeting was attended by some members of the Senate where they discussed ways of developing relations between the Kuwaiti National Assembly and the Malaysian Senate, praising the historical relations between the two countries, especially in the parliamentary and all fields and sectors. — KUNA



KUALA LUMPUR: Kuwaiti Ambassador to Malaysia Saad Al-Assousi (second from left) is seen with members of the Malaysian Senate. — KUNA

Local

# Air transport, services witnessed quantum leap during 2018: DGCA

## Plan to open T2 passenger terminal in 2023: Aviation chief

KUWAIT: President of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah said yesterday that projects and air transport services sector in the country has witnessed great improvement during 2018 to support Kuwait's vision 2035 plan. Sheikh Salman noted that Kuwait, in the past 10 years, paid great attention to development of air transport infrastructure due to its substantial economic impact on air transport industry as well as improving airport efficiency which is considered a cultural facade. He added, to help materialize Kuwait's 2035 vision, the state has injected substantial investments over the last 10 years into aviation sector and plans to inject more in the next two decades. He said that DGCA applies security measures in accordance

annually. He explained that the project provides about 12,000 jobs for engineers, trained and qualified workers, especially for Kuwaiti youth, and will generate additional annual revenues for the state up to \$300 million annually.

He pointed out that the development plan also included the operation of the first phase of the new cargo city at Kuwait International Airport on an area of three million square meters to be the largest in the Middle East. "The State of Kuwait is studying putting up a tender for setting up a new airport with capacity of 25 million passengers a year," Sheikh Salman said, adding "Kuwait will witness a rapid growth in passenger and cargo movement in the coming 20 years."

He forecasts that up to \$12 billion would be invested in the new airport which would generate over 15,000 job openings and offer a great platform for high-quality training for national cadres by specialized international experts. "To implement such ambi-



Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah



The Terminal 2 (T2) building at Kuwait International Airport.

tious plan, we would secure specialized international airport operation companies to operate Kuwait Airport terminals", he said. He also revealed that his

department is studying to establish an aviation academy to meet the growing demand for pilots and maintenance technicians in Kuwait. — KUNA



### Security measures applied in accordance with int'l standards

with international standards at airports, which gives priority of security a high degree of attention and care. He added that the Directorate inaugurated Terminal Four (T4) allocated for Kuwait Airways at Kuwait International Airport initially with the capacity of nearly 4.5 million passengers annually.

"A series of improvements in the main terminal (T1) at Kuwait International Airport during the summer season were implemented to provide the best services to passengers and facilitate their movement and overcome the congestion," he said. With regard to the new projects, Sheikh Salman said that in the coming period, two new runways, a new control tower with advanced systems, and the construction of a corridor to boost the capacity of Kuwait International Airport will see light. He unveiled a plan to open the new passenger terminal (T2) in 2023, which was designed according to world-class mega airports with a capacity of 25 million passengers



The Terminal 4 (T4) building at Kuwait International Airport.



The interior of Terminal 4 (T4) at Kuwait International Airport.

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# International

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2018



India girl seeks father's arrest over lavatory

## China detains Canada ex-diplomat for 'harming state security'

Page 9

Page 7



HASAKEH: A Syrian displaced woman carries her child inside the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp of Al-Hol in Al-Hasakeh governorate in northeastern Syria. — AFP

## Thousands flee bombs, hunger in East Syria

### Hundreds of bodies found in mass graves

**AL-HOL, Syria:** Faraj was born in the pouring rain on a nondescript stretch of desert road in eastern Syria as his family fled escalating fighting over the Islamic State group's last bastion. His family was part of a group of around 200 civilians who managed to escape from a pocket of territory in Deir Ezzor province that is still held by the jihadists. "I had to resist hunger, cold and rain," the newborn's mother Kamela Fadel said in a camp for displaced people in the northeastern region of Al-Hol.

The young woman, her husband and their four children now sleep under white tents, with hundreds of other people who fled eastern flashpoints in past weeks. They are huddled on straw mats laid out directly on the gravelly earth, wrapped in blankets and hugging bags packed with their meagre belongings.

A nurse helps an elderly lady to the camp clinic as children play at scaling piles of foam mattresses and families sit cross-legged, eating from tin cans. It is still cold in the vast tent but at least they are sheltered from the rain. They walked for several days in the winter weather before being met last week by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) battling IS in Deir Ezzor. "It was hunger that prompted us to leave, there was nothing left to eat," says Kamela's husband, still sporting the thick beard the jihadists impose on all adult men.

#### 'Destruction everywhere'

He and his family were living in Al-Shaafa, one of the

last villages, together with Sousa and Hajin, that are still under the control of IS. The SDF, with the support of air strikes by the US-led coalition against IS, launched a major operation against the last rump of the jihadists' moribund "caliphate" in September this year. The jihadists hunkering down in their Euphrates Valley heartland have offered stiff resistance, thwarting coalition hopes of a quick victory.

Warplanes have been raining bombs on IS targets in and around Hajin, causing significant civilian loss of life in the process, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The Observatory says almost 320 civilians have been killed, including 113 children. "There is destruction everywhere because of the fighting and the bombardment. We were scared for the children," says Faraj's father. Local camp official Mohamed Ibrahim told AFP around 1,700 civilians had arrived in Al-Hol in recent days. The intensity of the bombardment and the remoteness of the area make it difficult to estimate the number of civilians who remain, voluntarily or not, in the IS pocket.

"In Syria, displacement leads to food insecurity as people leave their belongings behind," said Marwa Awad, a spokeswoman for the UN's World Food Program in Damascus. "This is why it's vital to maintain a lifeline of food assistance for vulnerable families such as those escaping violence in Deir Ezzor," she said. Awad said at least 16,500 people had been forced to flee their homes in Hajin and surrounding areas since violence in the area intensified

in July this year. SDF fighters too suffered heavy losses in their assault on Hajin, where a group of die-hard jihadists with little to lose are making a bloody last stand.

#### Last stand

"There are landmines everywhere on the roads," says Abu Omar, one of the displaced in Al-Hol. Fearing retribution against relatives who have stayed behind in IS-controlled territory, he refused to give his full name. "The village and our homes have been destroyed by the bombardment," says Abu Omar, a man in his thirties. "There are still high-ranking members of IS and foreigners there, but most are on the Hajin frontline," he says. "They won't give up easily, they are fighting to the death." The US-led coalition puts the number of jihadist fighters holding out in that area at around 2,000.

"The day we managed to flee, the fog was thick and gave us cover. Had they seen us, they would have wiped us out," says Ziba Al-Ahmed, who escaped the town of Sousa. "The bombardment was so scary and our bellies were crying," says the mother of four. Their farming machinery was too precious to leave in Sousa and her husband stayed behind with one of their daughters. "We're worried about them, we don't know what's going to happen to them."

#### Seven mass graves

Meanwhile, seven mass graves containing hundreds of unidentified bodies have been unearthed near the

former Islamic State group stronghold of Albu Kamal in eastern Syria, official news agency SANA said. Most of the more than 100 bodies recovered so far at the site appear to "have been subjected to torture and ill-treatment before execution," it said, accusing IS of killing the victims. Work was under way to retrieve the rest of the bodies from the graves in the eastern province of Deir Ezzor, SANA said in its report published late Tuesday.

It released a video showing forensic experts in protective clothing recovering remains, and corpses laid out on the ground in a row under white sheets. A Syrian Red Crescent official said the main focus at present was identifying the remains already recovered which included those of several women. "Exhumations will resume afterwards," the official said, asking not to be identified. "The bodies show signs of torture and some were blindfolded and handcuffed."

IS has been held responsible for multiple atrocities during its reign of terror, including mass executions and decapitations. In recent months, both Syria and Iraq have discovered a number of mass graves in areas previously occupied by the jihadists. IS proclaimed a "caliphate" over swathes of the two countries in 2014, but has since lost almost all the territory it once held. Albu Kamal, which lies in the Euphrates Valley near the border with Iraq, was the last major town that IS controlled fully before losing it in November 2017. — Agencies

## Eerie quietness in France's bloodied 'Christmas capital'

**STRASBOURG:** Around two million people converge on the postcard-perfect island at the heart of Strasbourg every year for the Christmas market. Yesterday morning, it was shut and grimly quiet after a shooting spree left three dead. "There was a knot in my stomach when I went to work this morning. We don't know how this is going to go," said Cathia, a delivery woman who lives just south of the city.

She was at the market when the attack began Tuesday night, sending thousands of people running for safety and prompting a security lockdown in the city known as the "capital of Christmas." Hundreds hid in bars and restaurants and were finally able to leave under police escort at around 2:00 am (0100 GMT), but the city remained on edge as hundreds of police sought the gunman, a 29-year-old Strasbourg native.

Flags were lowered to half-staff as theatre performances and other shows were cancelled, though schools remained open for parents unable to keep their children at home. The annual market has become a veritable fortress since 2015, when France suffered jihadist terror strikes that left scores dead and marked the beginning of a wave of attacks. Access to the island formed by the River Ill is tightly controlled via the nearly 20 bridges connecting it to the rest of the city.

For Christmas, the island becomes home to around 300 wooden chalets warming visitors with mulled wine and sausages, under the dazzling lights of a 30-metre (100-foot) fir tree in Kleber Square. On Tuesday night, wounded victims could be seen in the streets which are flanked by traditional Alsatian buildings with their

exposed wooden beams. "I'm having a hard time believing what happened here," said Antoine, a 20-year-old medical student in the city of 300,000 people which lies on the border with Germany. "This is a first for Strasbourg, it's really a peaceful city."

#### 'Threat very high'

The market has long been a prime target, with French authorities foiling a bomb plot as far back as December 2000, when four men suspected of Al-Qaeda links were arrested. Concrete bollards and trenches dug between tramway lines are now a common site, to avoid vehicle attacks like that which struck Berlin's Christmas market in 2016, killing 12. That attack was claimed by the Islamic State group, which has claimed others in France that have killed more than 245 people since 2015. "The terror threat remains very high," junior interior minister Laurent Nunez said on November 23 during this year's inauguration of the market. "Our forces are ready to secure this major event for Strasbourg and France, with lots of visitors from around the world," he said. The security budget has more than tripled since 2015 to stand at one million euros (\$1.13 million). Around 260 police officers are deployed each day, bolstered by 160 private security agents and 50 municipal police agents.

Dozens of soldiers from France's anti-terror Sentinelle operation, created after the January 2015 massacre at the offices of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, also carry out patrols. It was Sentinelle soldiers alerted by the shots who first engaged with the gunman. He later exchanged fire with other security forces before fleeing in a commandeered taxi. Strasbourg Mayor Roland Ries said the market would be closed yesterday, but even if it reopens in the coming days, a lingering apprehension will likely cast a pall over the Christmas cheer. "It's hard to imagine what comes next, because we've never been through something like this," said Antoine. — AFP

## Indonesia's Aceh lashes 2 men 100 times each for sex

**LHOKSEUMAWA:** Two men caught having sex with underage girls were whipped 100 times each in Muslim-majority Indonesia's conservative Aceh province yesterday, as one begged officials to stop the painful punishment. Flogging is common for a range of offences in the region at the tip of Sumatra island, including gambling, drinking alcohol, and having gay sex or relations outside of marriage. It is the only province in Indonesia that imposes Islamic law.

The two men whipped yesterday were arrested this year—one for having sex with his underage step-daughter and the other for engaging in relations with a neighbor who was also below the age of consent. Indonesia's age of consent is 18, although 16-year-olds can marry with parental permission. The 100-stroke punishment is reserved for the most severe crimes and the pair were also sentenced to as much as five years in prison.

By contrast, a half dozen men whipped this week for online gambling—an offence under Islamic law—received between seven and 11 strokes each from a rattan cane.



ACEH, Indonesia: A Sharia law enforcement medical official checks the injuries of a man who was whipped in Lhokseumawe. — AFP

Yesterday, one of the men raised his hand and begged a masked sharia officer to stop after he had received just five lashes, saying he could not take the pain. The flogging resumed after doctors on the scene declared him fit enough to receive some 95 more strokes. "We'll only postpone a caning if the doctors say there's a serious health threat," local prosecutor Isnawati, who goes by one name, told reporters yesterday.

The other man quietly endured his punishment as blood seeped through the back of his shirt. Unlike some public floggings that can attract hundreds of spectators, including chil-

dren, only a few dozen people watched yesterday's whipping, which took place in a sports stadium. Usually public whippings are held outside a mosque after Friday prayers. Rights groups slam public caning as cruel, and Indonesia's President Joko Widodo has called for it to end. But the practice has wide support among Aceh's mostly Muslim population—around 98 percent of its five million residents practice Islam. Earlier this year, Aceh said that flogging would be carried out behind prison walls in future, but some local governments have continued public whippings. — AFP

## International

# Lebanese leaders show optimism on ending government deadlock

## Politicians at odds over new government

BEIRUT: Lebanese leaders expressed fresh confidence yesterday about reaching a deal to form a new government, with President Michel Aoun saying results of his efforts to break the months-long deadlock would appear this week. Heavily indebted and with a stagnant economy, Lebanon desperately needs a new government to implement economic reforms that are required to put its public finances on a more sustainable footing and unlock pledges of foreign aid. A general election in May gave rise to months of wrangling between the rival parties to form a coalition government under the country's sectarian system, with Saad Al-Hariri designated as prime minister.

Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri was cited as saying he was "optimistic for the possibility of a solution soon" and caretaker Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil said Lebanon would definitely form a new government "despite all obstacles". On Tuesday, Aoun said the government formation could not be resolved in the traditional way between the prime minister-designate and other parties, and that he had to get involved to avoid "catastrophe" - an apparent reference to the economy.

He said yesterday the results of his new effort would appear "in the next two days". Bassil, who is also Aoun's son-in-law and head of the political party he founded, said partnership between Aoun and Hariri would "certainly lead to the formation of a new government, despite all obstacles". He was speaking at a London conference which the Lebanese government hopes will garner

investor interest in a capital investment program that aims to tap into billions of dollars of aid pledged at a donors' conference in April.

### High public debt

But foreign governments and international institutions first want Lebanon to implement long-stalled economic reforms. The country has the world's third largest public debt compared to its GDP, at more than 150 percent. Hariri, also attending the London roadshow, told reporters he was "always optimistic" when asked about the prospects of forming a new government. Parliament Speaker Berri's optimism stemmed from Aoun's intervention in the process, lawmaker Ali Bazzi said. Agreement on the make-up of the new cabinet has met a series of obstacles as Hariri has sought to forge a deal parceling out 30 cabinet posts among rival groups according to the sectarian system.

The final hurdle has been over Sunni Muslim representation, with the powerful Iran-backed Shi'ite Muslim group Hezbollah demanding a cabinet seat for one of its Sunni allies who gained ground in the election. Analysts believe one compromise could be for Aoun to nominate one of the Hezbollah-aligned Sunnis, or a figure acceptable to them, among a group of ministers named by the president. Hariri said on Twitter that the new government would be firmly committed to reforms agreed at the April donors conference, including fiscal reforms. — Reuters



BATROUN, Lebanon: Waves crash over the old lighthouse and spill to the other side at the port of this Lebanese city north of Beirut yesterday. — AFP

## From wars to Duterte: Philippine journalist 'holds the line'

MANILA: Philippine journalist Maria Ressa, who was named this week as a Time magazine "Person of the Year", has extensive experience in conflict zones, but is now fighting a war to fend off government moves to put her behind bars. Hours after meeting bail Tuesday on fresh tax fraud charges that the 55-year-old insists are "manufactured", Ressa was named to the prestigious award. The accolade, also given to murdered Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi and imprisoned Reuters reporters Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, highlighted those taking "great risks in pursuit of greater truth," Time's chief editor said.

Ressa's news site, Rappler, has taken a critical stand on Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's deadly anti-drug crackdown and now says it is the target of attacks from authorities. "It is easier to navigate a conflict zone, a war zone than it is to navigate the legal weapon-

sation of laws in our country. But we will hold the line," the Princeton graduate said last week. Ressa and the site have been hit with multiple counts of misleading the government on taxes, and if convicted on one count alone she faces up to a decade behind bars.

### 'We did not hide'

It caps a tumultuous year for Ressa, which began with the government moving to revoke Rappler's licence in January. At the same time she has received a series of global awards from press freedom advocates, including from the Committee to Protect Journalists. Ressa has been battling what she calls disinformation under Duterte, who won elections in mid-2016 on a promise to rid society of drugs by killing tens of thousands of people.

Rappler has been among a small number of Philippine media outfits producing investigative reports on the killings in Duterte's anti-crime crackdown and is critical of his leadership. A journalist for more than 30 years, Ressa is no stranger to threats. As CNN's former bureau chief in Manila and Jakarta, Ressa specialised in terrorism where she tracked the links between global networks like Al-Qaeda and militants in Southeast Asia. "I've been shot at. I almost got thrown out of a country. I've been imprisoned for a night," she told AFP last week.

However Ressa, who holds both American and Filipino citizenship,



MANILA: CEO of Philippine news website Rappler, Maria Ressa, speaks to the media at the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) headquarters in Manila. — AFP

returned to the Philippines as news chief of the largest television network ABS-CBN for six years. In 2012, she launched her own startup, Rappler, in the social media-obsessed Philippines. However that website is now fighting for survival as Duterte's government has accused it of violating a constitutional ban on foreign ownership in securing funding, as well as libel and tax evasion.

Reacting to the Time award, Duterte's spokesman Salvador Panelo said on

Wednesday that charges against government critics were legitimate and free expression remained "robust". Ressa, who denies all the charges, has vowed to fight back. "We at Rappler decided that when we look back at this moment a decade from now, we will have done everything we could: we did not duck, we did not hide," she said while accepting an award last month. "You don't really know who you are until you're forced to fight to defend it." — AFP

## Indian girl seeks dad's arrest over broken promise to build lavatory

CHENNAI: A seven year-old Indian girl has complained to the police to have her father arrested after he failed to build a toilet in their home as promised, police said yesterday. Millions of Indians do not have access to sanitation and open defecation is a problem, even in developed, industrial states. The girl, E Hanifa Zaara, didn't want to go out in the open and won a promise from her father to build a lavatory indoors, said police officer A Valarmathi.

But when no toilet was built she went to the police to lodge a complaint, Valarmathi said over the telephone from the southern town of Ambur, 100 km from the city of Chennai. "The girl was adamant on having her father arrested as she felt cheated," Valarmathi said. "We then rang up her father, called him to the police station and made them shake hands and compromise." Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has been pushing a campaign to build 100 million toilets over five years but the drive has not covered large parts of the country.

The Times of India said the father told police he had twice asked the municipality for aid under Modi's campaign, known as Clean India, but there had been no response. The campaign, supported by big companies and Bollywood actors, has raised awareness of the ills of open defecation. Last year, a Bollywood film, 'Toilet: A Love Story', which drew inspiration from Modi's sanitation drive, sought to turn the topic of hygiene into a mainstream issue. The movie depicted a dispute between a young couple over an inside toilet - which many Indians, especially in the countryside, consider unclean. — Reuters

## EU court rejects Mubarak bid to end sanctions

LUXEMBOURG: An EU court yesterday rejected a bid by Egypt's former president Hosni Mubarak to lift a freeze on his assets in Europe that followed his ouster in the 2011 revolution. European Union member countries imposed the sanctions on Mubarak and his family in March 2011 based on lawsuits filed against them in Egypt for alleged embezzlement of state funds. After those countries-grouped in the European Council-renewed the sanctions in 2017 and 2018, Mubarak asked the EU's General Court to annul them. "In today's judgment, the General Court dismisses the action and upholds the Council's 2017 and 2018 decisions to renew the freezing of assets," the Luxembourg-based court said.

"The renewal decisions form part of a policy of support for the Egyptian authorities that is based, in particular, on objectives of consolidation of and support for democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the principles of international law," the court said. The European "decisions can be regarded as falling within the common foreign and security policy of the EU," it said. It added that the sanctions "support a peaceful transition to a civilian and democratic government in Egypt." They must "be maintained until the judicial proceedings are concluded in Egypt" so that they are effective.

"Consequently, they do not depend on successive changes of government in that country since the adoption of the decision," the court said. After Mubarak's ouster, Islamist president Mohamed Morsi took power in 2012 before the military toppled him in 2013 following mass protests against Morsi's rule. Former military chief Abdel Fatah al-Sisi became president later that year. The court also said there was no reason to doubt the legal basis on which the lawsuits were filed in Egypt. It also said the judicial proceedings in Egypt offered "effective safeguards" for Mubarak and his family.

Mubarak's team can file an appeal with the European Court of Justice, the top EU court, two months after being notified of the current ruling. Since Mubarak's ouster more than seven years ago, a number of legal proceedings have been launched against the three-decade ruler and his relatives. — AFP

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## International

# Pope removes scandal-hit cardinals from inner circle

## 2 prominent cardinals tainted by pedophile scandals

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis has removed two prominent cardinals from his inner circle months after they were tainted by pedophile scandals and ahead of a Church-wide meeting on the "protection of minors" next year. Australian Cardinal George Pell and Chilean Cardinal Francisco Javier Errazuriz were both removed from the so-called C9 Council of Cardinals, an international advice body set up by Francis himself, the Vatican said yesterday.

The last time the C9 met in September, Errazuriz, who is accused of ignoring reports of abuse in Chile, and Pell, who faces charges in Australia related to historical child sexual offences, were both absent, and the council said it was considering restructuring. Despite being removed from the C9, Pell, 77, remains in charge of Vatican finances, the third most powerful position in the Roman Catholic Church.

The Church has been hit by a series of child abuse scandals in recent years, with widespread allegations of cover-ups, including against the pope himself. The pope clarified the composition of the C9 ahead of a February meeting with leaders of bishops' conferences from around the world dealing with the "protection of minors", to which victims of priest sex abuse have been invited. The meeting of bishops from around the world will also have to deal with some Asian and African bishops' conferences who say they are not concerned by the "Western" abuse problem.

"February's meeting can't resolve all the problems, because there's too much world diversity in the Church. The American (US) episcopacy is panicking,

they want to be as radical (against sexual abuse) as possible, while Africans don't want any measures taken," said a source close to the pope. "A code of silence has been our culture for too long. February's meeting should mark a new beginning for bishops' responsibility, or even for a new control system," the source said. Allegations in August from a conservative archbishop that the pope had ignored abuse suspicions concerning a prominent US cardinal have triggered an internal investigation into Vatican archives ordered by Pope Francis.

### Internal rift

They also confirmed a rift in the Church between some ultra-conservative Catholics and a pope they see as a dangerous progressive interested in social issues to the detriment of Church doctrine. The Church was also rocked in August by a devastating US report on child sex abuse which accused more than 300 "predator" priests of abusing more than 1,000 minors over seven decades in the state of Pennsylvania. The commission set up by Francis has said that the fight against abuse must be a Church priority and emphasized the importance of listening to victims. While Pell faces prosecution in Australia, he is also up for renewal in February as the Vatican's finance chief. Francis has in the past preferred to give the accused the presumption of innocence and has therefore not named anyone to replace Pell, despite a senior Vatican official saying this week that Church expenses were growing "unacceptably".



VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis meets with the faithful during the weekly general audience in Paul VI hall yesterday at the Vatican. — AFP

Chilean Cardinal Errazuriz appears at the very least to have given Francis bad advice. The pope's mistaken defense of a Chilean bishop accused of covering up for an old paedophile priest overshadowed his trip to the South American country in January and heaped embarrassment on the Church. Errazuriz, 85, met Francis last month and subsequently announced his "withdrawal"

from the C9. A third cardinal, Democratic Republic of Congo's Laurent Monsengwo, will also no longer attend C9 meetings, effectively reducing the body to a "C6". Monsengwo, 79, has for years played an important political as well as spiritual role in the war-torn African nation, but recently gave up his position as archbishop of Kinshasa. — AFP

## Nigeria warned amid crackdown on Shiites

LAGOS: Nigeria yesterday faced calls to prosecute soldiers for using excessive force against Shiite Muslim protesters, exactly three years after a military crackdown killed more than 300. Human Rights Watch said the security forces had shown a "pattern of brutality" towards the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) and warned such action could worsen national security. More than 40 people were killed in three days of protests in the capital, Abuja, in October when the security forces fired live bullets at crowds.

The army maintained six people died and that soldiers acted in self-defense because protesters were trying to seize weapons and ammunition, and that troops came under attack. Anieta Ewang, Nigeria researcher at Human Rights Watch, said: "The repression against the

IMN Shia Muslim group by government security forces risks creating grievances that could worsen Nigeria's already precarious security situation. "The increasing spate of protests by the group is a cry for justice that authorities would do well to heed." She added: "Any unlawful use of violent force against processions and protesters is highly likely to be counterproductive as well as a crime."

### Mass grave

HRW called on the authorities to "end impunity" for the attacks, investigate crackdowns on other protests and "hold anyone found responsible for using unlawful force to account". The IMN and its leader Ibrahim Zakzaky have been at loggerheads with the government for years because of his call for an Iranian-style Islamic revolution in Nigeria.

Nigeria is almost evenly split between a mainly Sunni Muslim north and a largely Christian south. On December 12, 2015, soldiers killed 347 IMN members in a three-day crackdown in the northern city of Zaria, after accusing them of blocking the road and threatening the chief of army staff. — AFP

## In heated on-camera clash, Trump battles with top Democrats

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump openly fought with the top two Democratic lawmakers in the Oval Office on Tuesday about government funding, throwing into question whether a deal to avert a government shutdown was possible ahead of a deadline next week. In a remarkable public argument, the likes of which is seldom seen before cameras, Trump brawled with US Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer and House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi about paying for a wall on the US-Mexico border that they see as ineffective and wasteful. "If we don't get what we want, one way or the other - whether it's through you, through a military, through anything you want to call - I will shut down the government," Trump said as the heated argument drew to a crescendo.

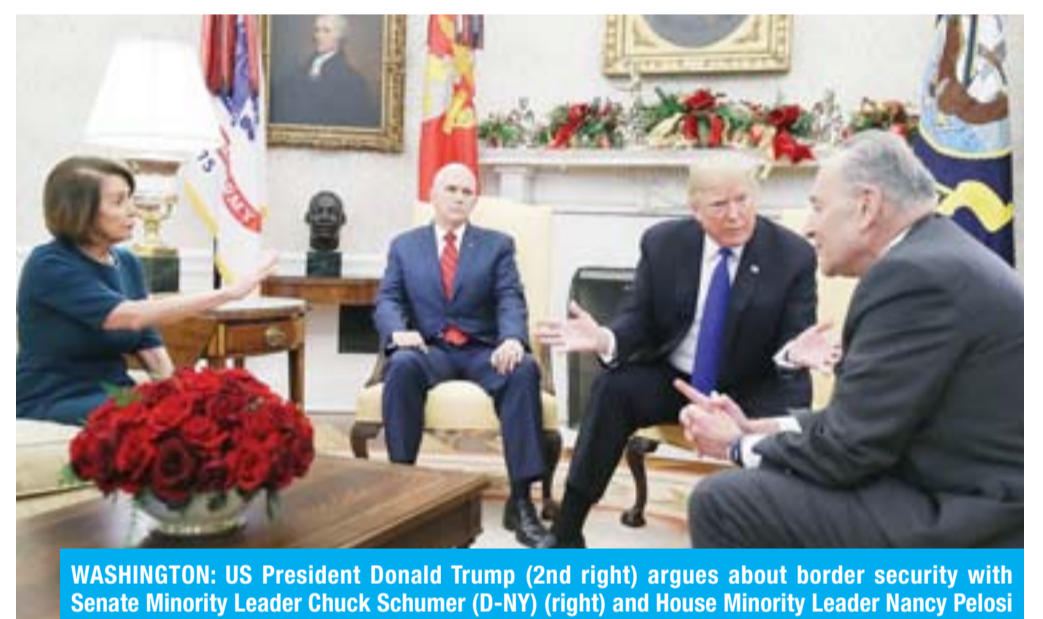
"I am proud to shut down the government for border security, Chuck, because the people of this country don't want criminals and people that have lots of problems and drugs pouring into our country," he said before reporters left their ringside seats. Vice President Mike Pence sat beside Trump, silent and stone faced. While Trump's fellow Republicans control both the House and the Senate until next month, Democratic support is needed to pass any spending legislation. If the impasse cannot be resolved by Dec 21, about one-quarter of the federal government immediately would be left without funding. Money for the rest of the government already has been appropriated.

Trump has asked Congress for \$5 billion for border security, while Schumer and Pelosi have offered to extend funding at current levels, around \$1.3 billion. That is less than the \$1.6 billion a bipartisan Senate committee approved. While the battle over border security is contentious, the money being negotiated is a small portion of a \$450 billion bill to keep agencies operating through next September. In an interview with Reuters later in the day, Trump did not rule out a compromise on the funding. "We have to see what else is entailed," he said.

## Strasbourg suspect: Violent criminal with extremist ideas

STRASBOURG: The 29-year-old man being sought by police over a mass shooting in Strasbourg lived in a small apartment in a rundown housing bloc and has spent time in prison in France and Germany. The man, who has not been named by French authorities, lived in the Poteries area of Strasbourg about a 20-minute tram ride from the centre of the French city and its Christmas market, which he was suspected of attacking on Tuesday night.

"It's a building for desperate people. No one wants to live there," one local, Bemba N'diaye, 37, told an AFP reporter near the nine-storey concrete bloc in the Hohberg dis-



WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump (2nd right) argues about border security with Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) (right) and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) as Vice President Mike Pence sits nearby in the Oval Office in Washington, DC. — AFP

### Harsh words continued

The meeting did not last long after reporters were ushered out of the Oval Office. But the harsh words continued during a closed meeting of House Democrats. According to an aide in the room, Pelosi said Trump's fixation with building a wall was "like a manhood thing for him. As if manhood could ever be associated with him."

Pelosi told reporters she had asked Trump to pray about resolving the dispute, recounting the biblical story of King Solomon asking God for wisdom. Pelosi told reporters that later in the day that she and Trump spoke by telephone, and the president said he was reviewing the offer made by Democrats during the White House meeting. Despite the rancor, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Republican, told reporters, "I'd still like to see a smooth ending here and I haven't given up hope that's what we'll have."

If there is no deal, Trump would be shuttering the very agency in charge of border security - the Department of Homeland Security. In past shutdown battles, workers deemed "essential" were instructed to work. Other federal agencies that also would face closures include the departments of State, Commerce and Agriculture, and visitors would not be allowed into federal parks. At the Pentagon, Lieutenant Colonel Jamie Davis said there were no plans now for the US military to build sections of the border wall, though the Defense Department could under-

current law pay for some border barrier projects "such as in support of counter-drug operations or national emergencies."

### 'It's called transparency'

The rocky White House meeting was the first Trump held with Pelosi and Schumer since Democrats won control of the House in Nov. 6 elections, possibly foreshadowing battles to come next year. Trump told Reuters he thought it would be possible to work on legislation with Democrats - unless they launch a barrage of investigations into his administration and policies. "We're either going to start the campaign and they're going to do presidential harassment. Or we're going to get tremendous amounts of legislation passed working together," he said.

Tuesday's fight kicked off when Pelosi told Trump that Americans did not want to see a "Trump shutdown," touching a nerve. Trump cut off Pelosi, arguing that he could not advance a funding bill without Democratic votes in the Senate. "If I needed the votes for the wall in the House, I would have them in one session. It would be done," Trump bragged. "Well then - go do it, go do it," Pelosi shot back. Senior White House staff watched the melee from the edges of the room. "I don't think we should have a debate in front of the press on this," Pelosi said, adding, "Let's call a halt to this." "It's not bad, Nancy - it's called transparency," Trump said. — Reuters

trict where the suspect lived. "People there are very isolated," N'diaye said. Others said the man was known in the area owing to his criminal record, but he kept a low profile. "His family has lived around here for a while, but he lived on his own nearby," Zach, a 22-year-old, said. "He was discreet, not a thug." The suspected gunman has been sentenced 27 times in France, Germany and Switzerland, mostly for violence and robbery, prosecutor Remy Heitz said at a press conference.

On his identity card, seen by an AFP reporter, the suspect has dark eyes, black hair and a short beard. He is "known for a number of criminal offences (...) but has never been linked to terrorist offences," French deputy interior minister Laurent Nunez told France Inter radio yesterday. The man was added to watchlist of possible extremists while in prison in France in 2015 after he "called for practicing a radical form of religion," Nunez said. He has since been monitored by France's domestic intelligence agency, the DGSI, which is highly stretched due to the large number of suspected extremists in France.

Some 25,000 people are currently on the "S" extremism watchlist, 9,700 of them for radicalism "linked mainly to Islamist terror movements," according to the interior ministry. In 2016, the suspected shooter was jailed in Germany for robberies in the city of Mainz and the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg before being expelled back to France after serving a year behind bars. German authorities were on the lookout for the fugitive yesterday "along the Rhine" river which serves as the border between France and Germany, a spokesman from the Baden-Wuerttemberg region said.

"But at the moment we do not believe that he has crossed into the country," he added. The lone gunman, armed with an handgun and a knife, shot and stabbed passers-by at the traditional Christmas market on Tuesday evening. He killed three people and wounded 13, eight seriously, before fleeing in a taxi, prosecutor Heitz said. Police had sought to detain him up Tuesday morning in connection with an attempted murder enquiry, but he was not at home, Nunez said. A grenade, four knives and a pistol were found at his home, police said. — AFP



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International

# China detains Canadian ex-diplomat Kovrig for 'harming state security'

## Western diplomat calls it 'political kidnapping'

BEIJING: Chinese authorities are questioning former Canadian diplomat Michael Kovrig, who was detained days after the arrest in Canada of a Chinese businesswoman, on suspicion of engaging in activities that harmed China's national security. The state-run Beijing News said yesterday that Kovrig, who works for the International Crisis Group (ICG), had become the subject of an investigation by the Beijing State Security Bureau.

He was detained after police in Canada arrested the chief financial officer of China's Huawei Technologies Co Ltd on Dec 1 at the request of US authorities, infuriating Beijing. The Canadian government has said it saw no explicit link to the Huawei case. "Canadian citizen Michael John Kovrig was on Dec 10 investigated in accordance with the law by the Beijing State Security Bureau on suspicion of engaging in activities that harm China's state security," the newspaper said in a brief report. The case is continuing to be investigated, it added without elaborating.

Accusations of harming state security could cover a wide range of suspected

crimes, and in China are often very vague when first leveled. The ICG, a think-tank focused on conflict resolution, said in an earlier statement Kovrig was detained by state security officials in Beijing on Monday night. Diplomats in China said the apparent involvement of the secretive state security ministry, which engages in domestic counter-espionage work, among other things, suggests the government could be looking at leveling spying accusations. However, ICG President and Chief Executive Robert Malley said the group did not engage in such activity.

"I don't want to speculate as to what's behind it but I am prepared to be categorical about what's not behind it, and what's not behind it is any illegal activity or endangering of Chinese national security," Malley told Reuters, before the state media report came out. "Everything we do is transparent, it's on our website. We don't engage in secretive work, in confidential work." Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Lu Kang, also speaking earlier in the day, said he had nothing he could say on the details of the case. He said the ICG was not regis-

tered in China as a non-government organization (NGO) and Kovrig could have broken Chinese law.

"If they are not registered and their workers are in China undertaking activities, then that's already outside of, and breaking, the law, revised just last year, on the management of overseas non-governmental organizations operating in China," Lu said. The Ministry of Public Security, which has oversight over foreign NGOs, did not respond to a request for comment. China's Ministry of State Security has no publicly available contact details. The foreign NGO law, which took effect in January, is part of a raft of new national security measures introduced under President Xi Jinping. "All foreigners that come to China, so long as they respect the law, have nothing to worry about," Lu said.

### 'No coincidences'

William Nee, China Researcher for Amnesty International's East Asia Regional Office in Hong Kong, said Kovrig's detention was alarming, especially as it appeared to be the first time the law has been used to

detain a foreign NGO worker. "We need to wait for the official explanation from the Chinese side, but this detention could have a chilling effect on the foreign NGO and business communities in terms of their feeling safe while travelling in China," he told Reuters.

Guy Saint-Jacques, Canada's former ambassador to China, was asked by the Canadian Broadcasting Corp on Tuesday whether the Kovrig detention was a coincidence after the arrest of Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou. "In China there are no coincidences ... If they want to send you a message, they will send you a message," he said. A Western diplomat in China, who asked not to be identified, was even more blunt: "This is a political kidnapping."

China had threatened severe consequences unless Canada released Meng immediately and analysts have said retaliation for the arrest was likely. Meng was granted bail by a Canadian court on Tuesday, 10 days after her arrest in Vancouver on US claims that she misled multinational banks about Iran-linked transactions caused a diplomatic dispute. Malley said Kovrig, who was



Former Canadian diplomat Michael Kovrig

based in Hong Kong, had been working on issues related to Chinese foreign policy in Asia and Africa. "I'm just going to hope that whatever process is under way is going to be a fair one and one that will quickly show that there's nothing against him," he said. — Reuters

## Pakistan rejects US blacklist for religious freedom violations

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan yesterday rejected Washington's decision to place it on a blacklist of countries that violate religious freedom, branding the move "politically motivated" and defending its treatment of minorities. The US move to designate Pakistan "among countries of particular concern" comes at a difficult time for relations between the nations, with the Trump administration accusing Islamabad of failing to act against Islamist militants on its soil.

"Pakistan does not need counsel by any individual country (on) how to protect the rights of its minorities," a statement from the foreign ministry said, adding that Islamabad "rejects" the designation. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced the move to blacklist Pakistan in a congressionally mandated annual report released Tuesday.

The measure means the US government is obliged to exert pressure, including imposing sanctions if necessary, to end freedom violations. However, a spokesman with the US embassy in Islamabad clarified yesterday that Pompeo had issued a waiver over potential sanctions against Pakistan as required by "the important national interest of the United States". Blasphemy is an inflammatory charge in Pakistan, and high-profile vigilante murders and mob lynchings have been carried out in the past. In October, a Pakistani court exonerated Asia Bibi, a Christian woman who had spent eight years on death row for blasphemy. She remains in protective custody in an



ISLAMABAD: Pakistani Christian girls look on from a roadside shop in a Christian colony in Islamabad yesterday. The United States yesterday added Pakistan to its blacklist of countries that violate religious freedom, ramping up pressure over the uneasy ally's treatment of minorities. — AFP

unknown location after violent protests against her acquittal, and a headline cleric has been charged with terrorism and sedition over the demonstrations. Bibi is currently seeking asylum abroad. Her family claims her life will be in danger if she remains in Pakistan. The foreign ministry statement did not mention Bibi, or the issue of blasphemy. "Pakistan is a multi-religious and pluralistic society where people of diverse faiths and denominations live together," it said. It also warned that honesty would have required Washington to examine the "exponential rise in Islamophobia and anti-Semitism in the US".

### 'Particular concern'

Pakistan says around four percent of its total population comprises citizens belonging to

Christian, Hindu, Buddhists and Sikh faiths. Human rights advocates have long voiced alarm about the treatment of religious minorities in Pakistan including Shiites and the Ahmadiis, whom Islamabad forbids from identifying as Muslim. The State Department had earlier held off on condemning Pakistan, a vital gateway for US forces in Afghanistan. But it last year placed Pakistan on a special watch list—a step short of the designation—and Washington has separately curbed military assistance. Relations between Washington and Islamabad have soured in recent years, with US officials repeatedly accusing Islamabad of ignoring or even collaborating with groups like the Afghan Taliban, which attack Afghanistan from alleged safe havens along the border between the two countries. —AFP

## India extends controversial citizens register deadline

NEW DELHI: India's Supreme Court extended yesterday by two weeks a deadline for millions of people left off a citizens register in Assam state to provide the necessary documents to be included. A new draft Register of Citizens (NRC) in the northeastern state announced in July left off four million people, leaving them potentially stateless and facing an uncertain future. With many of these lacking the necessary papers, only around 1.5 million people have filed claims for inclusion in the last two weeks, according to the state government.

But it appealed to the Supreme Court seeking more time, saying it could not process all the claims before the previous deadline of December 15. The new deadline is December 31. The current register includes only those who were able to prove they were in the state before 1971, when millions fled Bangladesh's war of independence into the state, and their descendants. The policy was introduced by the state government, which is controlled by the same BJP party in power nationally.

Critics say it is the latest move by the right-wing party of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to bolster India's Hindu majority at the expense of minorities. India will hold a national election next year. Assam, a state of 33 million people known for its lush tea estates, has for decades been racked by violence between indigenous tribes and settlers. The Assam controversy comes as the central government looks at amending the citizenship law to allow certain "persecuted minorities", including Hindus and Christians from neighboring countries, to obtain legal status after six years of residency in India. — AFP

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## On Iraq border with Syria, Iran-backed militia eye US forces

From a desert hillside guarded by Iraqi Shiite paramilitaries, commander Qasim Muslih can spot Islamic State hideouts across the frontier in Syria. But he also keeps a wary eye on US warplanes soaring overhead. "The Americans are spying on us," he said, squinting skywards. "But we can hold the borders. We'll fight whoever lays a finger on Iraq and its holy shrines." The fighters Muslih commands are part of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), a grouping of mostly Shiite militias backed by Iran, which the United States regards as the biggest threat to security in the Middle East.

The PMF has been deploying in growing numbers at the border, fearing hundreds of Islamic State militants who fled Iraq are trying to cross back into Iraqi territory. The deployment is strengthening the PMF's de facto control over large stretches of the frontier while its leaders are calling for a formal, permanent role securing the border. But with fewer Sunni militants to contend with on the Iraqi side a year after Baghdad declared victory over IS, many Shiite paramilitaries now see the United States as a bigger threat.

The White House has indicated the US military presence is as much about countering Iran's influence as fighting IS, which is also known as ISIS. Asked about the suggestion of spying on the PMF, a coalition spokesman said: "The Coalition is concerned with the enduring defeat of ISIS." As the battle against a mutual foe rumbles on, Washington and Tehran are keeping a close eye on each other in this part of the region, raising the risk of new violence.

The PMF officially became part of Iraq's security forces this year after playing an important role fighting IS. Factions including Iran-backed groups that fight inside Syria have concentrated their recent build-up around the town of Al-Qaim, which was recaptured from IS in Nov 2017 and was the last IS bastion in Iraq to fall last year. The PMF control movement in and out of the town near the border with Syria. One commander, Abu Seif Al-Tamimi, said the PMF now held a 240-km stretch of frontier in the area.

"We're ready to take over security," Muslih said in Al-Qaim. "We liberated these areas and didn't need help from the Americans." Military commanders in units not allied with Iran say US air power was crucial to the defeat of IS in a three-year campaign involving the military, Iraqi Kurdish fighters and the PMF. US forces have kept their bases in place. On the road to Al-Qaim, US armored vehicles passed PMF pickup trucks with masked fighters behind machine guns.

### 'Wild West situation'

South of the town there are signs of growing PMF control and an increasingly crowded battlefield. The watchtowers of Iraq's border guard which nominally polices the frontier disappear, and the paramilitaries are the only force. Flags of Shiite factions fly at outposts a short drive from a one of the US bases.

In Syria, the US coalition supports Kurdish-led forces who control areas east of the Euphrates and have been fighting off a new IS offensive. In Iraq it supports the Iraqi military. Fighting the militants on the other side of the river is the Syrian army, backed by Iran, Russia and the PMF, whose elite factions straddle the frontier. A fighter at one outpost said a US warplane recently made a low pass over their position. "They're trying to scare us," he said.

Tension rose in June when the PMF blamed the United States for the deaths of 22 of its fighters in an air strike near the border and threatened to retaliate. The US coalition denied involvement in the strike. A US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said "outright" aggression was not expected by Shiite militias before IS was fully defeated. "The question is what are they going to do once things are done," the official said.

The build-up of forces already risks a clash even if both sides wish to avoid it, said Philip Smyth, an analyst at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "Nearly every major Iranian-backed Shiite militia has forces deployed near Al-Qaim ... that is the glowing hot dot on the map," he said. "The danger is always there (and) the Americans clearly don't have the forces to handle that. We only have a couple of thousand guys in the area. If the militias want to turn on the problems, they can. It's a Wild West situation."

Muslih said there were 20,000 fighters deployed near the border under his command, from Al-Qaim to areas to the southwest near Jordan, and more reinforcements were ready. The PMF is estimated to have a total of about 150,000 fighters. Iran is seeking to secure its growing sway over a corridor of territory from Tehran to Beirut. Washington says it is prepared to counter that with force. "We're not going to leave as long as Iranian troops are outside Iranian borders and that includes Iranian proxies," White House national security adviser John Bolton said in September.

The US coalition says it is focused on defeating Islamic State militants who analysts estimate number thousands along the frontier. "The Coalition has an outstanding relationship with the Iraqi security forces and all decisions are made with close coordination with our partners," coalition spokesman Colonel Sean Ryan said. But those partners do not include the PMF, and this complicates coordination and Washington's relations with Baghdad. — Reuters

## MALAYSIA'S FORMER PM NAJIB RAZAK UNDER ARREST



## Where is #MeToo in India's politics?

From media to sports and business, a wave of #MeToo revelations has rocked India this year, but the movement has left the country's male-dominated politics largely untouched - and that needs to change, activists say. Men rule the roost in the world's largest democracy, where analysts and activists say harassment and exploitation of women are rife, including demands for sexual favors and character assassination. While the campaign has hit a few politicians - with a state legislator from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party sacked in November - most remain unscathed.

Fear has kept female politicians from launching a public discussion about the issue, said Kavita Krishnan, an activist with the All India Progressive Women's Association. "It is still immensely costly for women to speak out," she said. "It is dangerous because if they do, a whole pack will descend on them, gang up on them and bully them into silence."

The biggest casualty of India's #MeToo movement has been the resignation of a federal junior minister, M J Akbar, after several women accused him of sexual harassment before he became a politician. However, Krishnan said that case did not relate to politics per se, as the allegations were related to his time as a newspaper editor. The #MeToo campaign, which began in the US entertainment industry, gained traction in India in September when Bollywood actress Tanushree Dutta accused a veteran actor of sexually harassing her on a film set a decade earlier.

That triggered a cascade of sexual misconduct complaints against high-profile journalists, authors, film personalities, comedians, lawyers and corporate executives.

## Raising cattle risky business in Venezuela

Rotting hides on the road are all that is left of three butchered cows. Such carnage is common in Venezuela's cattle country, where thieves, squatters and government policy threaten a vital food resource. Venezuela's severe economic crisis is felt keenly in cities - where food sources are limited - but it's also cutting a swathe through what should be the country's food basket. Seeing the hides on the road - the handiwork of cattle poachers - Jose Labrador stops his truck and explodes with rage. "It's as if they were telling us: 'We are killing your cattle, so what?'" the 46-year old rancher says, fuming that complaining is useless - police and local authorities will do nothing.

Labrador and other farmers in the cattle-rearing region of San Silvestre, in the western state of Barinas, say they are in a state of siege - from squatters, gunmen and government price controls that make their farms unprofitable. "I can't sleep on the farm anymore because I'm scared," said Jose Antonio Espinoza, owner of a 600-head herd in San Silvestre. "They have come around here and tied people up, and then stolen everything - chainsaws, water pumps, cattle."

He said as many as 74 bulls have been stolen over the past year from his family farm. Cowboys on horseback herd his traditional Venezuelan Brahman and Carora breeds, as well as buffaloes, to and from their fertile grazing land. But they are powerless when the rustlers strike. The wheeling of vultures overhead is a warning that the poachers have struck once again. When they arrive, only bones and skin remain, the meat cut up and taken away to feed a hungry black market.

### Farm policy failures

In a 2016 survey, three-quarters of

politicians have not figured much on the list, but activists say sexual harassment is an unspoken reality in politics in India, where it is met with apathy or hushed by intimidation. Earlier this year, the member of parliament Shatrughan Sinha told local media that "sexual favors are demanded" in politics. "It's an old and time-tested way of getting ahead in life. 'You please me, I'll please you,'" he was quoted in the Indian Express newspaper as saying.

Ranjana Kumari, director of the New Delhi-based Centre for Social Research (CSR), said this was the "harsh reality", especially for women who do not come from politically-powerful and influential families. "When you look at the common middle-class women trying to enter that space, then the rule of the game is that she will be asked for sexual favors, she will be pushed, she will be touched," Kumari told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "The political culture is infested with exploitation and sexual harassment of women."

### Women in politics

A 2014 study by UN Women and CSR found that 14 percent of 750 respondents - mostly female politicians - had faced sexual violence in politics and 45 percent had been physically abused, compared to 30 percent in Pakistan and 21 in Nepal. The report 'Violence Against Women in Politics' also showed that the most common and widespread form of abuse was the expectation of sexual favors. Campaigners say changing the culture of abuse will require more women at top levels of government who can champion policies and laws to fight abuse, discrimination and inequality.

In order to bypass sexist attitudes that block female

politicians from top positions, they want the government to pass the two-decade-old Women's Reservation Bill, which reserves one-third of the seats in national and state assemblies for women. Women hold only 12 percent of seats in both the lower and upper houses of parliament in India, compared to the global average of 23 percent, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, an independent organization promoting democracy.

Kumari urged Modi, whose government has a majority in parliament, to pass the bill in the winter parliament session that began on Tuesday. Major parties, including the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and main opposition Congress, have long championed the passage of the bill, yet it has faced vehement resistance from male lawmakers. "Women need to be better represented at every level of governance so that they can prioritize the issue of sexual assault," said Nisha Mukherjee Bellinger, a political science professor at Boise State University in Idaho.

However, having more female politicians might not decrease sexual harassment and could unfairly place the onus of women's safety solely on women, activists say. "Just because they are women does not mean that they are going to be anti-patriarchal," Krishnan said, adding that #MeToo would not happen "anytime soon in Indian politics". Nishtha Satyam, deputy representative of UN Women in India, said she was confident that the movement would ultimately affect politics - but that would be unlikely to happen soon. India holds general elections next year. "Needless to say it is a very politically sensitive time and it will take extra courage, strength and an enabling environment for women to speak out at this particular time," she said. — Reuters

## Togo's barter market: Keeping tradition alive, poverty at bay

Alohou Papa stands in the middle of the bustling market in Togoville and blows hard on a bright red whistle to catch everyone's attention. "It's 9 o'clock. The village chief is sending me to announce that bartering can now start," he cries. "No arguing and no provocation," he tells traders and buyers. Every Saturday on the northern shore of Lake Togo, some 65 km east of the capital, Lome, Togoville runs a lively traditional barter market. No money changes hands at the small public square, where traders, fisherfolk and farmers from surrounding villages flock to trade their produce.

At "Togossime" - "Togo market" in the local Ewe language - all sorts of goods are swapped but grains, chickens, fish and other seafood are the most popular. "Togoville is a traditional village," explains Simon Tovor, special advisor to local chief King Mlapa VI, who is head of the district and whose palace looks down on the dusty streets. "In days gone by, our parents lived off the land and sea. They swapped produce and everyone got along well," he told AFP. "We thought it best to keep this practice so we didn't lose this record of our grandparents and to show to our children how our parents lived."

### Stuck in time

In many respects, Togoville - Togo's former capital which gave its name to the country - seems stuck in time, living according to the rhythm of the lake and the fishing season. It was here in 1884 that king Mlapa III of Togoville signed a

treaty to become a German protectorate, well before Togo became a French colony. Even today, it's easier to get to Togoville by wooden canoe across the lake than by using the potholed road from Lome that skirts the water's edge.

The village, which is home to some 10,000 people, is well known as a centre for voodoo, attracting devotees to study and practice the religion. Wooden statues and shrines are everywhere. The Virgin Mary is also said to have been seen walking on the lake in the 1970s, spurring pope John Paul II to visit in 1985. At the market, most business is conducted in the open in the oppressive heat. A few dilapidated wooden structures with rusting corrugated roofs are used as shade.

Others spread out their wares on the parched brown earth. Women in colorful wrappers pick their way expertly through the crowds, balancing large bowls of produce on their heads. Atsupi Fiodjio has been coming to the market from a nearby village for more than 25 years and sits on a brick selling smoked fish. "I come every Saturday with two or three big baskets of smoked fish and I go home at the end of the day with at least three sacks of maize, beans and black-eyed peas," she said. "I resell them in our market where grains sell really quickly because our people mainly fish. We don't grow anything," she added, as a dozen customers looked on.

Sitting on the ground in front of her nearby stall, Jeannette Tenge lets everyone in earshot know about the quality of her fish. "I only accept grains, especially corn and rice, and of course flour and cassava. Doing this gets me my stocks for the house for the whole week for my family," she added. "On other days I sell bread in the village school," she added, complaining about the lack of shade from the harsh sun.

Togoville's barter market is one of only a few surviving in the country but it isn't just about respecting traditions. It also endures out of necessity. — AFP

# Business

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2018

**12** Building and construction sector vital for realizing 'New Kuwait 2035' vision

**13** Bursa Kuwait hosts sustainability engagement session for listed firms

**14** Gulf Bank's AGM becomes first Kuwaiti AGM to lecture at IBS



VIENNA: OPEC President UAE Energy Minister Suhail Al-Mazrouei (center) speaks as he sits with Minister of Energy of Russia Alexander Novak (left) and OPEC Secretary General Mohammed Sanusi Barkindo (right) of Nigeria during a meeting at the headquarters of the OPEC and non-OPEC members in Vienna. —AFP

## OPEC offsets drop in Iranian oil exports

### Demand for OPEC crude in 2019 trimmed by 100,000 bpd

**LONDON:** OPEC said yesterday it had offset a drop in sanctions-hit Iranian oil exports and lowered the 2019 forecast of demand for its crude, underlining the challenge the producer group faces to prevent a glut even after last week's decision to trim output.

In a monthly report, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries said 2019 demand for its crude would fall to 31.44 million barrels per day, 100,000 bpd less than predicted last month and 1.53 million less than it currently produces. Worried by a drop in oil prices and rising supplies, OPEC and its allies including Russia last week agreed to return to supply cuts next year. They pledged to lower output by 1.2 million bpd, of which OPEC's share is 800,000 bpd.

OPEC expects global oil demand to slow next year and sees little support from the economic backdrop. "Rising trade tensions, monetary tightening and geopolitical challenges are among the issues that skew economic risks even further to the downside in 2019," OPEC said in the report. "The upside appears limited."

The supply cut was a policy U-turn after the producer alliance known as OPEC+ had agreed in June to boost supply amid pressure from US President Donald Trump to lower prices and cover an expected shortfall in Iranian exports. OPEC changed course after prices

dropped steeply from a four-year high above \$86 a barrel in October on concern that demand was weakening amid adequate supply. Crude rose on Wednesday to trade above \$61 a barrel.

In another sign of excess supply, OPEC's report yesterday said oil inventories in developed economies had risen back above the five-year average in October. Supply cuts that began in 2017 by OPEC and its allies had previously erased an inventory overhang that weighed on prices.

#### Filling Iran gap

In the report, OPEC said its oil output fell by only 11,000 bpd month-on-month to 32.97 million bpd in November, despite the reimposition of sanctions on Iran. Iranian output posted the biggest decline, of 380,000 bpd. This was offset by increases of 377,000 bpd from top exporter Saudi Arabia and an extra 71,000 bpd from the United Arab Emirates. Saudi Arabia told OPEC it pumped at a

record rate of 11.093 million bpd. The figures suggest there will still be a surplus in the market next year should OPEC fully deliver the 800,000-bpd cut and other things remain equal, although this could be eroded by a further decline in Iran or unplanned outages in other nations.

Qatar plans to leave OPEC in 2019 but, for now, remains in the OPEC group in the forecasts.

#### Reviewing cuts

Oil producers who agreed last week to trim production to boost prices will meet in April to review the impact and sign a long-term pact, the UAE minister said yesterday.

OPEC and some non-OPEC producers decided to cut output by 1.2 million barrels per day for six months from January after world prices shed a quarter of their value in just a few weeks. Prices currently hover around \$60 a barrel, down from more than \$85 a barrel in early October in the face of fears of weaker demand and an increase in supplies.

"In April, we will have a meeting to review the decision," United Arab Emirates Energy Minister Suhail Al-Mazrouei told reporters on the sidelines of a conference in Dubai. Mazrouei said that national oil company ADNOC has already informed clients that it will cut production by 2.5 percent from January. The UAE, OPEC's fourth largest producer, has been pumping around 3.0 million bpd.

He said that the producers decided to meet in April instead of June "to allow us to take the required decision," before the six months are up. The minister said the cuts will help restore balance to the world market in 2019. "We expected there will be a slowdown in demand for oil and accordingly decided to cut production," Mazrouei said.

The producers will also sign a long-term agreement in April to formalize the cooperation between OPEC and non-OPEC parties to the cuts, the minister said. He said the alliance with Russia and other non-cartel producers has made the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries stronger and more effective. "OPEC is no longer the 30 million barrel (per day) group ... With OPEC, non-OPEC including Russia, we are now talking about 50 million barrels or half the world's production," Mazrouei said. —Agencies



### Saudi pumps at record rate in November

## India's new CB chief promises to consult, hints at dovish stance

**MUMBAI:** New Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das said yesterday he would adopt a consultative approach and move quickly to meet the heads of state-run banks to tackle issues facing the banking sector. "I propose to undertake consultations with stakeholders wherever necessary," Das said at his first news conference.

Das' more communicative approach is in contrast to his more reticent predecessor, Urjit Patel, who resigned on Monday following a drawn out public dispute with the government. Das said the banking sector would be his key focus area and more measures were needed to revive lenders. A meeting with the heads of a number of state banks would be held today, he said. Analysts said the move to open up a dialogue was positive. "He is trying to give

comfort to the banking industry against the backdrop of continued concerns on the financial stability front," said Rupa Rege Nitsure, chief economist at L&T Financial Holdings.

Das' open style of communication is likely to be the way business will be conducted within the RBI as well as with outsiders, a marked departure from the previous regime.

At the news conference, Das answered questions from at least a dozen journalists, unlike his predecessor who only answered questions from a select few at bi-monthly monetary policy meetings.

While assuring that he would defend the central bank's autonomy at a time when the government has put pressure on it to ease regulatory curbs and boost growth, Das, a veteran government bureaucrat, also highlighted the need to take the government's views on board. "Government is not just a stakeholder, but the government of the day runs the economy and manages major policy decisions," Das said, responding to a question on the breakdown of communication lines between the two sides.

"So there has to be free, fair, objective and very frank discussions between the government and the RBI," he said.

#### Eye on growth

A seasoned bureaucrat who has worked under two successive finance ministers from two opposing political parties, Das is known for his preference towards pro-growth policies. That will be key to Prime Minister Narendra Modi as he tries to woo voters ahead of general elections due by May, after facing defeat in five recent state polls. Modi also needs the RBI's support in getting additional funds from the central bank's capital reserves to help pay for any populist measures ahead of the general elections.

While Das declined to elaborate on steps he had in mind to boost the economy, he sounded dovish on inflation and growth, which could mean a relaxation of some regulatory rules for banks.

"Inflation targeting is an important function which the RBI Act has mandated. It's a mandatory part of RBI's functioning. So that will remain very important," Das said, adding that the Act also mentions the importance of economic growth. "Maintenance of the growth trajectory of the Indian economy is also important," Das said.

India's retail inflation rate yesterday fell to a 17-month low at 2.33 percent in November, lower than an expected 2.8 percent, driven by weaker food inflation. —Reuters



MUMBAI: Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das speaks to the media after taking charge at the bank's head office in Mumbai yesterday. —AFP

## Business

# Building and construction sector vital for realizing 'New Kuwait 2035' vision

## 8th Industries and Construction Exhibition by Expo-Tag opens

**KUWAIT:** Deputy Chairman and CEO of the National Industries Company Dr Adel Al-Subaih confirmed that the building and construction sector is one of the most vital sectors that contribute to realizing the vision of "New Kuwait 2035", since the urban revival is a manifestation of evolution and progress in general.

This is included in a press statement by Dr Al-Subaih during yesterday's opening of the events of the 8th round of the Industries and Construction Exhibition, which was held under the patronage and in the presence of Anas Al-Saleh, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for the Council of Ministers Affairs, organized by Expo-Tag for Exhibitions and Conferences, in collaboration with the National Industries Company, at the Jumeirah Hotel, Kuwait. Its events will continue until today with the participation of a wide range of government bodies and companies specialized in the construction and building sector, in addition to the presence of many businessmen and traders working in this field.

Al-Subaih said that working towards achieving the vision of "New Kuwait 2035" requires the spirit of work and initiative to overcome all difficulties and obstacles to establish a solid economic base in the country to turn through which into a regional and international financial and commercial center.

He added that the "Industries and Construction Exhibition" has become one of the important annual economic events in the country which contribute to supporting this vital sector. Over the past years, the exhibition has gained the confidence of all sponsors and participants of the public and private sectors for keeping up with the latest developments of the construction and building tools industry in the world, and

for displaying the best and finest finishing and decoration products, which match the taste of the Kuwaiti citizen and meet his needs.

In turn, Dalia Wafae, Executive Director of Expo-Tag for Exhibitions and Conferences, said that the 8th round of the Industries and Construction Exhibition, just like the previous rounds, has enjoyed many sponsors and participants from more than 70 companies involved in the building, construction, decoration and furniture field, in addition to many government bodies related to the sector, and most notably the Public Authority for Housing Welfare, the Ministry of Electricity and Water, the Ministry of Public Works and the Kuwait Credit Bank.

Wafae added that the exhibition will allow Kuwaiti citizens, especially the beneficiaries of the housing welfare program, to get all they need in this field.

She explained that the exhibition, through bringing together the most prominent specialists in the field of building and construction of both sectors under one roof, aims at achieving a number of objectives, the most important of which is the competition of the Kuwaiti product with the rest of the international products, and allowing the opportunity for traders to seize suitable investment opportunities in addition to the presence of producers and importers of building materials and products, as well as, the applications that contribute to achieving energy saving, in line with the country's economic reform plans.

She pointed out that this year, the exhibition is held on an area of more than 2000 square meters. The media campaign accompanying the exhibition also includes advertisements in local newspapers and on buses, and radio ads, as well as the interest in the cam-



**KUWAIT:** Inauguration of the Industries and Construction Exhibition

aigns of the social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc., and inviting all youth associations and colleges specialized in the field of engineering and electricity in Kuwait.

We welcome the workshops, which include one of the Kuwaiti youth teams "Tashitabi", Kuwaiti United

Private Training Company, and Rehlat Baqaa Group, to introduce the developments of workshops. This is the least we can provide to support young people to undertake the leadership at the earliest possible opportunity for achieving the advancement of Kuwait through them.

## Dollar tiptoes higher for third day ahead of expected Fed hike

**LONDON:** The dollar edged higher for a third day before a widely expected US interest rate hike next week, but its gains were limited by growing expectations that the Federal Reserve may express a more cautious view on future rate rises. The dollar has gained nearly 6 percent against a basket of currencies this year on the back of Fed rate increases, but a recent softening of US Treasury yields and tepid data has led some to forecast a peak for the dollar. "We think the Fed may be inching closer to a wait-and-watch mode on the outlook for monetary policy," said Manuel Oliveri, a currency strategist at Credit Agricole in London.

"Even in recent episodes of market selloffs, the dollar hasn't been gaining as much, indicating investors are cautious about pushing the greenback higher."

On Wednesday, the dollar was a touch higher at 97.40 but moves were tiny in rangebound markets. The euro rose 0.1 percent to \$1.1334. Gauges of risk appetite such as the Australian dollar and the euro/Swiss franc were little changed. Market expectations for Fed rate increases in the money markets were barely for one more rate hike next year, even though some banks such as JP Morgan expect the Fed to raise interest rates as much as four times in 2019. John Normand, head of cross-asset fundamental strategy at JP Morgan, said short position on bonds are still prevalent, in contrast to the long positions that should be held late-cycle if the economy is expected to slow materially and the Fed set to pause.

US inflation data is the highlight of the day with headline inflation forecast at 2.2 percent, accelerating slightly from 2.1 percent. Sterling was the biggest gainer, rising 0.4 percent in volatile trade at \$1.2535, after Prime Minister Theresa May vowed to fight a challenge to her leadership and warned rebels within her party that they risked delaying or even stopping Britain's departure from the European Union. The Australian dollar, a gauge of broader risk sentiment, was up 0.2 percent at \$0.7217.

The 10-year Treasury note yield inched up to 2.886 percent, continuing to pull back from recent lows. The yield had dropped to a three-month low of 2.825 percent at the start of the week, with dovish comments from Fed officials and soft US data further reinforcing views of a slowdown in the tightening cycle. —AFP

## No special EU treatment for France over deficit

**FRANKFURT:** France and Italy will not be held to different standards on their budget deficits, European Commissioner for Economic Affairs Pierre Moscovici told AFP yesterday, insisting that "the rules are the same for everybody." Rome, facing possible EU sanctions over its big-spending budget, has demanded similar treatment for France where President Emmanuel Macron's concessions to "yellow vest" protesters threaten to blow-out deficit targets.

"There is no question of privileged treatment for some and exaggerated toughness for others," Moscovici said on the sidelines of a financial conference in Frankfurt.

But the official-himself a former French finance minister-added that "the rules are quite subtle and complex", pointing to wiggle room for Paris and the Commission. Brussels understands that "in the face of social movements and very strong demands to reduce regional or social disintegration, a government may need to take measures," Moscovici said. —AFP

## GPCA, SABIC and EQUATE hold 4th IP awareness workshop in Kuwait

**KUWAIT:** As part of development through joint training, the 4th Intellectual Property (IP) Awareness Workshop was organized by the Gulf Petrochemicals & Chemicals Association (GPCA) in collaboration with SABIC and EQUATE Petrochemical Company, a global producer of petrochemicals, from December 12 to 13.

The two-day workshop is aimed at promoting awareness about the practice and implementation of IP. Attendees discussed important issues related to IP, such as applications and disclosures, as well as strategies in protecting IP within the region and around the world.

The Secretary General of GPCA Dr Abdulwahab Al-Sadoun said, "The GCC chemical industry's patent applications have increased significantly over the years, reaching close to 2,400 in 2017. Over the past decade, the number of chemical patents obtained in the region grew by 6 percent per annum, almost on par with global growth of 5.6 percent. This trend is an indication of the industry's continuous drive towards innovation and the need to create awareness about the importance and protection of IP."

"In line with this, GPCA is proud to be organizing

the 4th edition of the IP Awareness Workshop, dedicated to the practice and implementation of IP and best in class strategies for protecting it within the region and the world. Special thanks goes to our partners EQUATE and SABIC for their extensive support in making this another successful edition," Al-Sadoun added.

EQUATE CFO Dawood Al-Abduljalil said, "IP is a key element of innovation in any industry that aspires to grow and develop by having new practices. Through the collaboration of various organizations from around the world, this forum is of essential significance in creating awareness about the importance and steps relevant to protecting intellectual property."

This successful series of IP awareness workshops is attended by a number of professionals from the chemical and petrochemical industry, as well as IP strategists, lawyers, innovators, researchers, patent officers, marketing and business development practitioners.

Previous GPCA IP workshops were held in the UAE and Saudi Arabia. The workshop series aims to create awareness on this important topic amongst the regional industry and related value chain partners.

The Gulf Petrochemicals and Chemicals Association (GPCA) was established in 2006 to represent the downstream hydrocarbon industry in the Arabian Gulf. Today, the association voices the common interests of more than 250 member companies from the chemical and allied industries, accounting for over 95 percent of chemical output in the GCC. The industry makes up the second largest manufacturing sector in the region, producing over \$108 billion worth of products every year.



**EQUATE CFO Dawood Al-Abduljalil speaking at GPCA 4th IP workshop**

GPCA supports the petrochemical and chemical industry in the Arabian Gulf through advocacy, networking and thought leadership initiatives aimed at helping member companies to connect, share and advance knowledge, contribute to international dialogue, and become prime influencers in shaping the future of the global petrochemicals industry.



**Group photo of GPCA 4th IP workshop**

## Trump says Fed shouldn't hike rates, but calls Powell 'a good man'

**WASHINGTON:** President Donald Trump said on Tuesday it would be a mistake if the Federal Reserve raises interest rates when it meets next week, as it is expected to do, continuing his criticism of the US central bank. "I think that would be foolish, but what can I say?" Trump told Reuters in an interview.

Trump said he needed the flexibility of lower interest rates to support the broader US economy as he fights a growing trade battle against China, and potentially other countries. "You have to understand, we're fighting some trade battles and we're winning. But I need accommodation too," he said.

Trump named Jerome Powell as Fed chairman, but has repeatedly railed against him since he took over as head of the US central bank last February. Trump in August told Reuters that he was not "thrilled" with Powell's raising interest rates.

Trump was more conciliatory in his comments about Powell on Tuesday, but

still criticized the policies of the man he chose for the top Fed job. "I think he's a good man. I think he's trying to do what he thinks is best. I disagree with him," Trump said. "I think he's being too aggressive, far too aggressive, actually far too aggressive."

When asked whether he was concerned there might be a recession when he was running for re-election in 2020, Trump noted that other factors in the world could affect the economy, including Britain's plans to leave the European Union, known as Brexit, and the unrest in France.

"Well, you have problems in the world, like Brexit, like France - a big

problem in France. It's shocking to see what's going on in Paris," Trump said, referring to anti-government protests that have targeted his French counterpart, President Emmanuel Macron. Macron this week made major concessions to try and quell the protests that have rocked France, announcing wage increases for the poorest workers and a tax cut for most pensioners.

"Are we heading for a recession?" Trump said. "In my opinion, we are doing really well. Our companies are doing really well. If the Fed is going to act reasonably and rationally, I think we'll go - I think we are a rocket ship going up." —Reuters

## Business

# Boursa Kuwait hosts sustainability engagement session for listed firms

## Session held in partnership with Sustainability Excellence

**KUWAIT:** Highlighting its commitment to promoting sustainable business practices in Kuwait's capital markets, Boursa Kuwait recently concluded the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) engagement session for the fourth quarter of 2018 in collaboration with Sustainability Excellence, a leading provider of sustainability and ESG strategy and disclosure services in Kuwait and the Middle East.

The senior-level session, which was exclusively held for the companies listed on Boursa Kuwait under the theme, 'The growing importance of ESG to investors', was led by Ahmed Al-Kiswani, Executive Director, Risk Management, Compliance and Corporate Governance at Boursa Kuwait, who welcomed attendees and initiated the session, which featured presentations by the Sustainability Excellence (SE) team. In addition, one-on-one engagement sessions will be organized to conduct a review of customized benchmarking and ESG rating reports for companies and highlight the latest ESG market developments most relevant to individual firms.

As a signatory of the Sustainable Stock Exchanges Initiative, Boursa Kuwait has been at the forefront of efforts aimed at advancing sustainability in capital markets around the world and promoting a culture of sustainability among listed companies. As investors are increasingly using ESG performance standards to screen potential investments, Boursa Kuwait's initiatives in partnership with SE will play a pivotal role in shaping the



future of securities markets.

Providing an overview of local, regional and international market forces that are accelerating sustainability reporting in Kuwait and the wider region, SE team shed light on wide-ranging implications of Boursa Kuwait's Emerging Markets status upgrade for listed companies with regards to sustainability reporting. He also highlighted growing expectations of the private sector to align to 'New Kuwait' vision and explored a range of investment products that offer investors access to companies with high-quality

ESG performance and reporting.

In their presentation, SE team shared his insight on key information investors seek when analyzing sustainability reports of companies. Stressing the importance of focusing on material ESG information, he discussed the ways to effectively structure sustainability reports in order to meet the demanding requirements of institutional investors and ESG rating agencies.

In addition, the participants of the ESG engagement session were briefed on Boursa Kuwait's new

and future initiatives aimed at enabling the exchange to meet the obligations of its participation in the Sustainable Stock Exchanges Initiative (SSE) and engage with listed companies and support their sustainability journeys.

Boursa Kuwait remains committed to making further leaps in driving sustainable practices and enhancing the transparency and the quality of sustainability reporting, in line with the sustainable development ambitions outlined in Kuwait's long-term development plan for 2035, New Kuwait.

## Rolls-Royce to switch work to Germany over Brexit

**LONDON:** Rolls-Royce yesterday said it was switching to Germany from the UK its design-approval of large aircraft engines after Prime Minister Theresa May delayed parliament's vote on the Brexit deal.

"Rolls-Royce notes the decision by the UK government to delay the vote on the proposed Withdrawal Agreement and political declaration," the company said in a trading update. May has postponed a historic vote in parliament over her EU withdrawal agreement because of its certain defeat-and must now win a no-confidence vote by MPs in her Conservative

party to be held later.

In a statement, Rolls said it was working with the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) over the planned movement of work to Germany, repeating that it was looking at stockpiling parts in preparation for Britain's planned exit from the EU on March 29. "We will continue to implement our contingency plans," Rolls said. "Specifically, we are working with EASA to transfer design approval for large aero engines to Germany, where we already carry out this process for business jets."

"This is a precautionary and reversible technical action which we do not anticipate will lead to the transfer of any jobs," Rolls added. The company said also that it had "begun to build inventory as a contingency measure".

It said that it has been liaising with all its suppliers and that it had required capacity to store extra parts. Rolls, which manufactures aviation and marine engines, employs more than 22,000 people in Britain, making it one of the country's largest manufacturing groups.



**LONDON:** An EU flag is seen displayed on the bonnet of a Rolls Royce car near the Houses of Parliament in central London on Tuesday. —AFP

Like other UK companies dependent on trade with the continent, Rolls is planning on how to deal with the return

of customs controls in the event of a no-deal Brexit, which would impact the supply chain of components. —AFP

## Hitachi moves to buy ABB's power grid unit for \$7bn

**TOKYO:** Japan's Hitachi is moving to purchase the power grid business of Swiss engineering giant ABB for a deal worth as much as \$7.05 billion, local media reported yesterday.

The electronics giant is "the final stage of talks" to acquire the ABB unit for up to an estimated 800 billion yen, the Nikkei business daily and Jiji Press said. Hitachi confirmed at its board meeting yesterday the plan to move forward with the deal and the two firms are expected to reach a final agreement as early as this week, according to the Nikkei.

A Hitachi spokeswoman declined to comment, while ABB said it is "in discussions with Hitachi to expand and re-define the existing strategic power grid partnership between the two companies."

"There can be no certainty that any transaction will occur, or as to the timing, structure or terms of any transaction," ABB said in a statement. ABB's power grid unit manufactures and operates infrastructure including power transmission equipment and control systems in multiple countries.

The two companies announced in 2014 plans to set up a joint venture to market power transmission equipment in Japan. The Nikkei said Hitachi plans to initially take a stake of around 50 percent in the power grid unit and over the next few years turn it into a wholly-owned subsidiary. The deal would make Hitachi the world's second-largest heavy electrical equipment maker by revenue, behind only General Electric, the paper said. —AFP



**TOKYO:** A logo of Japan's high-tech giant Hitachi at an exhibition in Tokyo. Japan's Hitachi is moving to purchase the power grid operations of Swiss engineering giant ABB for a deal as much as \$7.05 billion, local media reported yesterday. —AFP

## Berlin treads softly-softly on Macron over deficit

**BERLIN:** Germany is taking a softly-softly approach to French President Emmanuel Macron's use of government largesse to calm violent "yellow vest" protests, government sources say, as Berlin puts European stability above fiscal discipline.

A reluctance to criticize publicly contrasts with complaints about France from Italy whose populist coalition government is in a stand-off with Brussels over its own big-spending budget which includes a sharp spike in the deficit. "It's good news that things are calming down. France is Germany's most important partner and we have no interest in seeing

it destabilized for the long term," a senior German government source said.

Ministers have been urged not to stoke confrontation with Paris as Macron attempts to end mass demonstrations against his pro-business reforms, promising tax and spending measures for the lowest earners worth billions of euros (dollars).

"We don't know how they're going to pay for all this," the government source said, but "we will hold back from talking about a budget slip. This is about the French public finances; it's not for Germany to judge."

### Damping down fires

Especially since the financial crisis of 2008, Germany under Chancellor Angela Merkel has prioritised tight budgets, with deficits held to well under the EU three percent of GDP limit.

Her governments have also slashed accumulated total debt, bringing it down towards the EU ceiling of 60 percent of GDP. They have not been shy of

passing judgment on less stringent fellow EU members—such as Italy—and have opposed reforms to the 19-nation euro single currency that could mean more risk sharing between capitals. But for now Berlin's larger concern is a political crisis across Europe that has been stoked by populist victories, including Britons' 2016 vote to quit the European Union.

Italy, too, has been largely spared a wagging Teutonic finger this year despite its deficit-busting budget which the EU, in a first, rejected outright, insisting that Rome try again.

"We see it in France, we see it in other countries, we have an urgent responsibility to halt these populist movements in the European elections" next May, another government source said.

The tone from the European Commission has meanwhile been notably calm and understanding—unlike for Rome, as the Italian government has pointed out.

Overstepping the budget limit "can be

envisaged in a limited, temporary and exceptional way," Economic Affairs Commissioner Pierre Moscovici told France's Le Parisien daily yesterday.

Italy's Deputy Prime Minister Luigi Di Maio noted that a higher deficit "will create a French problem, after the Italian problem, if the rules are the same for everyone." "I expect the Commission to open a procedure" that could lead to sanctions for excessive spending—as it has threatened to do in Italy's case, he added.

Despite their public forbearance, German leaders are in private frustrated with Macron's uphill struggle to push through reforms they see as indispensable. One senior official noted how the young president's at times arrogant style has alienated parts of the French public.

And any weakening of restraint in French spending policy undermines Macron's bet he could win German confidence by showing France could live within its means and reshape state finances.

### 'More Renzi than Schroeder'

German economists greeted skeptically Macron's emergency concessions to the "yellow vests" after repeated weekends of marches, barricades and violence around France. For example, an increase in the minimum wage "will not reduce social tensions in France, where the minimum wage is already so high that it hampers the employment of weaker groups in the labor market, especially young people," said Clemens Fuest, head of Munich's influential Ifo think-tank.

German newspapers, which last week celebrated the 50th anniversary of irrepressible Gaulish comic book hero Asterix appearing in the language, see a similar stubbornness in modern France's resistance to its young president. For conservative Die Welt daily, Macron is "more of a Matteo Renzi", whose recent premiership in Italy failed to secure much-needed reforms, than a Gerhard Schroeder—the chancellor whose policies are credited with reviving Germany's fortunes after the moribund early 2000s. —AFP

## Business

# Gulf Bank's AGM becomes first Kuwaiti AGM to lecture at IBS

## Bader Al-Ali chosen as key lecturer by IBS for certification program

**KUWAIT:** Gulf Bank is proud to announce its participation in a training workshop organized by the Kuwait Institute of Banking Studies, inviting Gulf Bank's Bader Al-Ali, Assistant General Manager - Operations, as the key lecturer of their new certification program. Al-Ali becomes the first Kuwaiti AGM to have been chosen by the IBS to be a key lecturer at the institute as part of the Branch Operation Certification (CBBOM).

A newly created certification, the Branch Operation Certification (CBBOM), consists of two modules, taught by Al-Ali and an international expert in the field. An expert in his field, Al-Ali's role at the bank, alongside his many years of experience, are indicative of his knowledge within the realm of bank operations. Al-Ali has been selected based on his expertise in the field, as well as his local market knowledge.

The lecture aligns with Gulf Bank's policy of investing in staff expertise, reaffirming the bank's commitment to training and empowering Kuwaiti talent, and continuous aspiration to develop staff across all fields. Al-Ali's vast knowledge and experience within the local market, will allow him to tailor his teachings to students, providing them with



hands-on experience and insights into the field of study. By investing in current and future knowledge, the Bank is able to elevate the banking sector across the board.

Al-Ali's involvement with the Institute of Banking Studies, is an integral part of Gulf Bank's commitment to give back to the local banking community and falls within the Bank's year-long Corporate Social Responsibility drive.



Bader Al-Ali delivers the lecture at IBS certification program

## Win up to 2 kilos of gold at Malabar Gold & Diamonds festival



**KUWAIT:** Malabar Gold & Diamonds, one among the largest jewelry retailers globally with a strong retail network of 250 retail outlets spread across 10 countries has unveiled the details of their 8th edition of 'Malabar Gold & Diamonds Festival' in Kuwait running till 26th of January, 2019. This season, Malabar Gold & Diamonds showcases the latest collection of gold, diamond & precious gems jewelry in their outlets, to celebrate this festive period.

The festival brings unprecedented opportunities to win up to 2 kilos of gold with jewelry purchases. A true shopper's delight, Malabar Gold & Diamonds Festival will captivate the customers by exhibiting eye catchy designs in gold, diamonds, platinum, and precious gems from different parts of the world to flaunt any occasion or event and are well priced too.

With every purchase of gold and diamond jewelry worth KD 40, customers get a chance to enter raffle draws to win 100 gram of gold bar each in 10 raffle draws. Adding to the above, customers get 1gm free gold coin on every diamond and precious gem jewelry purchase worth KWD 250. Customers also get free gold coins on every purchase of 18k gold jewelry worth KWD 80. The above offers will be running till 26th of January in all outlets in Kuwait.

To add more glitter to this season, they have also unveiled the latest collection of jewelry in gold, diamonds and precious gems to suit the tastes of their multicultural and multinational customers. Malabar Gold & Diamonds has incorporated these designs as a part of various brands presented at Malabar Gold & Diamonds' namely Ethnix - Handcrafted Designer Jewelry, Era - Uncut Diamond Jewelry, Mine - Diamonds Unlimited, Divine - Indian Heritage Jewelry and Precia - Gem Jewelry.

## Ford's desert driving tips, Episode 5: Avoiding sticky situations

**DUBAI:** Desert driving is all about banking experience - novice drivers will learn a lot on their first venture into the dunes - and a few basic tips will help reduce the likelihood of getting stuck.

In the fifth Desert Driving Tips video, Ford's Desert Driving experts agree that the ignominy of getting stuck can be reduced by adopting a 'prevention is better than cure' approach to driving.

"The best way to avoid getting stuck is to be aware of what's going on and constantly think ahead," said Mike Chavez series co-host and Ford Middle East Product Development Lead Technologist. "The main thing is to not fight gravity. There is no point fighting it. Fighting the desert is like fighting in water. So, go with the flow. "If you're driving along and feel the vehicle begin to bog down, you need to change your situation," he explained. "Either look for a different line, perhaps where the sand may be firmer, or drive the vehicle down the dune to find firmer sand."

If your vehicle is struggling to move forward up a dune, applying more power is rarely the right thing to do. Your tyres will overcome the available grip, spin



and quickly dig your vehicle deeper into the sand. Keep it up, and you'll find yourself with a vehicle buried belly-deep on a dune and in need of some assistance. If you don't have enough forward momentum to make it over a dune, then get the nose of the vehicle turned

downhill. If that's not an option, then get off the power, stop, make sure the way is clear behind and reverse straight back down the dune. That way, you can either take a second bite at it, or find another, easier way around it.

## Ooredoo launches 'My Country' roaming bundles

**KUWAIT:** Ooredoo Kuwait announced the launch of 'My Country' roaming bundles that can be used in 11 countries which include Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Iraq, Jordan, Germany, Switzerland, Italy and the United States of America. The roaming bundle is available through a roaming SIM card with a free single subscription to 'My Country Bundle'.

The 'My Country Bundle' gives 200 minutes of incoming and outgoing calls, including 30 GB without any daily restriction to keep up with the customers need for mobile internet, as it is the main tool for sharing videos, pictures and audio clips with loved ones on various social media channels.

Commenting on the launch of this bundle, Ooredoo Kuwait issued a statement saying that the bundle is aimed to enrich the experience of the telecom service provider's customers and meet their expectations, taking in mind the lifestyle of the company's global-oriented customer base. The packages also reiterate Ooredoo's commitment to help customers enjoy the internet, especially since mobile internet is an essential part of everyday use.



Ooredoo noted that existing Ooredoo customers can easily activate 'My Country Bundle' can be activated through My Ooredoo app, Ooredoo website, and by SMS.

## Alstom, Siemens offer Brussels merger concessions

**PARIS:** French and German engineering giants Alstom and Siemens said yesterday they had offered EU regulators concessions they believed would meet concerns over the planned merger of their railway businesses. The European Union, citing the possible impact on competition, launched an in-depth investigation earlier this year into the merger of the rail activities at Alstom, the state-controlled maker of France's iconic TGV trains, and Germany's Siemens.

"The two sides believe that these remedies are appropriate and adequate," Alstom and Siemens said in a joint statement. There was no guarantee however that the remedies would be accepted by Brussels, they said, adding that they expected a response by February 19.

The remedies could include asset sales, and technology or license transfers, an Alstom spokesman told AFP. The tie-up is politically sensitive, with the group headquarters set to be in the Paris area while initially, Siemens will hold a 50-percent stake in the new entity.—AFP

## Renault Al-Babtain offers exclusive leasing campaign for a limited time

**KUWAIT:** Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al-Babtain Co, the authorized agent of Renault in the State of Kuwait invites customers to lease and enjoy models of the Renault Koleos, Renault Megane and Renault Megane GT. The offer that ends on Saturday, 15 December 2018 comes as part of the company's 70 years celebration to ensure that Renault fans experience the best deals.

The Renault Megane is equipped with generous space for its occupants i.e. dimensions of 4.63m long and 1.81m wide, and a record wheelbase in its class of 2.71m. Owing to its dynamic styling and advanced features, the new Megane represents the next level 10 yw in the compact saloon category. It comes with a 1.6-litre engine, 115hp designed to enhance driving enjoyment and reduce fuel consumption.

The Renault Koleos exterior holds a taste for adventure all that is expected of a D-segment SUV. It's

robust and muscular features amplifies the athletic exterior design with door protective moldings, large diameter two-tone alloy wheels, alloy roof rails, shark antenna, fender chrome lines and silver front skid. The four wheel drive technology, all-terrain ability, engine and transmission line-up has been tailored to meet the needs and expectations of the Kuwaiti market. The 2.5-litre petrol engine is also an atmospheric, four-cylinder, power is 170hp (126kW) at 6,000rpm, with peak torque of 233Nm at 4,000rpm.

The Megane GT is tuned by Renault Sport and boasts a 1.6L and TCE 205 HP engine mated to 7 speed dual clutch automatic gearbox, achieving a swift 0-100km/h in just 7.1 seconds. Combining dynamic style and ride comfort, the model offers first-class road handling thanks to 4CONTROL. The model delivers a connected driving experience thanks to R-LINK 2, which serves as the car's control centre. Showcased via a modern 8.7" touchscreen, R-LINK 2 ensures an 'Easy Life' by offering a range of in-car features including easy park assist, rearview camera, Renault Smart Card with walk-away closing, as well as an active emergency braking system, 6 airbags or even the Renault Sport mode switch button: RS Drive. Renault Al-Babtain encourages its customers to discover the 'best in class' models by visiting the showroom located in Al-Rai and take advantage of the exclusive offer.



Health & Science

# Arctic's record warming driving 'broad change' in environment

Heat records have assaulted the fragile Arctic for each of the past five years

WASHINGTON: Global warming is heating the Arctic at a record pace, driving broad environmental changes across the planet, including extreme storms in the United States and Europe, a major US scientific report said Tuesday. Persistent heat records have assaulted the fragile Arctic for each of the past five years — a record-long warming streak, said the 2018 Arctic Report Card, released by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

The mounting heat in the north is upsetting typical weather patterns, a trend that "coincides" with severe winter storms in the eastern United States and an extreme cold snap in Europe in March, it said. "Continued warming of the Arctic atmosphere and ocean are driving broad change in the environmental system in predicted and, also, unexpected ways," warned the report.

"New and rapidly emerging threats are taking form and highlighting the level of uncertainty in the breadth of environmental change that is to come," Emily Osborne, program manager of NOAA's Arctic Research Program, told reporters the Arctic "is experiencing the most unprecedented transition in human history."

The report was released at the American Geophysical Union's annual conference in Washington, just weeks after another damning climate assessment by federal scientists which US President Donald Trump dismissed, saying he did not "believe" it. Asked by reporters if he had personally briefed Trump on the latest Arctic findings, NOAA acting administrator Timothy Gallaudet said he had not, but he insisted that NOAA has the White House's support when it comes to scientific research.

### Temperature records

Arctic air temperatures for the past five years, from 2014 to 2018, "have exceeded all previous records since 1900," when record-keeping began, said the peer-reviewed report compiled by 81 scientists working for governments and academia in 12 nations. This warming trend "is unlike any other period on record," it said. During the latest period studied, October 2017 through September 2018, annual average tem-

perature in the Arctic was 3.1 Fahrenheit (1.7 Celsius) higher than the 1981-2010 average. "The year 2018 was the second warmest year on record in the Arctic since 1900 (after 2016)," it said. The Arctic also saw the second-lowest overall sea-ice coverage and the lowest recorded winter ice in the Bering Sea. Another key measure of ice cover is its age, and the old, thick kind is rapidly disappearing across the Arctic. Last year, old ice made up less than one percent of the ice pack. Over the past 33 years, very old Arctic ice has declined by 95 percent.

### Jet stream

The Arctic continues to heat up at twice the rate of the rest of the planet, but the effects are far from isolated, and are now spilling over into the mid-latitudes. That's because a warmer Arctic reduces the north-south temperature difference, which provides the main fuel for the polar jet stream, or a river of strong wind, at levels where jet aircraft fly, NOAA said. In this warming environment, the jet stream has become wavier, a pattern that "allows warm air to penetrate farther north and cold air to plunge farther south, compared to when the jet is strong and relatively straight," said the report. Scientist now see evidence that this changing jet stream may be sparking extreme storms. Examples include "the heat wave at the North Pole in autumn 2017, a swarm of severe winter storms in the eastern United States in 2018, and the extreme cold outbreak in Europe in March 2018 known as the 'Beast from the East.'"

### Reindeer, marine life

Meanwhile, warmer Arctic temperatures are wreaking havoc on the Arctic ecosystem, decimating reindeer and caribou populations, allowing harmful algae blooms to move northward and sickening marine life, said the report, now in its 13th year. "Considerable concentrations of algal toxins have been found in the tissues of Arctic clams, seals, walrus, and whales and other marine organisms," it said.

Even though melting ice has freed up more land for grazing, herds of caribou and wild reindeer across the Arctic tundra have declined by 56 percent over the last two decades,



WASHINGTON, DC: A demonstrator holds a sign against drilling in the Arctic Refuge on the 58th anniversary of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, during a press conference outside the US Capitol. — AFP

cutting populations from 4.7 million to 2.1 million. "The long-term warming trend may be taking a toll on some of the Arctic's most majestic animals," said Howard Epstein, professor of environmental sciences at the University of Virginia. Scientists attribute the decline to increased frequency of drought, which affects quality of the tundra, and longer and hotter summers which can lead to more parasites. Another new focus of the report involved the emerging threat of marine microplastics, which scientists have discovered are accumulat-

ing in the Arctic at higher concentrations than anywhere else in the world. "This pollution — from plastics produced and discarded in more populated areas of the world — is likely traveling with ocean currents to the Arctic," said Karen Frey, professor of geography at Clark University. Microplastic contamination has increased over the last decade, and is a concern because seabirds and marine life can ingest debris, sickening them and interfering with a key food and income source for people who consume them, she said. — AFP

## Small islands plead for action at UN climate talks

KATOWICE, Poland: Ministers from nations imperiled by rising seas and temperatures on Tuesday called for drastic action at UN climate talks deadlocked over a refusal by big polluters to embrace landmark environmental data. The COP24 summit in Poland is scheduled to finish at the end of the week but delegates are still worlds apart when it comes to agreeing on a rulebook making

good on the promises nailed down in the 2015 Paris climate accord. Tuesday saw ministers begin to put forward their country's case for action, with several from small island states threatened with oblivion pleading for progress. "We all need to act now and fast, but I must stress it requires a strong political will by us leaders," said Taneti Maamau, president of Kiribati in the Pacific.

The Paris deal committed nations to limiting temperature rises to well below two degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit) and beneath the safer cap of 1.5C if at all possible. But in the three years since, greenhouse gas emissions have continued to rise and there are fears the political will to act is waning. The talks were thrown into tumult over the weekend when the United States, Saudi Arabia, Russia and Kuwait blocked a proposal from 44 small island nations for the UN body to "welcome" a

recent UN report that drew the starkest climate picture to date. Unveiled in October, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) "special report" concluded that CO2 emissions must drop a quarter within 12 years to stay under 2C, and by nearly half to cap warming at 1.5C, seen as a safer guardrail against catastrophic extreme weather. The four nations disagreed with the motion, and proposed that the UN climate body simply "note" the report, rather than "welcome" it.

This added yet another hurdle to the already painstaking negotiating process. A draft summary of the concluding COP24 text seen by AFP suggests nations "acknowledge the report and/or its quality" and invites them "to use the information in the report" — far from what the at-risk countries are demanding. US President Donald Trump, who said last month he did not believe his own government's climate

change predictions, has said he will renege on the Paris pledges. But the US is still part of the UN climate process as its pre-standing commitments last until 2020. Without naming any of the four hold-outs, Cook Islands Prime Minister Henry Puna accused some nations of "not willing to accept the stark realities outlined in this report."

The situation was so sensitive that UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres made an unscheduled return to the talks on Tuesday as he was "concerned about how the COP was going", a UN source told AFP. "Science has provided unequivocal evidence to prove we can avert this dire situation and achieve a 1.5C scenario for our planet but we need selfless and visionary leaders with the political courage and conviction to act together now," Samoan Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi told delegates. — AFP

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PAGE

248 33 199

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What's On



Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer Waleed Al Khashti, Zain Kuwait's Chief Commercial Officer Meshal Mohammed, and Amazon's representative during the press conference.

Waleed Al Khashti and Meshal Mohammed with Amazon's executives

# Zain launches exclusive Amazon Prime Video offer for first time in Kuwait

Features award-winning movies, Prime Originals and exclusive TV shows

Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced the launch of an exclusive Amazon Prime Video offer for the first time in Kuwait. Through the exclusive offer starting on December 13, Zain will provide its customers with award-winning and popular movies and TV shows on its most advanced network, including Prime Originals and TV series like the whirlwind motoring antics of Jeremy Clarkson, Richard Hammond and James May in the *The Grand Tour*; the thrilling gangster saga set in India, *Mirzapur*; highly-acclaimed actress Julia Roberts' TV debut in the all new *Homecoming*; and the Emmy and Golden Globe-winning series, *The Marvelous Mrs Maisel*.

Through the new exclusive offer, Zain provides its customers in Kuwait with the opportunity to easily enjoy Prime Video's award-winning and popular movies and TV shows, including Prime Originals. Postpaid and prepaid Zain customers can easily subscribe to Prime Video without the need of using a credit card or additional payment methods. The exclusive offer includes two months of Prime Video, courtesy of Zain, after which customers can enjoy the service for up to KD 2 per month.

Zain Kuwait's Chief Commercial Officer Meshal Mohammed said: "today we jointly announce the launch of an exclusive offer featuring Amazon Prime Video for the first time in Kuwait. This launch is a continuation of the distribution agreement we signed with Amazon last October during our participation at the 38th edition of The Gulf Information Technology Exhibition (GITEX Technology Week 2018) in Dubai".

Meshal Mohammed added: "at Zain, we are committed to further expanding our collaboration ecosystem with global technology leaders like Amazon to meet the

expectations and aspirations of our customers in line with our strategy that centers around digital transformation leadership. Today's announcement further reinforces our portfolio of innovative services and solutions in the digital entertainment area, especially with the high demand witnessed by this sector via Video on Demand (VOD) and Over the Top (OTT) services in place of traditional media channels".

Meshal Mohammed concluded: "the launch of this offer today for the first time in Kuwait will contribute in triggering Zain's full potential in the digital community, and will enrich our digital entertainment portfolio and reinforce our efforts in becoming a fully integrated digital lifestyle provider. We introduce this exclusive offer on our most advanced network for our customer base, considered the largest in Kuwait, to empower them in enjoying an unmatched digital entertainment experience. We are certain that this agreement is only the beginning of a fruitful collaboration with Amazon to launch more innovations in the Kuwaiti market in the near future".

"We want Prime Video customers to be able to enjoy watching all their favorite TV shows where and when they want," said Tim Leslie, Vice President, Amazon Prime Video International. "We're delighted that the addition of Prime Video on Zain allows even more customers the opportunity to watch their favorite Prime Originals and popular TV shows and movies, both in the home or on the move."

Zain always aspires to new levels of excellence in all of the services it offers to its customers. Through collaboration with the biggest tech leaders from around the world, Zain affirms its continuous efforts in meeting its customers' needs and aspirations, and



Meshal Mohammed and Amazon's representative during the press conference

delivers its promise of offering the best services and latest technologies.

The primary collaboration between the two companies was announced during Zain's participation at GITEX 2018 last October in Dubai, which highlighted the company's efforts to enrich its transformation into a fully integrated digital service provider. Zain started its digital transformation journey by launching many smart services and solutions to both consumers and businesses throughout the past two years. Zain partic-

ipated at GITEX as the only telecom company that represented the State of Kuwait in this leading global and regional event.

Zain's strategy is centered around digital transformation leadership and empowering the community to enjoy a smarter portable lifestyle, as well as using advanced technology and Zain's long experience to enable an easier and more flexible life. The company places itself as an active partner in creating the future of smart life in Kuwait.

## McDonald's and Weber Shandwick win awards at MEPRA

Once again, the creative partnership between McDonald's and Weber Shandwick Kuwait has resulted in award-winning, viral campaigns. "World Cup Drive-Thru Experience" and "Ramadan Memories Made Together", two innovative campaigns produced earlier this year, recently won big at the 2018 Middle East Public Relations Association (MEPRA) Awards, nabbing two Gold and three Bronze honors at the 10th edition of the annual communications awards, during a ceremony which was held in Dubai.

The "World Cup Drive-Thru Experience" campaign kicked off the awards ceremony with the very first win of the evening, grabbing the Bronze Award for "Best Sports & Entertainment Campaign", before winning Gold for "Best Use of Sponsorship". On the other hand, the "Ramadan Memories Made Together" campaign won Bronze for "Best Corporate Reputation Campaign". In the "Best in Kuwait" category, "World Cup Drive-Thru Experience" walked away with the Gold, whilst "Ramadan Memories Made Together" was honored with a Bronze.

"World Cup Drive-Thru Experience" was a creative activation that delivered a one-of-a-kind experience for football fans in celebration of the FIFA World Cup 2018 - bringing the World Cup atmosphere right to McDonald's with the help of legendary sports commentator Raouf Khleif. The campaign became a viral sensation, with an estimated reach of 20 million people. Going down a more emotional route, "Ramadan Memories Made Together" eschewed traditional tactics to create a standout activation: bringing together families for a special one-night Ramadan celebration.

This marks the second consecutive year that McDonald's and Weber Shandwick have been honored for their creative campaigns at MEPRA. In the 2017 ceremony, the creative



social experiment campaign, "Beef Nation", walked away with the top honor in the "Crisis Communications" category, in addition to being named "Best in Kuwait".

Speaking about the award wins, Sherif Country, Senior Marketing Director at McDonald's Kuwait, said: "These five awards are a true testament to our continued efforts to be creative and original in every way, especially with our communications. Along with our agency partners, we work to deliver our messages in an innovative, stand-out way

that truly resonates with the audience. This year, we produced two excellent campaigns that we are extremely proud of, and it is incredible to see them recognized on a regional level."

On his part, Faisal Khazal, Associate Director at Weber Shandwick Kuwait said: "We have enjoyed a long and mutually fruitful partnership with McDonald's Kuwait for more than a decade now, and we are thrilled to see this creative collaboration continue to deliver outstanding campaigns year on year.



Kuwait Autism Center held the second family gathering for students & parents diwaniya as well as a lecture titled "violent behavior during adolescence and how to deal with it," delivered by programs supervisor at Kuwait Autism Center Khaznah Al-Hadhrami. The adolescence period is the most difficult for autistics due to psychological troubles and behavior changes that are out of parents control.

## Burgan Bank employees participate in workshop

Burgan Bank employees recently participated in a two-day educational workshop by leading knowledge transfer platform - Knowledge Club, aimed at sharpening leadership skills and business acumen. The bank's staff from different departments took part in a 'Mini-MBA-in-a-Day' simulation to enhance decision-making skills, strategic thinking and cross-functional collaboration to ensure a dynamic and stimulating corporate culture. Attended by business leaders from various industries, 'Interplay' addressed all aspects of running a successful company and the impact that business decisions have on the overall performance.

Day 1 of the intensive workshop covered a full-fledged approach including setting up the company's starting position, getting initial direc-

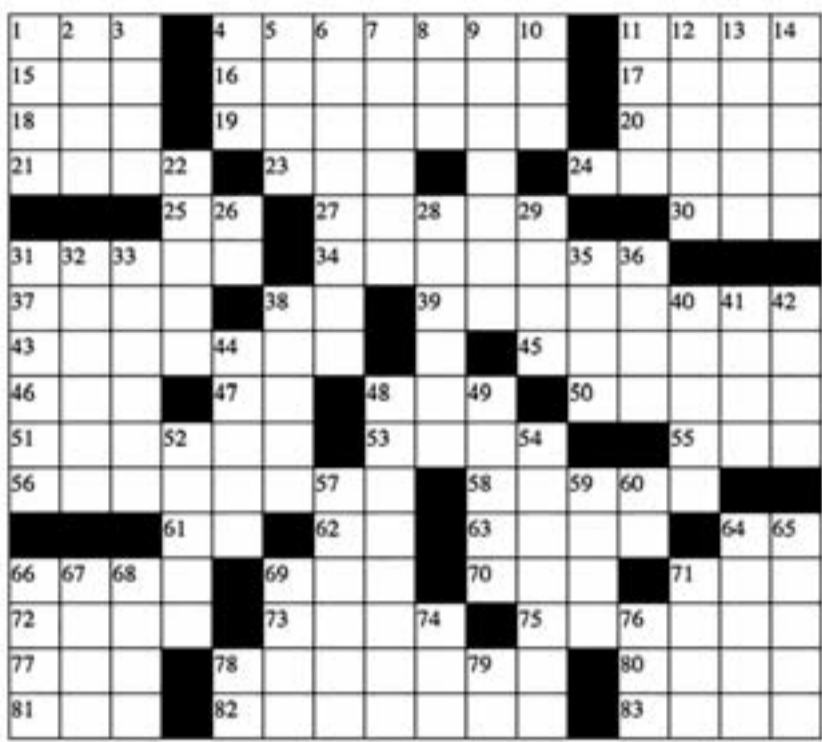
tion from equity investors, determining the strategy for profitable returns, followed by managing the initial impact of the decisions made and finally calculating year-end results. Day 2 looked into the future by assessing the performance of the management team, producing reliable forecasts and investor presentations. The workshop was led by James van der Westhuizen, a trusted advisor to many public and private sector companies including MTN South Africa & MTN Group, Microsoft, PepsiCo, Saudi Basic Industries Corporation and others.

Burgan Bank has a one-year partnership with Vigor Events, a first-class innovative platform in the Middle East and North Africa that transforms the concept of educational talks into an unconventional experience. Vigor Events established the Knowledge Club in 2013, which provides participants with wide-ranging exposure to key decision-makers from diverse industries featuring real-life case studies and new best practices. The latest sponsorship reiterates Burgan bank's mission to elevate the standard of banking and financial practice from within by continuing to invest in its human capital to deliver excellence for its customers.



Stars

CROSSWORD 2083



ACROSS

- Characteristic of a mob.
- A person who fixes the boundaries of land claims.
- A girl or young woman who is unmarried.
- Any of various primates with short tails or no tail at all.
- A deciduous tree of the family Ulmaceae that grows in the southeastern United States.
- A Loloish language.
- Having leadership guidance.
- Operculate seasnail of coastal waters with a short spiral shell.
- A flat-bottomed volcanic crater that was formed by an explosion.
- Singing jazz.
- European cave-dwelling aquatic salamander with permanent external gills.
- A telegram sent abroad.
- Being nine more than ninety.
- East Indian tree yielding a resin used medicinally and burned as incense.
- Fermented alcoholic beverage similar to but heavier than beer.
- More than enough in size or scope or capacity.
- One who reveals confidential information in return for money.
- Taking place over public roads.
- State of being husband and wife.
- Declared but not proved.
- Any of several toxic or carcinogenic hydrocarbons that occur as impurities in herbicides.
- A nucleic acid that transmits genetic information from DNA to the cytoplasm.
- A unit of luminous flux equal to the amount of light given out through a solid angle of 1 steradian by a point source of 1 candela intensity radiating uniformly in all directions.
- Yearling heifer or bullock.
- A city in western Germany near the Dutch and Belgian borders.
- An artificial source of visible illumination.
- American prizefighter who won the world heavyweight championship three times (born in 1942).
- A wooden peg that is used to fasten timbers in shipbuilding.
- An award for winning a championship or commemorating some other event.
- An associate degree in nursing.
- Destruction of heart tissue resulting from obstruction of the blood supply to the heart muscle.
- (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
- Any of a number of fishes of the family Carangidae.
- Horny projecting mouth of a bird.
- Made of or resembling lace.
- A river that rises in northeastern Turkey (near the source of the Euphrates) and flows generally eastward through Armenia to the Caspian Sea.
- West Indian tree having racemes of fragrant white flowers and yielding a durable timber and resinous juice.
- Black tropical American cuckoo.
- According to the Old Testament he was a pagan king of Israel and husband of Jezebel (9th century BC).
- A piece of furniture that provides a place to sleep.
- (British) A minicar used as a taxicab.
- A small cake leavened with yeast.

DOWN

- A master's degree in library science.
- An organization of countries formed in 1961 to agree on a common policy for the sale of petroleum.

- English monk and scholar (672-735).
- A nurse who has enough training to be licensed by a state to provide routine care for the sick.
- A spread made chiefly from vegetable oils and used as a substitute for butter.
- A town in southeastern New Mexico on the Pecos River near the Mexican border.
- Of the appetites and passions of the body.
- Vietnamese New Year.
- A city of east central Mexico (west of Veracruz).
- A unit of absorbed ionizing radiation equal to 100 ergs per gram of irradiated material.
- A Tibetan or Mongolian priest of Lamaism.
- Jordan's port.
- Be going to.
- A dress worn primarily by Hindu women.
- A diacritical mark (-) placed over the letter n in Spanish to indicate a palatal nasal sound or over a vowel in Portuguese to indicate nasalization.
- A ductile gray metallic element of the lanthanide series.
- The 11th letter of the Greek alphabet.
- A United Nations agency created to assist developing nations by loans guaranteed by member governments.
- Hungarian playwright (1878-1952).
- A large and stately mansion.
- (Greek mythology) Goddess of discord.
- A public act of violence by an unruly mob.
- Minute aquatic herbs floating on or below the water surface of still water consisting of a leaflike frond or plant body and single root.
- Of or relating to or resembling an axis of rotation.
- A young woman.
- (Sumerian) Water god and god of wisdom.
- Made the first orbital rocket-powered flight by a United States astronaut in 1962.
- A mountain peak in the Andes in Bolivia (21,201 feet high).
- The capital and largest city of Jordan.
- Extremely exciting as if by alcohol or a narcotic.
- A tricycle (usually propelled by pedalling).
- An immunosuppressive drug (trade name Imuran) used to prevent rejection of a transplanted organ.
- A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
- A public promotion of some product or service.
- Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
- Jordan's port.
- A stick that people can lean on to help them walk.
- Harsh or corrosive in tone.
- The language of the nomadic Lapp people in northern Scandinavia and the Kola Peninsula.
- A member of the Siouan people formerly living in the Missouri river valley in NE Nebraska.
- Intentionally so written (used after a printed word or phrase).
- A workplace for the conduct of scientific research.
- Before noon.
- A hard gray lustrous metallic element that is highly corrosion-resistant.

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

It seems the focus in your life is beginning to change. You have a strong desire to be in total control of everything and everyone surrounding you. You are ready to get things organized. You are driven by ambition and are becoming very responsible. You may find you are so focused you are moving full steam ahead. Pace yourself as to not burn out before you accomplish all of your goals. Sometimes you need to remind yourself to work smarter, rather than harder. Do not let frustration get in your way. Keep your focus and drive but remember to do always do the right thing. You can expect great rewards from your hard work.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Talk about bringing home the bacon and frying it up in the pan! This is you all day every day. You are able to balance career and home life all with ease. You are a jack of all trades. You have a deep desire to strengthen the foundation you have built for all. You desire a sense of roots and family, home, and relatives are where your focus is. You want to feel as if you belong on a personal and private level. You have an intimate desire to know that you are needed. Taurus. The energy and effort you put into taking care of others does not go unnoticed.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Taking charge and being in control are two things that seem very appealing to you now. You may find that you are more determined than ever to get your life in order. You will begin to get not only things in your life, but also people organized. There is a place for everything, and everything has a place. You are on a mission to make that happen. This is a very ambitious and responsible now. You may need to take a step back and slow yourself down a bit. You do to want to burn out. Remember, work smarter, not harder.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

You are ready to take total control of your life. Taking charge of your situation has become a major focus for you. You are ready to get things organized. You really have the initiative and drive to get things done. This is a time of ambition and responsibility for you. Keep your cool, stay focused, and pace yourself. Too much of anything can be a bad thing. Do not push too hard. There is no need to burn yourself out.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

If you could choose any magic trick to be able to perform, today's choice would be a disappearing act. You need to take a break. An escape is in order. Try spending some time curled up with a romantic book or watching a movie. The only way you will be able to get back to being your productive self is by taking care of yourself. Everyone has their breaking point and you passed it miles ago. You are the only person you can change, Leo. Keep this in mind.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Don't be surprised if you cross paths today with someone who just doesn't sit right with you. You have a feeling that something about them just isn't right. You may feel as if you want to get away from this person as soon as possible. Your virtues are simple. You prefer this way of life. Today may be a day you are having difficulty with focus and performing your daily tasks. You seem in a dreamy mood and unable to snap back. Deep in thought you seem to have too much on your mind. This may be a good time to sit back and reorganize and restructure your surroundings and goals. You are in a way shutting down due to an emotional overload.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

No one likes to be stood up. This may be the action you take that puts strain on your relationship with friends. Though you would love nothing more than to be out with friends socializing and have some fun, your more responsible side knows where your priorities lie and are unable to go through with plans you have made. Your mind is sharp, and you find yourself very productive which is the reward you need to make up for having to miss out and play adult today. You may find your experience leaves you with a great sense of sympathy for those close to you, Libra. Wisdom not knowledge is what now counts most in your life.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

It seems as if your romantic and social relationships are comfortable. Getting along with those closest to you seems very natural. You are persuasive with others and able to communicate with ease when it comes to relationships, new and old. This may be a time of great financial gain in your life. You could find yourself crossing paths with others who find business opportunities seem to fall in your lap. You desire power and control and it seems as if you are gaining both of these in every aspect of your life. This is a great time for you, Scorpio, face every new opportunity with an open mind.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You have the ability to get outside yourself and see what is going on with others. This may mean you see things others don't see. It's a gift that could serve you well in journalism or in crime detection. Or, you may just find it useful in personal relationships. You can see beyond the "what" and identify the "why" of behavior. It helps. You will be able to use this gift in a very positive manner today.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Today may not be an easy one for you. You may feel as your emotions do not align with the way things truly are in your world today. You need to take a step back and relax. You may find if you push too hard you may break something that can not be repaired. Patience is needed and you need to wait this one out and let it blow over. You may find these circumstances aggravate and anger you. Do not let yourself become over emotional and fly off the handle. Nothing good can come from a negative reaction. Find a positive way to look at the situation you are in and sit back and wait for it to change.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Taking charge and being in control seem to be major desires in your life. You want to get things organized and now is the time you have the initiative to do it. This a great time of ambition and taking on new responsibilities for you. Keep your cool and pace yourself. You know it is always best to work smarter rather than harder. You should accomplish much at this time. Your ambition and drive are to be admired. You are not only making clear decisions about your life and the path you are taking but you are able to be clear decision concerning the lives of those close to you. You may find someone seeking your advice today.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Emotionally you may have one desire, but it could be at odds with what is in your best interest. Doing for others comes naturally for you. This is a time you need to put you and yours first. Being too generous could leave you in a bad situation. This is a great time to work on budgeting your resources. Taking charge and being in control seem to be a great desire you have now. Take control of yourself, your life, and your finances first.

Wordsearch Puzzle

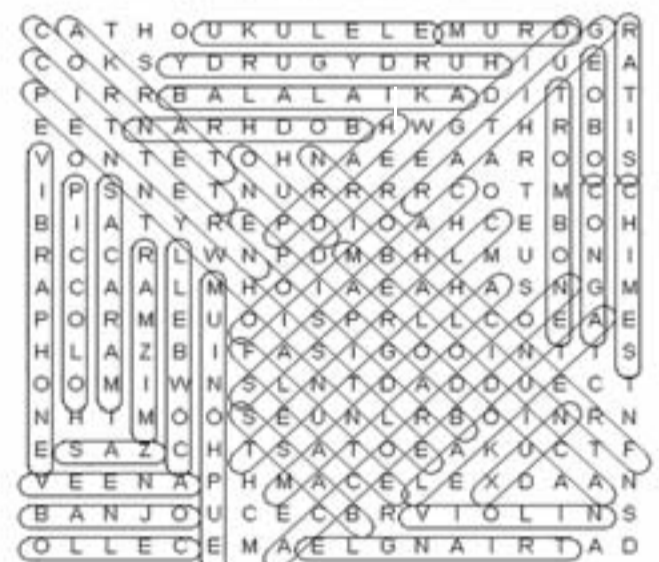
Musical Instruments 2

Find and circle all of the musical instruments that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a secret message - a G. K. Chesterton quotation.



- |           |            |          |               |
|-----------|------------|----------|---------------|
| BASSOON   | FFFE       | MARIMBAS | SHOFAR        |
| BAGPIPE   | FLUGELHORN | MELOEON  | SLIDE WHISTLE |
| BALALAIKA | GONG       | MOCENO   | STRUMSTICK    |
| BANJO     | BUGLE      | NEFER    | TAMBURINE     |
| BASS      | CASTANETS  | OCARINA  | TAMBURA       |
| BODHRAN   | CONCERTINA | PIANO    | TEN WHISTLE   |
| CABASAS   | CONCH HORN | REBEC    | TRUMPET       |
| CELLO     | CUMBUS     | RECORD   | TUBA          |
| CHIMES    | CYMBAL     | LUTE     | VIOLA         |
| CITTERN   | DULCIMER   | MANDOLIN | SAXOPHONE     |
|           |            |          | XYLOPHONE     |

Musical Instruments 1



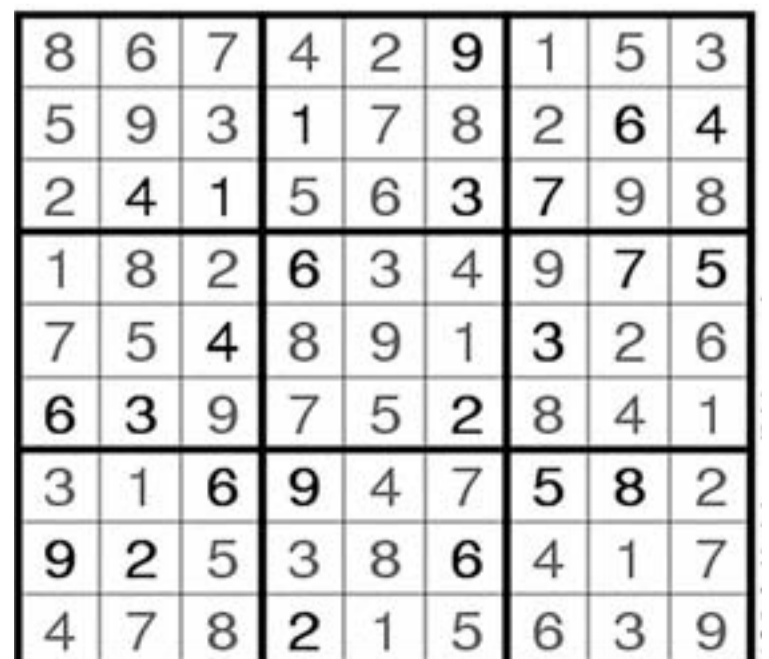
- |           |             |              |            |
|-----------|-------------|--------------|------------|
| ACCORDION | CONGA       | HURDY-GURDY  | SAZ        |
| BAGPIPE   | CORNET      | LAUTA        | SITAR      |
| BALALAIKA | COW BELL    | MARACAS      | TARKA      |
| BANJO     | DIDGERIDOO  | MELODICA     | TRIANGLE   |
| BASS      | DRUM        | MIZMAR       | TROMBONE   |
| BODHRAN   | EUPHONIUM   | OBDE         | UKULELE    |
| CABASAS   | FLUTE       | OSDE         | VEENA      |
| CELLO     | FRENCH HORN | QUID         | VISSAPHONE |
| CHIMES    | GUITAR      | PENNYWHISTLE | VIOLIN     |
| CITTERN   | HARP        | PICCOLO      | XUN        |

Hidden sentence: THOSE WHO HEAR NOT THE MUSIC THINK THE DANCERS MAD

Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution



# Lifestyle

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2018



Afghan workers separate saffron threads from harvested flowers at a processing center in Herat province. — AFP photos

## Red gold: Afghanistan saffron production grows



An Afghan worker sorts harvested saffron flowers in a field on the outskirts of Herat province.

Starting before dawn has even broken, Afghanistan's army of saffron pickers shift their way across sun-baked fields to pluck the brightly coloured crocuses that are providing the country's farmers with a new means of income. The delicate pistil of the flower has for centuries been used in cooking around the world and because of its relatively high price has been dubbed "red gold" by those who rely on its cultivation. Joma Khan is one of the 156,000 seasonal workers who help harvest the spice, earning about \$1 an hour. "We start our field work before sunrise and each of us can collect about four to five kilograms of saffron flower," the 16-year-old said.

The harvest is then sent to factories where gloved workers remove the red pistil, made up of the three stigma that when dried constitute the spice. Authorities struggling to wean farmers off the highly profitable opium poppy trade are hoping to use the spice as an attractive alternative. And the results are looking positive, thanks to billions of dollars of international aid. The saffron harvest hit 13 tons this year, compared with a ton in 2013, according to agriculture ministry spokesman Akbar Rostami.

Cultivation requires little water, meaning it has not been heavily impacted by the historic drought currently threatening nearly three million Afghans with famine. It has even intensified in some drought-hit areas, especially in the northwestern province of Herat on the border with Iran and Turkmenistan. Official figures show saffron cultivation has increased to 6,200 hectares of land in 2018, up 21 percent on last year.

However, there is still a way to go, with 263,000 hectares currently given over to poppy production. And while the saffron sector generated \$35 million in 2017, opium made an incredible \$1.4 billion. Iran remains the world's largest saffron producer, capturing nearly 90 percent of the global market with 400 tons annually. Meanwhile, nearly 90 percent of the opium harvested on the planet still comes from Afghanistan.



Afghan workers carry harvested saffron flowers in a field on the outskirts of Herat province.

Prices for the spice have also fallen, from more than \$900 at the start of the year to \$660 now, due in part to mafias who illegally import Iranian saffron and flood the market, Rostami said. Nevertheless, the increased cultivation of it is being seen as a positive sign. The spice is being exported to 17 countries through new air corridors, mainly to China, India, and the Gulf countries, and to a lesser extent to the European Union and North America, says the agriculture ministry. "Afghanistan's saffron, based on its organic nature, it is better than other saffron in the world," claimed Abdul Shukoer Ahrari, director of Tila-e-Surkh Afghan ("Afghan Red Gold"), one of the country's main processing sites. — AFP



Afghan workers separate saffron threads from harvested flowers.



An Afghan woman picks saffron flowers in a field.



An Afghan worker shows saffron flowers.



An Afghan worker spreads separated saffron threads from harvested flowers.



An Afghan worker sorts harvested saffron flowers in a field on the outskirts of Herat province.

## Yalitza Aparicio: An indigenous Mexican woman captivates Hollywood

Yalitza Aparicio had just gone along with her sister to the casting call for Alfonso Cuarón's new film. She had no intention of trying out herself. But destiny put her in front of the camera and that was how the Mexican woman of indigenous origins, who had just graduated as a teacher but wasn't yet working, became the star of "Roma." She is likely now to spend the next few months learning how to handle Tinseltown red-carpet ceremonies-Cuarón's latest film is a sensation, and her work is generating major buzz.



Mexican actress Yalitza Aparicio arrives for the Los Angeles premiere of "Roma" at the Egyptian theatre in Hollywood. — AFP photos

"Roma" won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival, has been nominated for three Golden Globes and is a strong favorite for the Oscars in February. "It wasn't something that I really wanted or had dreamed about," Aparicio, who turned 26 on Tuesday, told AFP. "Because of your socioeconomic status or your culture, you think you can't aspire to be an actress, and to participate in this medium that sounds like a fantasy."

### Passion project

After his Oscar-winning "Gravity," which took home seven trophies, Cuarón bet on a very personal project. "Roma" tells the story-in black and white-of the two women who made a deep mark on his childhood in Mexico City. Cleo, played by Aparicio, is a domestic worker who becomes pregnant after her first sexual encounter. The director's mother and lady of the house, played by Marina de Távira, is about to be left by her husband for another woman. Framing all of it is the turbulent Mexico of the early 1970s.

Aparicio had no Cleo in her childhood in Tlaxiaco, a town of 40,000 people in the southwestern state of Oaxaca. But her own mother, who raised her on her own, worked as a maid and that helped Aparicio understand the relationship of love and heartbreak that can form between caregivers and their bosses. "There were scenes during the filming that stirred my memories, and there arose, all by itself, my character's need to protect the children from what was happening so they would not suffer," she said.

Cuarón, who also directed "Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban," said the actors in "Roma" were "the best" he has ever worked with. The film, which had a cinematic release in select US theaters, will be available on Netflix on December 14.

### Casting call

The first requirement for becoming a member of the cast of "Roma" was to physically resemble the real people in the director's life.

"The directive was that they had to physically look as much like the original people as possible," Cuarón told AFP. "And on top of that, they



Mexican director Alfonso Cuarón (left), Mexican actress Yalitza Aparicio (center) and Mexican actress Marina de Távira (right) arrive for the Los Angeles premiere of "Roma" at the Egyptian theatre in Hollywood.

should have the same energy." Aparicio's sister ended up not being cast because of her advanced pregnancy.

But since the young teacher was there, she did the first of many screen tests that led ultimately to her winning the part inspired by Libo, the director's nanny, who Cuarón says "cries every time" she sees the movie. Before filming began, Aparicio met with the now elderly ex-domestic worker. "She told me only how she came to the house, about her relationship with the family, but it was left at that," she said. Then filming began.

### Change 'little by little'

Cuarón did not give out the entire script at once, only parts of it. Filming unfolded in a replica of the house where he had lived as a child in the upper middle class Mexico City neighborhood of Roma-hence the film's title. The set was so close to the real thing that his mother, who died recently, and the rest of the family were impressed. Despite having no previous experience, Aparicio has been applauded by other actors, like Tom Hanks, and by critics. The New York Times includ-

ed her in a list of best performances of 2018. "After living through this whole adventure, I realized that the movies aren't as far away as I thought from what I had always dreamed of doing," she said.

"Through films, you can educate people in a more massive way. But let's see if some offers come my way," she added, discussing her future with humility. For now, Aparicio plans to experience the moment, which has included not just accolades but also ugly racist and class-related insults from some of her compatriots after she appeared in designer clothes in Vanity Fair magazine. She ignores the abuse, though, and focuses on what's important to her: change. "I am showing my people that they also can reach something like this, that just because you don't have blonde hair and green eyes, it doesn't mean you can't be a part of it," she said. "There are certain things that will change little by little in our culture and let's hope that with this picture, something is learned." — AFP

## Rexha won't compromise with creative control

Bebe Rexha has walked away from "big" opportunities because of the lack of creative control. The 29-year-old star struggled to get noticed before her song "The Monster" was recorded by Eminem and Rihanna in 2013, and was often told she would be better off as a songwriter than an artist. Even now she is Grammy-nominated, the "I Got You" hitmaker always makes sure her collaborations are authentic, and is quite happy to drop something if it's not going how she wants it to. Speaking candidly in an interview with Euphoria Magazine, she said: "If I were ever put in a situation where I felt like I didn't have creative control, then I just left no matter how big the person was. "If I'm in a situation where there's no collaboration effort and someone tells me what to do, I'm out."



Bebe Rexha

"I've been in really weird situations where I've looked like an idiot having walked away from a really big producer because I wouldn't have them tell me who I need to be." Even when "The Monster" came out, Bebe was told she'd never make it as a pop star. She recalled: "I remember when I first moved to Los Angeles and everybody was like 'you should just go home this isn't going to work for you.' "I got signed to a record deal and a songwriter deal, then I had 'The Monster' (come out) and they were like 'No. You have a record deal and a songwriting deal but you should stick to songwriting because you'll never be an artist.'" Bebe is "proud" that she'll never fit the stereotype of a female pop star and praised Pink for her empowering speech at the 2017 MTV VMAs, where she revealed a moment of insecurity her young daughter Willow, now seven, had about her looks and how important it is to be proud of who you are.

She told the publication: "When I was growing up, all my favorite pop girls were so fit and had abs and sh\*t and I will never be that. I will never be a size 2, I will never be size 4. I will be a size 8 and I'm proud of it. "I respect P!nk because she said what she needed to say and say go to hell to all the record label people at the time and that's something you do not do. "There are women who have inspired me and inspired me to be in the pop world and that's the reason I'm here today." Meanwhile, Bebe admitted that she never expected 'Meant To Be' to be a hit.

Speaking about the Florida Georgia Line-featuring track, she said: "I think 'Meant To Be' is one of those very special situations - not to be corny about it - but it was written in the stars. "It's just do different (and) unexpected and I think the best things in life are unexpected. "I didn't see 'Meant To Be' having the success it did. "I knew it was a special song, but I didn't think it would be that big." — Bang Showbiz

## Fender owes music career to inspirational teacher

BRITs Critics' Choice Award 2019 winner Sam Fender owes his music career to a teacher who inspired him to learn to write properly. The 'Poundshop Kardashians' singer beat R&B star Mahalia and indie rocker Lewis Capaldi to win the prestigious prize but he insists if it wasn't for the efforts of a special educator at his school he wouldn't have been able to pen the lyrics that are creating such a buzz in the music industry.



Sam Fender

In an interview with The Times newspaper, Sam said: "When I was 13 I did an oral exam on 'Frankenstein' and the teacher said to me, 'You speak like an A-star student, but you write like a complete idiot.' I sat back at school with her for two

years until she got my writing up, and it became the first time I was stood at anything. All I ever wanted to do was play the guitar, and I began to see how I could combine my love of creative writing with music. That teacher inspired me to write, to put into words things I couldn't say out loud. It was only a normal state school but it made me who I am."

The songwriter grew up in North Shields near Newcastle in the North East of England and his working class upbringing is the inspiration for most of his music. Sam, 24, wants to represent the life that many people in the UK are living and he isn't afraid to tackle tough subjects like drug use and men's mental health. He said: "Spice was rife in my home town when I was a kid and it's an awful drug. The song ['Spice'] is about a boy who completely destroyed his life by smoking it. 'Poundshop Kardashians' is Newcastle on a Saturday night. Nobody wears coats - it's all muscles and V-necks and fake tan. And 'Dead Boys' is about a friend who committed suicide. The Cure wrote 'Boys Don't Cry' and it's the same today; as a boy you're not meant to show your emotions, but if you don't have a job or any prospects, you're going to be depressed and it will be much worse if you can't express that. I hate the term because it's become a buzzword, but it's toxic masculinity." — Bang Showbiz



A man watches a commercial featuring K-pop supergroup Blackpink on his laptop in Jakarta after the advertisement was banned by the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission. — AFP

## Indonesia bans K-pop supergroup's miniskirt commercial

A television ad featuring members of K-pop supergroup Blackpink dressed in miniskirts has been banned from Indonesian airwaves, prompting a furious backlash from fans. The Indonesian Broadcasting Commission ordered 11 domestic TV stations to yank the commercial late Tuesday, saying it was indecent. The order followed a petition signed by more than 100,000 people asking the commission to cancel the ad-which in turn sparked a tit-for-tat campaign calling for the expulsion of the woman who launched the original petition.

The ad features four members of the top-selling Korean girl band singing and dancing to promote Shopee, an Indonesian online retailer. Indonesia's broadcasting watchdog said the ad flouted moral norms in the world's biggest Muslim majority country. "Companies need to be careful when they're making a commercial that

they don't associate their product with something Indonesians see as negative," commission head Hardly Stefano said in a statement Tuesday.

Shopee called the commission's remarks "very valuable input", but added that the ad had been greenlit by another government agency prior to its airing. The decision to ban the ad was widely panned by Blackpink fans in Indonesia. "This is too much-you can see women dressed that way in any mall in Indonesia," Disna Harvens told AFP. "It's not vulgar at all." Blackpink has quickly become a household name at home and among K-pop fans overseas with their signature hip hop-infused music, impeccably choreographed dance routines and edgy fashion styles. They also stand out in a K-pop industry largely dominated by boy bands. — AFP

## E! Announces Generation M.E.

A new local production celebrating successful female entrepreneurs exclusively on OSN

E! Entertainment Television, NBCUniversal International Networks' pop culture channel, announces its new locally produced show in the MENA region - Generation M.E. - premiering on December 23rd from 9pm (KSA), on E!, exclusively on OSN - the region's leading entertainment network. Generation M.E. follows Dana Al-Tuwarish, a Kuwaiti influencer and entrepreneur, as she meets a selection of game-changing women in the region, who, like her, have unique journeys and have achieved success in their chosen fields. In the three episode series, Dana interviews women from the glamorous worlds of fashion, entertainment, beauty and sport. She also shares insights on how she manages her multiple businesses including beauty salons along with perfumes and brand collaborations.

The show features Joelle Mardinian, a Lebanese presenter and beauty entrepreneur; Haya Abdel Salam, a Kuwaiti actress/director; Saudi fashion designer, Arwa Al-Banawi; Manal Rostom, Egypt's most prominent marathon-runner and mountaineer; as well as top Lebanese chef Tara Khatter. Dana also follows Hanan Mazouzi, the Algerian founder of the UAE's first women-only supercar club called- Arabian Gazelles, as they take a spectacular ride to raise funds for breast cancer research.

Kuwaiti influencer and entrepreneur Dana Al-Tuwarish, said, "It was an absolute pleasure shooting for such an incredible show. I had an amazing time interacting with

each one of the participants and getting to know their inspiring entrepreneurial journey and life experiences. I hope that the viewers enjoy the show as much as we enjoyed shooting it!"

Emad Morcos, Chief Content Officer of OSN, added, "Generation M.E. is a great example of OSN's collaboration with international networks to bring shows that are truly local and relevant to our audiences. While the show gives us insights on Dana's inspirational journey, it also

serves as a platform to highlight the achievements of the region's other young talents."

"Generation M.E. is a compelling follow up to My Fabulous M.E., E!'s original series that was exclusive on OSN last year," comments Lee Raftery, Managing Director UK & Emerging Markets and Chief Marketing & Content Officer, NBCUniversal International. "This December viewers in the Middle East can expect to be impressed and inspired by the stories of a new generation of women across the region, including Dana's own inspirational career."

All three episodes of Generation M.E. will air back-to-back on Sunday, December 23rd from 9pm (KSA), where viewers will get an in-depth and behind-the-scenes look at the lives of businesswomen and influencers that are impacting their culture across the region.

Generation M.E. is a fun, smart and inspirational series, with all episodes available to watch On Demand on OSN Play. Generation M.E. is produced by Sugar Rush Productions for NBCUniversal International Networks. Follow the action on social media using #GenerationME. Be the first to hear about OSN news by following @OSNnewsME on Twitter and follow E! on Instagram (@entertainmentme) for the latest updates on your favourite shows.



Lifestyle | Features



A Miss Central African Republic 2018 contestant parades in an evening dress during the beauty pageant in Bangui. — AFP photos



Solene (center), Miss Bangui and winner of the Miss Central African Republic 2018 competition, poses for the photographers at Bangui National Stadium.

# Russian influence on show in C African beauty contest

Clad in sleek red gowns and wreathed in smiles, the models lined up in Bangui stadium for the capital's first Miss Central African Republic beauty pageant for three years—all thanks to Russia. In a country mired in conflict and poverty, the flash of cameras capturing the moment a young woman was crowned the nation's glamour queen was a moment to savor. But for Western observers, the contest also marked the latest subtle shift in a regional power dynamic.

In their eyes, Russia's funding of the event signaled a bid to boost its clout in the former French colony, deploying people-pleasing "soft power" as well as military aid. In the capital's crumbling 20,000-seat main stadium at the weekend, about 100 people—mostly state officials and the families of contestants—watched the women parade in high heels alongside Russian flags adorning the venue's walls. Lobaye Invest, a diamond mining firm reputedly close to the Kremlin, featured prominently on the billboards of event sponsors. "To our dear friends from Russia, we wish to thank you from the bottom of our hearts for the support you are bringing to every level of our society," said the show's top producer, Lea Floride Mokodopo, who then gave a warm welcome to Elmira Abdrazakova, Miss Russia 2013.

### Weapons and training

Russia's influence in CAR has been growing ever since the UN-backed government last year called for help to fight militias rampaging through the country. Since then, Moscow has supplied weapons, military officers, 170 military "trainers" and a security advisor to work with President Faustin-Archange Touadera—a significant deployment to a country historically linked to France and which already has EU and UN aid.

The military trainers sent by Russia are mercenaries with close ties to Russian mining companies and the numbers deployed could be significantly higher, according to Western sources. At the contest, Miss



The Russian flag overlooks the Miss Central African Republic 2018 contestants during a shooting before the beauty pageant.

Russia 2013 presented a cheque for five million CFA francs (\$8,650, 7,600 euros) to support a local health center and made a speech referencing Russia's political push in the CAR. "The recently signed Khartoum declaration is a pledge of peace," Abdrazakova said. Initiated by Russia in August, the "declaration" came after Russia and Sudan hosted talks in the Sudanese capital Khartoum with some of CAR's rival militias.

The talks took place separately from an African Union initiative, with both attempting to convince CAR's rival groups to end the violence that spiraled

after the 2013 overthrow of longtime leader Francois Bozize. Most of the country is controlled by armed groups, many of which claim to protect Christian or Muslim communities, and which often fight over resources including gold, copper, iron ore and uranium.

### 'Respect international rules'

In a sign of Western wariness towards Russia's actions, France's Armed Forces Minister Florence Parly on Tuesday emphasized the importance of countries working with the African Union in CAR. "The positive contribution by a number of countries, including Russia, should be in line with the African initiative for peace supported by the AU," she said. Parly was in Bangui for ceremonies in which France handed over 1,400 Kalashnikov assault rifles and three amphibious vehicles to CAR's poorly-equipped army.

The French-supplied weapons follow 1,700 Kalashnikovs provided by Russia in January. Both shipments have been approved by a UN panel that issues exemptions to a global arms embargo against the CAR. Russia has dismissed concerns about its role in the CAR. On November 15, Russian Deputy Ambassador Dmitry Polyanski told France to put aside "parochial national interests" and acknowledge that Moscow is "helping the CAR".

As 23-year-old student Charlene Sombo was crowned "Miss Centrafrique" after midnight on Sunday, the speeches thanking Russia's help could be heard on radios broadcasting across the capital. Through simple goodwill or part of a broader initiative for prestige and influence, Russia this year also staged a "Cup of Hope" football tournament and organized a drawing and poetry competition for local children. The prize: A trip to Russia, and the chance to stay in a former holiday camp for Communist youth. — AFP



The Miss Central African Republic 2018 contestants are waiting for the jury's verdict in an evening gowns category during the beauty pageant in Bangui.



The contestants from Miss Republic of Central Africa poses in the water for a shooting, in Bimbo.

## AL KOUT MALL HOSTS WORLD'S TOP MAKEUP ARTISTS

Al Kout Mall, one of Al Kout Project's six bespoke experiences, has announced the launching of Kohl festival—the biggest beauty event in Kuwait. Beauty and Makeup enthusiasts and hobbyists alike are invited to participate in this first of its kind event this Friday and Saturday, the 14-15 December, 2018.

Makeup aficionados will get the chance to meet top international makeup artists, such as Nikkie de Jager of NikkieTutorials from Europe, and sisters Sonia and Fyza from the United Kingdom. Visitors can meet the makeup artists on the main stage area at the mall as well as enjoy several special beauty-related tutorials, fun activities, interact with top makeup brands, as well as enjoy valuable giveaways.

### Kohl, Kuwait's premier beauty event

During the two-day festival, the mall will provide several activities related to beauty and makeup, showcasing the latest in makeup trends, skin care and beauty tips. Several makeup brands such as Make Up For Ever, L'Occitane, Kiko, Milano, and SKINFOOD are also participating with fun activities, product showcases and makeup sessions. Several lucky winners from the festival's social media competitions will



also get the chance to attend a private master class with NikkieTutorials, and sisters Sonia and Fyza in a Cinescape hall at Al Kout Mall.

Commenting on the Kohl festival, Marketing Manager, Nermeen Bishady said: "Al Kout Mall is committed to providing all-new and exclusive experiences to its visitors, and since the mall is an ideal destination for beauty and shopping enthusiasts, we have chosen to organize this festival—the first and biggest beauty event showcasing international experts in the State of Kuwait. The festival consists of two parts: the first involves beauty sessions and exclusive meetings with the three international makeup experts. The second will include activities for all visitors

including the provision of beauty-related tips, getting to meet beauty experts here at the mall, and stands displaying the beauty products of participating brands alongside many more exclusive surprises."

Al Kout Mall has provided many special events for visitors that were the first of their kind in Kuwait, having recently hosted international star Shah Rukh Khan promoting his new movie, in addition to the "Park & Win" promotional offer. The mall promises to provide its visitors with more exciting events and activities soon, which will make the shopping experience at the mall more entertaining and unique.



## Miss Universe's first transgender contestant revels in being role model

Like many other contestants at the Miss Universe beauty pageant, Angela Ponce grew up watching the glitzy spectacle on television, dreaming of representing her country one day. This year, her wish has come true, with Ponce making history as the first transgender contestant in the pageant's 66-year history. "Trans women have been persecuted and crased for so long, I'm showing that trans women can be whatever they want," said Ponce, who was crowned Miss Spain earlier this year.

"I am proud to have the opportunity to use this platform for a message of inclusion, tolerance and respect for the LGBT+ community," she said in an interview in Bangkok, where the finale is to be held on Dec 17. The Miss Universe Organization, which owns the beauty pageant, lifted a ban on transgender contestants in 2012. The competition airs in more than 190 countries, with an estimated half a billion viewers annually.

Picked by several online bookies as the favorite to win the crown, Ponce volunteers with a non-profit in Spain that works with children and families dealing with gender identity issues. Transgender children often struggle with depression and suicidal thoughts, she said. "I was born into a world, into a society which really wasn't prepared for me. I had the support of my family, but I still faced discrimination, and I had no role models," she said. "So many children face discrimination for being different. It is important to tell them they have

a right to be who they are, who they want to be," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation through an interpreter.

### Confidence

The pageant will take place as Thailand prepares to pass a landmark bill that would allow civil partnerships of same-sex couples, becoming the first Asian country to do so. Taiwan's constitutional court last year ruled that same-sex couples had the right to legally marry, and set a two-year deadline for legalization. But voters last month rejected a referendum on legalization. Ponce, 26, said she was shut out of several fashion competitions because she is transgender. "When I won Miss Spain, I was so excited," she said. "As they were placing the crown, I just shut my eyes to take it in, because I knew it was a very significant moment."

Also significantly, the pageant this year features its first all-woman selection panel, said a spokeswoman for Miss Universe Organization. Among the 94 contestants is another woman who has battled prejudice, and is also making history as Panama's first indigenous Miss Universe contestant. "When I entered the competition, there was a lot of criticism; people attacked me on Instagram and in the media, and said I should not be allowed to compete," said Rosa Montezuma, her eyes welling up. There are an estimated 370 million indigenous people in the world, according to the United Nations. They make up less than 5 percent of the global population, but account for 15 percent of the poorest as they are denied land rights, and access to education and healthcare. "Indigenous people have a lot of traditional knowledge, but we are not given the same opportunities," said Montezuma, 25. "This is a great platform for me to reach the whole world and show that indigenous girls can also be successful." — Reuters



A woman walking past a claw crane store in Taipei. — AFP photos



Parents helping their children to operate a claw crane machine in Taipei.



A technician adjusting a claw crane grabber in a store in the Xizhi district in New Taipei City.

## Everyone's a winner: Taiwan's claw crane craze

As Taiwan's economy stagnates, claw crane arcades where customers lower a grabber to try to pick up a prize from a glass box are booming as affordable entertainment, while operators see them as a way to make a fast buck. According to official figures, there is one claw crane outlet for every two convenience stores in Taiwan, with the number more than doubling last year to become the fourth largest tax income source in the entertainment industry. The concept is simple—for as little as TW\$10 (\$0.33), customers manually lower a metal claw into a pile of prizes, which are usually soft toys, but can also include electronic gadgets and fashion accessories.

the last few years have seen a surge in popularity in Taiwan and South Korea. With salaries failing to keep up with the cost of living in Taiwan, players see the machines as inexpensive entertainment while operators consider them an effective investment. Vendors usually look for a good location and stock it with claw machines, which in turn are subleased to individual operators.

Nick Chang, 31, leased two claw machines inside a recently opened arcade in a Taipei residential district. Like most neighborhood arcades, the 40 toy claws inside are sublet to various owners who then stock them with toys of their choice. Rental fees for each console range between TW\$3000 in this arcade to TW\$10,000 in busy entertainment districts. Chang has stocked his claw machine with Japanese action figures. "I don't have to be in the shop 24 hours a day which means I can keep my full-time job," said Chang who works as a magazine photographer.

He makes around TW\$10,000 monthly profit per machine which is more than most operators. The average monthly revenue for a machine is only about TW\$5000, but with Taiwan's average monthly income including bonuses stuck at TW\$50,000, many feel it is a decent return.

"I make more because I am constantly looking for cheaper sources for my toys and I have many returning customers," said Chang. Finding the right prize can be key—Ken Chuang, 38, has a claw machine inside the same arcade as Chang. Once he stocked it with underwear resembling Calvin Klein briefs, and found it emptied after two hours. "Someone must have thought they were the real thing!" he laughed.

### Adrenaline rush

There are more than 100 Facebook pages in Taiwan dedicated to claw machines with tens of thousands of members who share their experiences and tips on the latest trends and swap merchandise. The craze has even prompted Taiwan's Central Bank to announce that it will issue more TW\$10 coins in 2019 to meet demand sparked by the game.

Lo Chi-fu, a radio presenter who hosts a financial program, says young people are particularly drawn to supplementing poor incomes and often club together with friends to lease a machine, though he feels the number of machines in Taiwan markets has reached saturation point. But for some it's simply about the buzz of playing. Restaurant worker Steven Wu, in his twenties, has just spent six hours playing and admits he has spent "quite a lot". "It's like winning the lottery," he tells AFP. "The thrill when the prize falls into the chute." — AFP



Women playing a claw crane machine in Taipei.



Some claw machines stand in the corner of neighborhood grocery stores, while others sit in rows in brightly lit arcades spread out in residential and entertainment districts alike. A whole culture has built up around the craze—enthusiasts give online tutorials on how to most effectively maneuver the claw while other websites are devoted to swapping toy prizes. For Albee Chou, 34, playing the crane machine in her neighborhood arcade in Taipei is a cheap way to find a gift for her daughter. A skilled player, she quickly picks up a few Hello Kitty storage boxes. "It's actually cheaper than buying from a shop. Plus, it's more fun," said Chou.

### Good investment

The toy claw evolved from "digger" machines in 1930s America. The early versions were purely mechanical in design and picked up candy. A more sophisticated electric version quickly spread to Asia in the late 1970s and



A technician testing a claw crane grabber at a store in the Xizhi district in New Taipei City.



A mother helping her children to operate a claw crane machine in Taipei.



Tourists taking selfies in front of a claw crane store in Taipei.



A customer counting his prizes which he won from a claw crane machine at a store in the Xizhi district in New Taipei City.



Carmen Lopez Garcia, Spain's first blind female surfer who is to participate in the ISA World Adaptive Surfing Championship, poses before training at Salinas beach.



Carmen Lopez Garcia and her coach Lucas Garcia pose for a photo with friends after training at Salinas beach.

## Blind Spanish surfer says sea sets her free, goes for world title

Carmen Lopez can only imagine what the sea looks like, but the blind 21-year-old Spaniard is in her element riding the surf. Guided by instinct and signals whistled by her coach, Lopez has been training hard to become Spain's first blind female athlete to enter the World Adaptive Surfing Championship in La Jolla, California, yesterday. "The sea is where I feel peace and freedom, as if it were where I'm supposed to be," she said sitting on her surfboard after an hour and a half of wave-riding practice in the Bay of Biscay in northern Spain.

"I'm not different from other surfers," said Lopez, who was born with congenital glaucoma and lost her vision completely when she was a child. In its fourth edition, the La Jolla event for surfers with disabilities features its first team competition for visually-impaired female athletes, with Lopez representing Spain. Blind surfers such as Lopez' countryman Aitor Francesena or Brazilian Derek Rabelo have achieved legendary status in the sport, and Lopez, who only took up surfing a few months ago, is aiming high. After the La Jolla tournament, organised by the International Surfing Association (ISA), Lopez aims to compete in the 2024 Paralympic Games in Paris. ISA has been campaigning to make adaptive surfing a Paralympic sport.

Lopez has also practiced figure-skating and horse-riding and her coach and friend Lucas Garcia praised her natural balance and instinct. Garcia, who swims next to Lopez when she surfs, is her 'eyes' when it comes to



telling her about a wave coming up. "A single whistle means the wave is coming on her right side, and a double whistle, on her left side," he said, likening the signals to the way dolphins communicate. Lopez wants to encourage others with disabilities to challenge their limitations, live a full life and perhaps try out radical sports. — Reuters

Carmen Lopez Garcia is watched by her coach Lucas Garcia during training at Salinas beach.

— Reuters photos

# Classifieds

Thursday, December 13, 2018

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DAY: Wednesday 12/12/2018 Valid From 7 PM To 7 AM

### Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

**BY NIGHT:** Cool with light variable wind, with speed of 06 - 20 km/h with a chance for mist forming over some areas.

**BY DAY:** Mostly Sunny with light variable wind to light to moderate south easterly wind, with speed of 06 - 26 km/h.

WEATHER WARNING			No Current Warnings		
STATION	MAX. REC.	MIN. EXP.	SFC. CHART 12/12/2018 1200 UTC		
KUWAIT CITY	23 °C	16 °C			
KUWAIT AIRPORT	22 °C	10 °C			
ABDALY	23 °C	09 °C			
BUBYAN	*** °C	*** °C			
JAHRA	23 °C	12 °C			
FAILAKA ISLAND	22 °C	13 °C			
SALMIYAH	22 °C	17 °C			
AHMADI	21 °C	15 °C			
NUWAISIB	24 °C	13 °C			
WAFRA	23 °C	10 °C			
SALMY	20 °C	10 °C			

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Thursday	12/13	Mostly Sunny	23 °C	10 °C	VRB-SE	06 - 26 km/h
Friday	12/14	Partly cloudy	23 °C	12 °C	VRB-NW	06 - 26 km/h
Saturday	12/15	Mostly Sunny	22 °C	13 °C	NW	12 - 32 km/h
Sunday	12/16	Mostly Sunny	21 °C	12 °C	VRB-NW	06 - 26 km/h

TOMORROW PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:08
Sunrise	06:33
Zuhr	11:42
Asr	14:32
Sunset	16:51
Isha	18:13

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	22 °C
MIN. Temp.	13 °C
MAX. RH	98 %
MIN. RH	39 %
MAX. Wind	N 32 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

All times are local time unless otherwise stated. UP0 2018/12/12 14:19 UTC V1.00 T2.4 ق م 8-1

### CHANGE OF NAME

**I. Roque Pedro Souza**, holder of Indian Passport No: H1831444 and Civil ID no. 256022900498, has changed my name to Roque Souza.

**I, YENAMADALA ANANTHA LAKSHMI S/o. SURI BABU** holder of Indian Passport No. L3848064 & Civil ID No. 263011008467 has changed my name from YENAMADALA ANANTHA LAKSHMI to GADDAM SURYA KUMARI hereinafter in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by name of GADDAM SURYA KUMARI. (C 5436)

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Wataniya Airways	22 066 536
Turkish Airlines	1884918
American Airlines	22087425
	22087426
Jet Airways	22924455
FlyDubai	22414400
Qatar Airways	22423888
KLM	22425747
Royal Jordanian	22418064/5/6
British Airways	22425635
Air France	22430224
Emirates	22921555
Air India	22438184
Sri Lanka Airlines	22424444
Egypt Air	22421578
Swiss Air	22421516
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## Directorate General of Civil Aviation Home Page (www.kuwait-airport.com.kw) DIAL161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Thursday 13/12/2018					Departure Flights on Thursday 13/12/2018				
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time		Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	
JZR	254	Amman	00:05	KNE 231	JZR	602	Riyadh	14:10	UAE 872
JAI	572	Mumbai	00:15	IRA 667	JZR	602	Esfahan	14:10	AXB 394
KAC	503	Beirut	00:45	JZR	602	Baku	14:10	JZR	103
KAC	102	London	00:50	IRA 667	JZR	602	Jeddah	14:15	IAW 158A
THY	772	Istanbul	00:50	JZR	602	Dubai	14:20	IAW 158B	Bahrain
SAI	441	Lahore	00:50	JZR	602	Dubai	14:20	KAC 661	Al Najaf
JZR	734	Cairo	00:50	JZR	602	Dubai	14:20	JZR 1079	Al Najaf
PGT	858	Istanbul	00:55	JZR	602	Bahrain	14:40	KNE 382	Abu Dhabi
DLH	625	Dammam	01:25	JZR	602	Bangkok	15:00	IRA 666	Doha
RJA	642	Amman	01:35	JZR	602	Jeddah	15:05	FDB 060	Taif
UAE	853	Dubai	01:45	JZR	602	Jeddah	15:05	JZR 125	Esfahan
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50	JZR	602	Muscat	15:10	GFA 222	Dubai
IGO	1757	Kochi	01:55	JZR	602	Muscat	15:15	KAC 673	Bahrain
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	JZR	602	Muscat	15:20	FDB 8066	Dubai
JZR	722	Alexandria	02:15	JZR	602	Muscat	15:25	SAI 501	Jeddah
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	JZR	602	Muscat	15:30	KAC 775	Riyadh
KLM	446	Bahrain	02:30	JZR	602	Muscat	15:35	KNE 530	Jeddah
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40	JZR	602	Muscat	15:40	KAC 615	Bahrain
KKK	1268	Istanbul	02:55	JZR	602	Muscat	15:45	KAC 563	Amman
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	JZR	602	Muscat	15:50	KAC 619	Doha
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:05	JZR	602	Muscat	15:55	ETD 304	Abu Dhabi
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15	JZR	602	Muscat	16:00	OMA 646	Muscat
QTR	1076	Doha	04:00	JZR	602	Muscat	16:05	KAC 785	Jeddah
LMU	510	Cairo	04:00	JZR	602	Muscat	16:10	JZR 261	Beirut
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10	JZR	602	Muscat	16:15	ABY 128	Sharjah
KAC	418	Manila	04:25	JZR	602	Muscat	16:20	KNE 532	Jeddah
KAC	784	Jeddah	04:30	JZR	602	Muscat	16:25	SAW 706	Damascus
DHX	170	Bahrain	04:35	JZR	602	Muscat	16:30	KAC 675	Dubai
SGL	9053	Tbilisi	04:40	JZR	602	Muscat	16:35	KAC 691	Muscat
FDB	069	Dubai	05:00	JZR	602	Muscat	16:40	KAC 503	Beirut
KAC	382	Delhi	05:05	JZR	602	Muscat	16:45	FDB 052	Dubai
JZR	404	Hyderabad	05:10	JZR	602	Muscat	16:50	KAC 283	Dhaka
KAC	1544	Cairo	05:10	JZR	602	Muscat	16:55	UAE 858	Dubai
THY	770	Istanbul	05:10	JZR	602	Muscat	17:00	QTR 1073	Doha
JZR	112	Doha	05:25	JZR	602	Muscat	17:05	FEG 242	Alexandria
KAC	332	Trivandrum	05:40	JZR	602	Muscat	17:10	KAC 343	Chennai
KAC	344	Chennai	05:50	JZR	602	Muscat	17:15	KAC 331	Trivandrum
JZR	402	Mumbai	06:05	JZR	602	Muscat	17:20	KAC 343	Cairo
KAC	284	Dhaka	06:10	JZR	602	Muscat	17:25	SVI 511	Riyadh
KAC	362	Colombo	06:10	JZR	602	Muscat	17:30	GFA 216	Bahrain
KAC	302	Mumbai	06:10	JZR	602	Muscat	17:35	KAC 621	Doha
KAC	678	Dubai	06:55	JZR	602	Muscat	17:40	KAC 216	Doha
BAW	157	London	07:05	JZR	602	Muscat	17:45	JZR 403	Hyderabad
JZR	708	Luxor	07:15	JZR	602	Muscat	17:50	JZR 253	Amman
QTR	8511	Doha	07:35	JZR	602	Muscat	17:55	KAC 381	Delhi
KAC	206	Islamabad	07:35	JZR	602	Muscat	18:00	JZR 721	Alexandria
KAC	354	Bengaluru	07:35	JZR	602	Muscat	18:05	FDB 064	Dubai
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50	JZR	602	Muscat	18:10	UAE 876	Dubai
KAC	384	Delhi	08:00	JZR	602	Muscat	18:15	MSR 621	Cairo
KAC	358	Kochi	08:05	JZR	602	Muscat	18:20	QTR 1081	Doha
UAE	855	Dubai	08:35	JZR	602	Muscat	18:25	RIA 641	Amman
MSC	411	Asyut	09:00	JZR	602	Muscat	18:30	RBG 556	Alexandria
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	09:05	JZR	602	Muscat	18:35	ABY 124	Sharjah
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05	JZR	602	Muscat	18:40	GFA 218	Bahrain
QTR	1070	Doha	09:30	JZR	602	Muscat	18:45	NIA 162	Cairo
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	JZR	602	Muscat	18:50	FDB 058	Dubai
IAW	157	Al Najaf	09:55	JZR	602	Muscat	18:55	KNE 232	Riyadh
SAW	703	Damascus	10:30	JZR	602	Muscat	19:00	KAC 301	Mumbai
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	JZR	602	Muscat	19:05	JZR 401	Mumbai
IRA	675	Lar	10:50	JZR	602	Muscat	19:10	KAC 357	Kochi
SYR	341	Damascus	11:00	JZR	602	Muscat	19:15	OMA 648	Muscat
JZR	122	Dubai	11:20	JZR	602	Muscat	19:20	DLH 624	Dammam
QTR	1074	Doha	11:35	JZR	602	Muscat	19:25	DHX 171	Bahrain
JZR	216	Jeddah	11:45	JZR	602	Muscat	19:30	QTR 1089	Doha
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55	JZR	602	Muscat	19:35	ETD 308	Abu Dhabi
KAC	614	Bahrain	12:25	JZR	602	Muscat	19:40	KAC 1543	Cairo
JZR	252	Amman	12:30	JZR	602	Muscat	19:45	KAC 203	Lahore
JZR	714	Sohag	12:35	JZR	602	Muscat	19:50	MEA 403	Beirut
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	JZR	602	Muscat	19:55	ALK 230	Colombo
KAC	742	Dammam	12:50	JZR	602	Muscat	20:00	KAC 383	Delhi
ABY	121	Sharjah	12:55	JZR	602	Muscat	20:05	GFA 220	Bahrain
MSR	610	Cairo	13:10	JZR	602	Muscat	20:10	KLM 445	Bahrain
AXB	393	Kozhikode	13:15	JZR	602	Muscat	20:15	KAC 783	Jeddah
QTR	1078	Doha	13:35	JZR	602	Muscat	20:20	UAE 860	Dubai
IAW	157B	Al Najaf	13:55	JZR	602	Muscat	20:25	MSC 406	Sohag
IAW	157A	Al Najaf	13:55	JZR	602	Muscat	20:30	JAI 573	Mumbai
KAC	774	Riyadh	14:00	JZR	602	Muscat	20:35	ETD 310	Abu Dhabi
KAC	792	Madinah	14:05	JZR	602	Muscat	20:40	RBG 214	Sohag
				JZR	602	Muscat	20:45	QTR 1083	Doha

# Indian voters boot out cow, happiness ministers in polls

**NEW DELHI:** India's only dedicated "cow minister" has been dumped in state elections, ending a controversial tenure that saw hundreds of the sacred animals starve to death and poisoned on his watch. Otarum Dewasi, the first head of Rajasthan's cow ministry, was turfed out Tuesday when the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was thumped in the western desert state and two other key regional polls.

He was not the only noteworthy casualty from India's ruling party, with the country's only "happiness minister" - who stands accused of murder - also tossed aside by voters in central Madhya Pradesh state. Dewasi, the cow minister who in office wore the red turban and white sarong of a desert herdsman, lost by 10,000 votes to an independent candidate.

Hindus consider cows sacred and the BJP, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has campaigned for

their protection at state and national levels, and introduced harsh penalties for mistreating them. But the cause has spawned cow vigilantism in parts of India, with people accused of carrying beef or slaughtering the animals - especially Muslims and low-caste Hindus, who consume beef - murdered by mobs.

Rajasthan, bordering Pakistan, has witnessed some of the most high-profile cow lynchings in recent times, including the brazen beating to death of a Muslim dairy farmer on a busy highway last year. The state created India's first ministry exclusively for cow protection in 2015 when the BJP won elections and appointed Dewasi, a policeman turned politician, to be in charge.

He imposed a 20 percent surcharge on new property purchases - dubbed a "cow tax" - to generate cash to run the 2,300 shelters in his state for abandoned cows. He also branded hundreds of thousands of cows under

his care to stop them being smuggled. But his reputation was marred in 2016 when 500 cows starved to death at a state-run shelter when the facility was flooded during heavy rains.

In August, 28 more died from poisoning, further denting his image as a sacred custodian in a state where cow slaughter comes with 10 years jail. The BJP campaigned for the Rajasthan elections on tougher laws for cow slaughter and more money for shelters - but was defeated by the Congress Party in results announced Tuesday.

## Not so happy

The Congress party led by Rahul Gandhi also beat the BJP in two other key states in India's Hindi-speaking heartland known as the "cow belt" - Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Voters in Madhya Pradesh

booted out Lalsingh Arya, the state minister in charge of India's only "happiness ministry", after a scandal-ridden term. The ministry he helped set up in 2017 was modelled on the "gross national happiness" index used in Bhutan, a tiny Himalayan country, to measure the wellbeing of its citizens.

But weeks after it was inaugurated, Arya was on the run, accused of murdering a political rival in 2009. He was eventually arrested, and his trial is ongoing. He lost by 25,000 votes to a rival from Congress, which seized Madhya Pradesh after 15 years of BJP rule. The electoral defeats are seen as a major blow to Modi's image of invincibility. The BJP had won more than a dozen state elections since Modi soared to power with a thumping majority in 2014. He is seeking a second term as prime minister when the country goes to polls by May 2019. — AFP

## Syrian state seizes opponents' property

**BEIRUT:** Syria's government has been using a little-known anti-terrorism law to seize property from dissidents and their families as it takes back control of areas that were held by rebel groups, rights groups and some of the people affected say. With Syria's conflict stabilised, at least for now, and President Bashar al-Assad back in control of the biggest cities, there is an increasing focus on how he will handle the areas where the 2011 uprising against him flared. International attention has focused on policies, such as legislation known as Law 10, that could eventually enable the government to dispossess people in the opposition strongholds worst damaged in the war. But while Law 10 has not yet been put into effect, the separate anti-terrorism law has already been used to seize property, including from people who had no hand in violence, according to human rights groups.

One man, an architect who joined street protests against Assad early in the uprising, and posted anti-government material online, lost his house, office and farmland in Ghouta in southwestern Syria as well as his car, he said. "I built my house brick by brick. I built it with my bare hands, tended to every corner and to every inch," the architect said. He now lives in the northwestern province of Idlib after fleeing with many other Ghouta residents after its surrender in April.

As they stand to lose property permanently, and because in many cases they have family members still living under government control, none of the six people who spoke to Reuters after being named in seizure orders wanted to be identified. Lists circulating online - which rights groups believe to be accurate - show that hundreds of such orders have been made, affecting potentially thousands of people.

### Seizure

The architect first knew a government security order had targeted him when the Architects and Engineers Syndicate terminated his membership because of a security order and cancelled his pension. He had joined the protests against Assad early on, but said he never took up arms or played a role in local government in his area of eastern Ghouta, which the army recaptured in April. In 2016, he tried to sell his car. "The broker in Damascus told me that a seizure for security had been imposed on all the properties owned by me, my partners, my wife and children," he said via a messaging app.

The family needed money, so he sold the car for parts for 190,000 Syrian pounds - about \$580 at that time. When they left for Idlib along with thousands of others as part of a surrender deal with the government covering eastern Ghouta, the family had to abandon their family home, an office and farm land that is now all forfeit to the

state. "It is hard to describe a house you lived in your whole life and land you planted with trees that you watched grow. I miss the doors, windows and even the doorstep," the architect's son said.

### Uprising

About a year into the uprising, Assad updated Syria's anti-terrorism laws, issuing a decree to give courts the power to impose "security seizure" orders against individuals. Initially, assets are frozen under these orders, preventing owners from selling, or using them commercially. When the seizures are executed, the state will sell the assets by auction. A doctor from the eastern Ghouta town of Douma who left in April and now lives in Turkey said his house, land, clinic and car had been seized. "The Syrian regime has labeled all the opposition activists as terrorists, tried them in absentia and seized their properties," he said.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) said orders to freeze assets were among numerous laws the Syrian government used to punish political dissidents and opponents. Damascus denies targeting peaceful dissidents with its anti-terrorism laws, or unlawfully dispossessing people. The government did not respond to a Reuters request for further comment. HRW said it could not verify lists of people affected by the court orders that are circulating online, or the scale of the property freezes. But it said it had confirmed several cases of people whose names it found on one such list.

Two Syrian rights groups, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and the Syrian Network for Human Rights, said they had verified numerous cases. The network said it had registered at least 327 individuals targeted by property seizures from 2014 to 2018. The observatory said it had registered 93 cases of property seizures targeting opposition activists. It was aware of many other cases, but was not able to verify them because those involved were too scared to speak freely, it said.

### Fear

Those affected, already fearing for their lives if they return after being branded terrorists, also face a loss of property that could discourage family members from going home. "They left the people whose property they seized with nothing to return to, not even hope," said the architect, who now lives in rebel-held Idlib province with his family. Paradoxically, it is often the people who left eastern Ghouta who are in most need of the property they left behind. One man left eastern Ghouta for Idlib and now lives in poverty far from home.

He cannot find work there and wants to pay smugglers to cross the border into Turkey. But his once rich parents, who stayed in eastern Ghouta, cannot raise the money by selling or renting land because their assets have been frozen. They found out about the court order before the government retook eastern Ghouta in April. "My parents are now guests in their own home. The house they have lived in for their whole lives is now put under seizure by the government because we were opposition activists," he said. — Reuters

Jack Ma as Asia's wealthiest man. The respective families will hold several other receptions across India's financial capital in the coming days.

The wedding caps a big month for what social media users have been calling "big fat Indian weddings". The Chopra-Jonas nuptials came shortly after Bollywood stars Deepika Padukone and Ranveer Singh wed. Not everyone is happy though. "Isha Ambani's wedding is a perfect example of the wealth inequality in India," wrote one Twitter user. "Here you have one of the richest families in the nation spending so much while millions still can't even afford food or shelter," she added. "The new standard for lavish Indian wedding is Beyonce. Imagine," tweeted another. — AFP

revenues since crude prices crashed in mid-2014. Oil prices later rebounded after OPEC and non-OPEC producers reduced their production. But they slid again when producers boosted output earlier this year to compensate for expected losses from Iran because of the re-imposition of US sanctions.

Oil prices have lost more than a quarter of their value compared with a four-year peak over \$85 a barrel seen in October, with benchmark Brent crude trading at around \$61 a barrel in London yesterday. World Bank senior vice president Mahmoud Mohieldin warned that economic growth in the GCC region was still dependent on oil price movements. "Now, we are at a time of uncertainty ... Growth in Gulf states is forecast at three percent next year ... but this could be revised," following the drop in oil prices, Mohieldin said. He said that the unemployment rate among Arab youths is 30 percent and higher among females, adding that growth is not producing enough jobs.

OPEC and non-OPEC producers decided last week to cut production by 1.2 million barrels a day from January to shore up prices, which some analysts warned would hit economic growth. "We think that the OPEC deal will have an overall negative impact on GDP (gross domestic product) growth in the Gulf over the coming quarters," London-based consultancy firm Capital Economics said last week.



**RIYADH:** Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir (center) and Yemen's Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammed Hadrami (right) arrive to attend a meeting of foreign ministers of countries from seven Arab and African states yesterday. — AFP

## Saudi Arabia seeks new political bloc in Red Sea region

**RIYADH:** Saudi Arabia is seeking an alliance with six countries bordering the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, a strategic area vital to global shipping and increasingly an arena of contention with regional rivals like Iran, Turkey and Qatar. Representatives from Egypt, Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen and Jordan gathered in Riyadh yesterday to discuss the initiative without reaching final agreement. A team of experts is expected to meet "soon" in Cairo for technical talks.

Eritrea, with Red Sea islands and a mainland coastline of 1,150-km, was not present. Nor was Ethiopia, which has no access to the sea but the largest population in the Horn of Africa. "This is part of the kingdom's efforts to protect its interests and those of its neighbors

and ... to stabilize the region that we live in and to try to create synergies between the various countries..." Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir told reporters after a day of closed-door meetings. "The more cooperation and coordination that you have among the countries of this region, the less negative outside influence will be on this region," he said.

Saudi Arabia and its Gulf ally the United Arab Emirates increasingly view the Horn of Africa coastline as their "western security flank" and fear their adversaries could gain a foothold in the region. The Red Sea also includes the Bab al-Mandeb strait, through which an estimated 3.2 million barrels of oil per day flows towards Europe, the United States and Asia. In recent years the waterway has been targeted by pirates and Houthi fighters from Yemen.

Jubeir said the meeting also discussed boosting trade and conserving the environment. As part of a push to diversify its economy away from oil, Saudi Arabia has announced several mega-projects along the Red Sea, including a \$500 billion business zone shared with Egypt and Jordan as well as a luxury tourism destination. — AFP

## French police hunt gunman;...

Continued from Page 1

HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables.

Police identified the suspect as Strasbourg-born Cherif Chekatt, 29, who is on an intelligence services watch list as a potential security risk. An investigation had been opened into alleged murder with terrorist intent and suspected ties to terrorist networks with intent to commit crimes, Heitz said. Two people were killed and a third person was brain-dead and being kept alive on life support, he said. Six other victims were fighting for their lives.

France raised its security threat to the highest alert level, strengthening controls on its border with Germany as elite commandos backed by helicopters hunted for the suspect. French and German agents checked vehicles and public transport crossing the Rhine river, along which the Franco-German frontier runs, backing up traffic in both directions. Hundreds of French troops and police were taking part in the manhunt. Deputy Interior Minister Laurent Nunez said he could not rule out that the fugitive had already crossed the border.

## Thriving black market to buy ...

Continued from Page 1

The sources underscored that during a meeting with CSC, education ministry officials had warned that the decisions would be a golden opportunity for visa traffickers at private schools and institutes, as well as affect local recruitment. "The education ministry also warned that many expats with accredited educational degrees and enough experience arrive in Kuwait using other types of visas, but the CSC did not pay heed", the sources added.

The sources expressed displeasure with the recent

Sylvaine Jardin, director of the Porcus charcuterie, just meters from where the shooting took place struggled to hold back tears saying she needed to work to not think about what had happened. "We can't let ourselves be submerged by fear, but we'll feel better when he is caught," she said, adding that traders had last year been given training and advice in preparation for a possible attack.

The gunman struck at about 1900 GMT on Tuesday, just as the picturesque Christmas market in the historic city was shutting down. He engaged in two gunfights with security forces as he evaded a police dragnet and bragged about his acts to the driver of a taxi that he commandeered, prosecutor Heitz said. No one has yet claimed responsibility, but the US-based Site intelligence group, which monitors jihadist websites, said Islamic State supporters were celebrating.

French and German security officials painted a portrait of Chekatt as a serial law-breaker who had racked up more than two dozen convictions in France, Germany and Switzerland, and served time in prison. "It was during these spells in jail that we detected a radicalization in his religious practices. But we there were never signs he was preparing an attack," Minister Nunez said.

One German security source said the suspect was jailed in southern Germany from Aug 2016 to Feb 2017 for aggravated theft but was released before the end of his 27-month sentence so that he could be deported to France. "He was banned from re-entering Germany at the same time", the security source in the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg said. "We don't have any knowledge of any kind of radicalization." — Reuters

CSC decisions, noting that they will have a short-term negative impact on the educational process, adding that CSC had, over the past few days, rejected the recruitment of scores of teachers who had met all recruitment conditions and passed the necessary job interviews, passed all medical tests, completed all formal procedures such as fingerprint tests and resigned from their earlier jobs, only because they have other job titles in their work permits. "Other teachers' contracts have been terminated after they were actually assigned to designated schools and officially started work. Who will make it up for the injustice of getting terminated only a few days after recruitment and resigning from previous jobs?" the sources demanded, warning that the education ministry will face a critical shortage of teachers next year, namely in subjects where Kuwaiti teachers are few, taking into consideration it costs the ministry considerable amounts of money to recruit teachers in these subjects from abroad. — Al-Qabas

## Beyonce, Bollywood and Hillary ...

Continued from Page 1

Ambani, 27 and Piramal, 33 got engaged at Lake Como in Italy in September and the high-profile wedding brings together two of India's biggest industrialist families. Mukesh Ambani is the chairman of oil-to-telecoms conglomerate Reliance Industries. He is worth more than \$47 billion and recently overtook China's

## Assembly orders probe into ...

Continued from Page 1

Signs of an "economic war" between the United States and China, the world's largest economies, and an expected global economic slowdown starting next year will dampen demand for oil, the experts told a conference in Dubai.

"Oil prices will remain low for a long period," former Lebanese minister of economy and trade Nasser Saidi told the one-day Arab Strategy Forum. A cooling of the global economy will reduce demand for oil, which coupled with rising competition from renewable energy sources and shale crude will lead to low oil prices, said Saidi, who is now a consultant. "This will negatively impact growth in the whole (Arab) region ... The whole area will face a financial and economic crisis," he said.

The six member nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) earn more than 80 percent of their revenues from energy. The GCC states - Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates - have lost hundreds of billions of dollars in oil



## Sports

# Broncos, Browns on playoff fringe ahead of matchup

## NFL hikes salary cap to \$190 million in 2019

**DENVER:** The Denver Broncos were high on quarterback Baker Mayfield long before he was selected first overall in the NFL draft in April. They hope to keep him from beating them on Saturday night.

Mayfield, the brash, outspoken Cleveland Browns rookie, visits Denver for a Week 15 showdown with both teams clinging to slim postseason hopes. The Browns (5-7-1) are having their best season in years and are coming off a 26-20 win over Carolina.

The Broncos (6-7) had their three-game winning streak ended at San Francisco on Sunday in a game they desperately needed. Denver was feeling good after getting back to .500 and into the thick of the wild-card race, but as has been the case this season, it struggled against a young quarterback.

The Broncos have lost to rookies Sam Darnold (New York Jets) and Nick Mullens (49ers) and twice to second-year star Patrick Mahomes (Kansas City Chiefs). They did they beat Josh Rosen of the Arizona Cardinals and Jeff Driskel of the Cincinnati Bengals, and they have another chance against Mayfield on Saturday.

"He's got a neat personality," Denver coach Vance Joseph said after practice Tuesday. "It's kind of a-it's loose, but it's tight. Very, very intelligent, but a very, very confident person." Mayfield could find success against a banged-up secondary that will be without Pro Bowl cornerback Chris Harris Jr., who sustained a fractured left fibula against the Bengals on Dec. 2. Harris said he is improving, but he won't be ready for Saturday.

Without him, and with the status of Tramaine Brock (ribs) and Isaac Yiadom (separated right shoulder) in question, Denver is vulnerable on the back end. The Broncos signed rookie safety Trey Marshall off the practice squad Tuesday to add to their depth.

The Browns have the weapons to take advantage,

with Mayfield showing plenty of poise and wide receiver Jarvis Landry running routes. They can mix things up with running back Nick Chubb.

The biggest turnaround for Cleveland has come after the firings of head coach Hue Jackson and offensive coordinator Todd Haley. Gregg Williams is now the interim head coach, and Freddie Kitchens was promoted to offensive coordinator.

With Kitchens calling plays, Mayfield has thrown 11 touchdown passes in five games, and his passer rating is 114.4 compared to from 78.9 under Haley. With the short week, both teams practiced Tuesday instead of having a regular day off. For Denver, linebacker Shaquil Barrett (hip), Harris, wide receiver Courtland Sutton (quadriceps), Yiadom and defensive tackle Derek Wolfe (concussion) did not practice.

Joseph said Sutton should play Saturday but didn't have an update on Wolfe, Tight end Orson Charles (ankle), tackle Austin Corbett (foot), defensive tackle Larry Ogunjobi (biceps), cornerback Denzel Ward (concussion) and center JC Tretter (ankle) did not practice for Cleveland. Tretter has been dealing with the ankle injury for two months but has battled through the past seven games. He is normally held out of practice to stay ready for games.

"From a guy who barely practices all week to have the game plan down and then fight through it on Sundays for everybody else, it is great to have," Mayfield told the Cleveland Plain Dealer after the Sunday game. "He is a very, very important piece out there to have to be able to make calls and direct guys the right way and lead."

Meanwhile, the NFL announced Tuesday that the salary cap will rise to about \$190 million in 2019, a jump from \$177.2 million this season. The league informed teams that the projected range is from \$187



Baker Mayfield

million to \$191.1 million.

That marks a 40-percent increase since the 2014 season (\$133.0 million) and the sixth consecutive year the cap has climbed by at least \$10 million. "Total pro-

jected player costs, including benefits, will be more than \$7.3 billion in 2019," the league said in a statement. The exact salary cap figure will be determined before free agency opens on March 13. — Reuters

## Under-fire Cheika 'has to go', says Wallabies Burke

**SYDNEY:** Wallabies legend Matt Burke has urged Rugby Australia to axe Michael Cheika along with his coaching staff after a review was announced into their positions less than a year before the World Cup.

The two-time world champions have won just four Tests this year and slipped to sixth in the world rankings, heaping pressure on Cheika as a sense of turmoil engulfs the national side. Burke said the Wallabies needed change "from the top down", calling for Cheika and his assistants, Stephen Larkham and Nathan Grey, to go.

"Michael Cheika after that (season) has to go" Burke, who played 81 Tests for Australia and was a World Cup winner in 1999, told Big Sports Breakfast radio. "There has to be a change. I don't think just getting rid of the assistant coaches will be enough," he added.

Despite club success at Leinster and the NSW Waratahs, Cheika has struggled to stamp his authority

on a Wallabies side that is replete with world-class players, but has consistently underperformed of late.

"I think they have to change it from the top down. Getting rid of the assistant coaches won't be enough because it's still the same voice," said Burke. "At the moment it's untenable when you're looking at the situation from the coaches and then the high performance managers and the rest of it."

Rugby Australia has promised a decision on Cheika and his coaching staff "ahead of Christmas". Cheika's contract is due to run out in a year and he had previously received the backing of Rugby Australia chief executive Raelene Castle to take the Wallabies to the World Cup in Japan.

However, three defeats out of four on their northern hemisphere tour renewed the pressure on Cheika, who took the Wallabies to the last World Cup final in 2015.

Meanwhile, New Zealand three-quarter Ben Smith will join Pau after next year's Rugby World Cup, the club's president told French broadcaster RMC Sport on Tuesday. Smith lifted the Webb Ellis trophy in 2015 and the 32-year-old has featured on 76 occasions for his country, scoring 33 tries since making his international debut in 2009.

He will move to an unnamed Japanese club after finishing the 2020 Top 14 season and will be unable to feature for his national side while playing outside of New Zealand.



Michael Cheika

"It's a great satisfaction. He will have an impact on the squad and considering his calibre it will allow him to help our youngsters," Bernard Pontneau said. On the other hand, New Zealand back-rower Ardie Savea will not join the club who sit in 11th place in the table, despite originally agreeing a three-year deal in the autumn.

The 36-time All Black has decided to re-sign with the New Zealand Rugby Union. His brother Julian plays for Toulon in the France's top tier. — AFP

## Chiefs can lock up West with win over Chargers

**KANSAS CITY:** An unexpected toss with his left hand, a no-look pass to a crossing receiver and-most importantly-a run toward home-field advantage in the AFC playoffs. All that and so much more has defined record-setting Patrick Mahomes as a first-year starter in the NFL this season. Yet the Kansas City Chiefs quarterback must be on top of his game again Thursday night when the streaking Los Angeles Chargers look to tighten the AFC West division race.

Kansas City (11-2) last weekend qualified for the playoffs for the fifth time under sixth-year coach Andy Reid, using a madcap rally Mahomes engineered Sunday to hold off the Baltimore Ravens 27-24 in overtime. But after burning the NFL's top defense entering the game for 377 yards passing and two touchdowns, the no-look pass was all the rage.

Hey, it's always something radical with Mahomes. "I worked with him real hard on that. I built that right into the offense," Reid cracked. "He has a knack for that. He is comfortable doing it. This is the NFL and he is doing it. That's something to do it in practice, but when you start throwing it in a game against the No. 1 defense in the National Football League, that is a little different."

Confidence oozes from Mahomes, whose plus-32 touchdown-to-interception mark leads the NFL, as do his 43 touchdown passes and 45 completions of 25-plus yards. The Chiefs average 437.5 yards and 36.2 points per game, along with 6.86 yards per play, all of which lead the league.

"I have built that chemistry with guys like D-Rob," Mahomes said of Demarcus Robinson, recipient of the no-look pass, "through training camp and through last year. I know that the guys are going to know what I'm thinking and trust that they are going to keep running the route the same way. Then, I put the ball out there for them."

Los Angeles (10-3) will counter with pressure off both edges from defensive ends Melvin Ingram and Joey Bosa. Bosa was injured and missed the first matchup, a 38-28 Week 1 win for the Chiefs to account for Kansas City's one-game lead over the Chargers.

Los Angeles has won nine of its last 10 games, including three straight. Its only road defeat was against the crosstown Rams. Kansas City, however, has won 20 of its last 21 against AFC West rivals and is looking to secure a third consecutive division title. A better divisional record gives the Chiefs the tiebreaker over the Chargers should Los Angeles win Thursday.

Veteran quarterback Philip Rivers is having an exceptional season for the Chargers but may need to come up even bigger against the Chiefs. Running backs Melvin Gordon (knee) and Austin Ekeler (neck) are dealing with injuries. Two rookies who have combined for 32 carries, Justin Jackson and Detrez Newsome, are next in line.

"It's important to just get back to being healthy," said Michael Badgley, a rookie kicker who set a Chargers record with a 59-yard field goal while going 4-for-4 Sunday in a win over Cincinnati. "Get back in there, go through all of our recovery, and it will be a short week, so a big mental week." The Chiefs also must deal with injuries to offensive threats.

Speedy receiver Tyreek Hill limped through a heel injury against the Ravens but is expected to be available. Another receiver, Sammy Watkins (foot) is likely out. Running back Spencer Ware (shoulder) is also hobbled. — Reuters

## Triumph and controversy, Team Sky's era of domination

**LONDON:** When Team Sky launched in London in 2010 with the ambition of having a British winner of the Tour de France within five years, there was more than a modicum of scepticism at the undoubtedly flashy new boys in the peloton.

Not that there was inexperience as British Cycling's Dave Brailsford was installed as team principal and brought with him the "marginal gains" strategy that would underpin the team's successes and controversies over almost a decade of extraordinary success.

Six out of seven Tour de France titles, three of which were won by different riders, and Chris Froome holding all three major tour titles at once would be impressive enough in isolation but, coming after more than 100 years of Britain failing to get a man on the Tour podium, the success and the speed with which it was achieved were nothing short of astonishing.

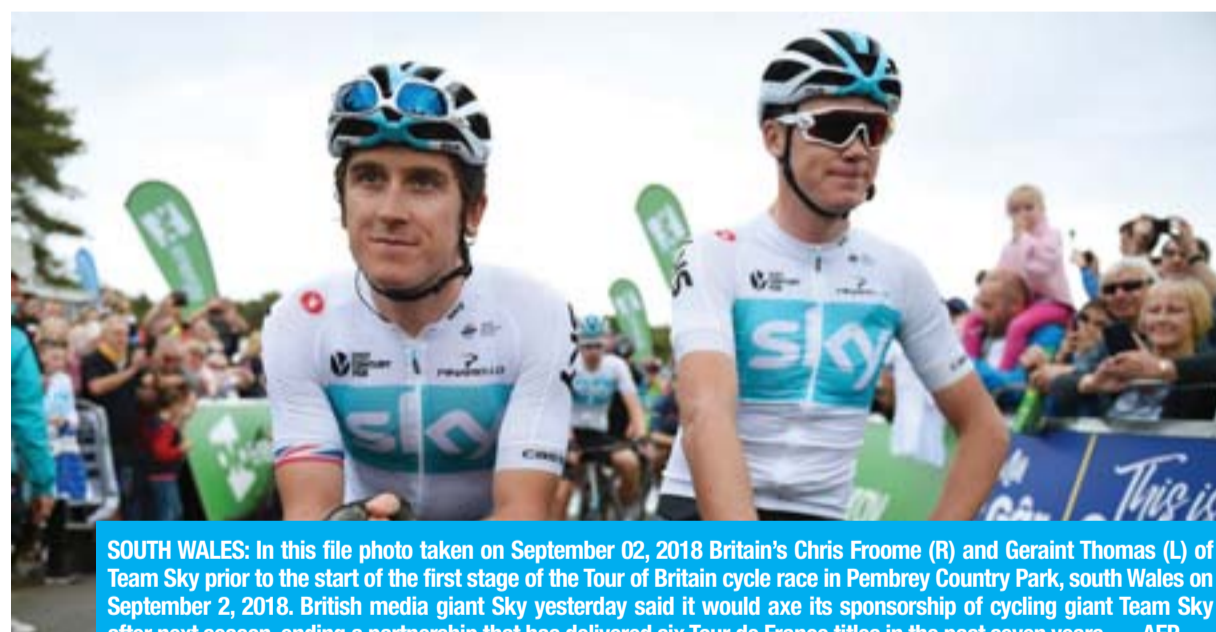
The broadcaster, which has announced it will end its association with the team next year, had already enjoyed a fruitful partnership with the national cycling federation and, with Brailsford's persuasion, a team was built to nurture young British talent and win cycling's biggest prizes.

At the time, reports said the investment was worth 30 million pounds (\$37.6 million) over four years but by 2017 their budget for that year alone was 31.1 million pounds.

Such figures dwarfed anything the rest of the peloton could muster and soon led to a seething undercurrent of animosity. Bradley Wiggins finished 24th in Team Sky's tentative debut at the Tour de France in 2010 and two years later became the first British winner of cycling's most prestigious event.

With Wiggins also leading British domination of the cycling programme at the 2012 London Olympics, Brailsford was the toast of the sporting world.

"The whole principle came from the idea that if you broke down everything you could think of that goes into riding a bike, and then improved it by one percent, you will get a significant increase when you put them all together," Brailsford said that year, expanding on his marginal gains philosophy. At a time when trust in cycling was at an all-time low on the back of Lance Armstrong and relentless



**SOUTH WALES:** In this file photo taken on September 02, 2018 Britain's Chris Froome (R) and Geraint Thomas (L) of Team Sky prior to the start of the first stage of the Tour of Britain cycle race in Pembrey Country Park, south Wales on September 2, 2018. British media giant Sky yesterday said it would axe its sponsorship of cycling giant Team Sky after next season, ending a partnership that has delivered six Tour de France titles in the past seven years. — AFP

doping revelations, Sky seemed a shining beacon for their focus on technical improvements and their insistence on 'winning clean'. But soon the halo began to slip. The team struggled to explain the delivery of a mystery "jiffy bag" for Wiggins at the 2011 Criterium du Dauphine race in France and Brailsford's belated claim that it was a 'flu treatment that needed to come from England did not convince many onlookers. A 14-month U.K. Anti-Doping investigation into its contents eventually hit a dead end due to a lack of accurate medical records being available. In March this year, a damning report by the British government's Digital Culture Media and Sport select committee said that the team had cynically abused the anti-doping system by using therapeutic-use exemption certificates.

### PR DAMAGE

Froome won the Tour in 2013 and would go on to win another three but he too came under the microscope for an adverse analytical finding for asthma drug salbutamol. He was later cleared of any wrongdoing by the governing UCI, but the PR damage had been done.

Despite winning the Giro d'Italia, again another milestone for a British rider, Froome endured his worst reception in France, being jostled and spat at on this year's Tour as critics accused Sky of crossing the ethical line.

Geraint Thomas won his maiden title in the race to give the team a timely boost, considering the Welshman's lack of connection to any controversies.

By then it was clear what a force the Sky machine had become from that flashy but nervous launch in London in 2010, with its huge entourage, clad in black-and-blue, leading the way wherever they went. Even their buses went out in front.

There was no doubting who Wiggins was referring to at his own team's season launch earlier this year. "We want to be a team who engages with the public, not hidden in a big, black bus behind screens," he said, after even he fell out with his former employers.

It was changes further up the food chain that probably spelled out the end of Sky's association as last year James Murdoch resigned as Sky plc chairman following the majority-control takeover by U.S. cable group Comcast Corp. Murdoch had been the main driver of Sky's involvement in cycling. He was a keen fan of the sport and the push to make the team the best in the world had not been simply a business decision but one of personal passion, too. With Murdoch gone, so too it seems is the passion as Sky pursues other aspects of its business.

As far as shaking up the world of cycling and putting British riders to the fore, the sponsorship has undoubtedly been a spectacular success.

The team hopes to continue beyond next year but any potential new backer is highly unlikely to be able to match Sky's investment levels, suggesting that the end of one of the most dominant eras in the history of the sport is about to draw to a close. — Reuters

## Sports

# India quicks getting the thoroughbred treatment

## Kohli engineered Kumble's exit, leaked email suggests

**MELBOURNE:** India are treating their pace bowlers like prize-winning thoroughbreds after the series-opening win over Australia in Adelaide while cautioning them against straining too hard at the reins when the second match gets underway in Perth.

Ishant Sharma, Mohammed Shami and Jasprit Bumrah took 14 of 20 wickets at Adelaide Oval in a fine debut as a pace trio on Australian soil that helped fire the tourists to a 31-run win on Monday.

Former England captain Michael Vaughan wrote on Twitter that India skipper Virat Kohli and actress wife Anushka Sharma had given up their business class seats to two of the quicks for the 3.5 hour flight from Adelaide to Perth on Tuesday.

India coach Ravi Shastri said all three were being spared net duties on Tuesday in a bid to freshen up before day one of the second Test starting at Perth Stadium tomorrow. "I think fast bowlers are a precious commodity and they need to be taken care of like what you do with a racehorse," India bowling coach Bharat Arun told reporters in Perth yesterday.

### "And that's exactly what's happening."

Friday's test will be the first played at the new Perth Stadium, which has a drop-in pitch and succeeded the WACA as the city's premier venue for internationals. Perth Stadium curator Brett Siphthorpe is keen to produce a fast, bouncy wicket that would not be out of place at the WACA.

Arun said India's bowlers would welcome that prospect following the relatively unhelpful track served up at Adelaide. "Definitely with a little help from the wicket, obviously the bowlers would love that sort of a wicket," he said.

"Again, whatever is in the offing, we are happy with it." However, he said he would urge his bowlers to stick to the same recipe that brought success in Adelaide-

consistency and sustained pressure.

"You can be carried away with the extra pace and bounce but again you need to understand that on any responsive track, what is really going to be successful is your consistency," he said.

"And that's exactly what we're going to work with the bowlers." While the quicks were akin to racehorses, Arun likened spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, who took six wickets and bowled a huge load at Adelaide, to a fine wine. "Spinners mature a lot with age, maybe they're like wine," he said. "He helped us gain control. He gave us the control, bowling close to 90 overs for 147 runs and six wickets, you can't ask for better."

Meanwhile, the acrimonious exit of India's cricket coach last year was given a fresh twist yesterday as a leaked email suggested captain Virat Kohli had "frequently" worked behind the scenes against him.

Former coach Anil Kumble quit over a rift with Kohli in June 2017, saying his relationship with the skipper was "untenable". The Board of Control for Cricket in India has denied any division in the Indian camp.

But in a leaked email seen by AFP, a senior BCCI official wrote to board administrator Vinod Rai that Kohli "frequently sent SMSs to the CEO on which you acted and there was a change in the coach".

"Mr Kumble a legend in his own right was subjected to loss of face and made to look like a villain," added senior administrator Diana Edulji. "He was gracious enough to move on for which I respect him. There also, rules were broken and I had raised objections back then." Edulji's email originated from a separate controversy in the women's national team, where former coach Ramesh Powar fell out with one-day captain Mithali Raj. As men's national team coach, Kumble helped India reclaim the number-one Test ranking and maintained an unblemished record in five Test series.

But he resigned after his one-year term ended with a



**PERTH:** India's cricket captain Virat Kohli (R) shares a lighter moment with teammate Rishabh Pant (L) during a training session in Perth yesterday. India take on Australia in the second cricket Test match starting tomorrow in Perth. — AFP

humiliating defeat to Pakistan in the 50-over Champions Trophy in June 2017, prompting a fallout with Kohli who reportedly didn't like the coach's training techniques.

He was replaced by Ravi Shastri. Shastri was always

the frontrunner for the job with pundits pointing to his time as India's team director from 2014-16 and warm relationship with Kohli. Kohli, currently on tour in Australia, was yet to comment publicly on the leaked email. — AFP

## Presidents Cup shows golf yet to become truly global sport

**NEW YORK:** A quarter century after the Presidents Cup began with high hopes that it would one day rival the Ryder Cup as golf's premier team event, it remains a relative minnow on the global calendar after a series of one-sided American victories.

Created by the US-based PGA Tour, the Presidents Cup largely copied the Ryder Cup format. Yet instead of the US playing Europe, the Americans were pitted against an International team comprised of players from the rest of the world.

The 13th staging of the biennial event will be held at Royal Melbourne starting exactly a year today and a glance at the respective world rankings of the likely players suggests that the Americans are poised to continue their dominance.

"I fear for the immediate future of the Presidents Cup," New Zealander Frank Nobilo, who played on the first three International teams, told Reuters. The Americans have lost just once, at Royal Melbourne in 1998, while the 2003 event in South Africa was drawn.

That makes it seven losses in a row for the Internationals, who for the most part have been outclassed by the US juggernaut. The inaugural International team in 1994 was comprised largely of players from Australia and southern Africa.

There was, however, an expectation that over time golf would become more global, which would gradually improve the depth of the International team as more players emerged from various corners of the world.

That has not panned out. Moreover, Australia and South Africa have regressed, no longer turning out the large production line of world-class players of previous decades.

Zimbabwean Nick Price and Australian Greg Norman were ranked first and second in the world at the end of 1994, while there were five other International players in the top 20.

The current world rankings are dominated by Americans and Europeans. There are no Internationals in the top 10 and only two in the top 20 as of Dec. 2 — Australians Jason Day (13th) and Marc Leishman (19th).

The US has 12 players ranked in the top 18, hardly a comforting thought for International captain Ernie Els. The emergence of Thailand's Kiradech Aphibarnrat and China's Li Haotong as world class players is a promising sign, and Japan and South Korea sporadically produce an occasional top player, but a steady production line of Asian talent has not yet materialised.

### SIGNS OF HOPE

The cupboard is even barer in South America, with only Argentine Emiliano Grillo in the top 100, though hopes are high that 20-year-old Chilean Joaquin Niemann, a former world amateur number one, will prove to be the real deal.

South Africa aside, golf remains inaccessible to most people in the rest of Africa. It is not all doom and gloom though. Some experts see signs of hope in Asia at long last. "China despite its aversion to golf has benefited by golf being in the Olympics so their golf programs are continuing and they are recruiting coaches from Down Under and it's helping," said Nobilo, who visits the region regularly in his role as a Golf Channel analyst. — Reuters

## ICC boss 'confident' of corruption-free World Cup

**NEW DELHI:** The head of cricket's world body said yesterday he is confident of a corruption-free 2019 World Cup as the sport works overtime to disrupt criminals who attempt to fix matches. David Richardson, chief executive of the International Cricket Council, also called on national governments to do more to tackle match fixing, which has affected lucrative Twenty20 leagues as well as international matches.

The ICC anti-corruption unit "is trying to be much more proactive in first of all disrupting these criminals who are travelling the world trying to corrupt the game," said Richardson.

"Working hand in hand with the law enforcement agencies will help us do that. So (we are) very confident that we will keep the World Cup corruption free," Richardson told reporters at a promotional event in New Delhi.

He added: "We are persuading governments to introduce legislation that can make attempts to fix cricket matches a criminal offence and put these people behind bars." Richardson said there are currently investigations ongoing into corruption and match fixing.

Sri Lanka bowling coach Nuwan Zoysa was the latest to face suspension in October over accusations of match fixing. Former Sri Lankan opener and ex-selector Sanath Jayasuriya was also charged for failing to cooperate with a match-fixing probe and concealing information in October.

The 2019 World Cup is due to take place in England and Wales from May to July. The 59-year-old Richardson, who is a former South Africa wicketkeeper, also reiterated ICC's interest in taking cricket to the Olympics.

The vast majority of ICC members are keen to have the sport at the quadrennial event, but the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has its reservations. "We have got an ambition to have cricket in the Olympics in 2028. That's easier said than done. We need to convince the International Olympic Committee to have cricket," said Richardson.

"103 out of 104 members are strongly behind that decision to get cricket in the Olympics. There are some issues that BCCI has with the Indian Olympic



**David Richardson**

Association but I am very confident that those issues can be resolved."

The only time cricket has ever featured at the Olympics was in 1900, with just two men's teams competing. Great Britain won gold with hosts France taking silver. — AFP



**Glenn Maxwell**

## Maxwell says to spurn IPL in pursuit of test berth

**MELBOURNE:** All-rounder Glenn Maxwell has said he will turn his back on the lucrative Indian Premier League next year and play a full season of English county cricket in a bid to regain his spot in the Australian test side.

The hard-hitting 30-year-old played the last of his seven Tests against Bangladesh in September 2017 and missed out on a spot in the squad for the ongoing four-match series against India. Maxwell will join up

with former Australia Test opener Joe Burns and his former World Cup-winning team mate James Faulkner at Lancashire, and play all three formats with the county side.

"This is a pretty clear sign I still want to play Test cricket," Maxwell told Melbourne's Herald Sun newspaper yesterday. "To knock back a chance to play IPL was a big decision, and a tough decision. It's not something you make lightly, but the thought of playing Test cricket again still burns deep."

"I desperately want to get back out there and I still think I have a lot to offer the Australian Test team." Maxwell has reaped millions of dollars playing in the IPL but had a poor tournament with Delhi Daredevils this year and was released by the franchise last month.

He was controversially overlooked for the tour squad to play Pakistan in United Arab Emirates in October, beaten out by four uncapped players. Tim Paine's Australia are 1-0 down in the four-test series against India after losing by 31 runs in Adelaide on Monday. The second Test starts in Perth tomorrow. — Reuters

## Langer ready for pacey track in second India Test

**PERTH:** Australia coach Justin Langer said yesterday he expected a pacey wicket at the new Perth Stadium for the second Test against India and declared "pretty boy" captain Tim Paine "ready to go" despite injury.

Australia are looking to avenge a 31-run defeat in Adelaide to level the four-Test series but Langer admitted there was some uncertainty over the surface in Perth.

The Test will be the first played at the new stadium and Langer said it appeared the wicket was similar to the fast track which made its predecessor, the WACA, a haven for pace bowlers.

"I'm really fascinated and can't wait to see what the wicket brings," he told reporters. "There's only been one four-day game in its history."

"I went and watched a bit of the NSW versus WA game—there was certainly some pace and bounce there. We've also seen some pace and bounce in it during the one-dayers and T20 game."

But he said neither team would know how the drop-in pitch plays in Test conditions until the match begins tomorrow. "Time will tell what the wicket brings... If we can get (WACA-style pace and bounce) it'd be a great thing for Test cricket," Langer said.

Langer also scoffed at suggestions skipper Paine could miss the Test after a delivery in Adelaide smashed into a right finger that has required several operations in the past.

"Paine is the toughest pretty boy I've seen in my life," he said. "Even if it was snapped in about four places he'd still be right. He's absolutely fine. He's obviously had issues with it before but he's 100 percent ready to go."

India's win was their first in Australia in a decade, and their first ever in the opening Test as they search for a maiden series win Down Under. — AFP

Sports

# Salah's first-half goal sends Liverpool into last 16

## Tottenham survive Barca struggle to keep stadium dream alive

**PARIS:** Mohamed Salah's first-half goal and a stunning late save from goalkeeper Alisson saw Liverpool edge into the Champions League knockout stage after a tense 1-0 win over Napoli on Tuesday, while Lucas Moura's late strike saw Tottenham progress with a draw at Barcelona.

Last year's runners-up Liverpool knew victory by two goals or a 1-0 triumph would put them through to the last 16 from Group C, and Salah's cool 34th-minute strike proved enough as they finished ahead of Napoli on goals scored.

"Wow, what a game. I am not sure a manager could be prouder of a team than I am," Reds boss Jurgen Klopp told BT Sport. Paris Saint-Germain reached the knockout rounds as group winners thanks to a 4-1 victory over Red Star Belgrade, with Neymar, Kylian Mbappe and Edinson Cavani all on the scoresheet.

Liverpool grabbed the crucial goal at a raucous Anfield, as Salah jinked past Kalidou Koulibaly inside the area and slotted the ball beyond goalkeeper David Ospina. Salah, who had already wasted an earlier chance with a heavy touch, continued to run Napoli ragged early in the second half, but Ospina saved from Jordan Henderson and James Milner curled wide as Carlo Ancelotti's men stayed a goal from turning the group on its head.

The atmosphere around Anfield became increasingly tense as the Premier League leaders continued to miss opportunities, with Ospina springing to his left to tip away Salah's attempted lob before denying Mane from point-blank range.

Senegal forward Mane was guilty of two further snatched efforts in front of goal, and Napoli almost made the Reds pay in the dying moments. The ball fell for substitute striker Arkadiusz Milik unmarked in the area, but Alisson raced from his line to keep out the Pole's strike with his legs.

"I have no idea how Alisson made a save like

this," gushed Klopp. "It was amazing." PSG went into their match in Belgrade knowing that victory would send them through, and Edinson Cavani gave the French champions the perfect start by tapping in after an excellent run and pass by Kylian Mbappe.

Neymar's strike five minutes before half-time appeared to have put the game to bed, but Red Star, who had already beaten Liverpool and held Napoli in Serbia earlier in the campaign, pulled one back before the hour mark through Marko Gobeljic.

But PSG finally sealed their spot in the last 16 as Marquinhos headed in Angel Di Maria's free-kick with 16 minutes to go and Mbappe added further gloss to the scoreline in added time. "We made mistakes, but I really liked the reaction after Belgrade's goal. We controlled the match," PSG coach Thomas Tuchel told RMC Sport.

Spurs went into their final Group B game at the Camp Nou needing to match Inter Milan's result against PSV Eindhoven in Italy, but Mauricio Pochettino's side fell behind in only the seventh minute as Ousmane Dembele scored a wonderful individual goal.

Hirving Lozano gave PSV a shock early advantage at the San Siro, though, to leave Tottenham heading through as it stood.

The English club had plenty of half-chances against a much-changed Barca, who had already won the group, but Philippe Coutinho almost made it 2-0 when his low shot struck the post.

Mauro Icardi levelled for Inter against PSV with 17 minutes left to leave Spurs needing to score at least once. Tottenham, who were facing an early elimination when trailing PSV in their fourth group match before rallying to win and then beating Inter, continued to push and Moura met Harry Kane's low cross in the 85th minute to cap a dramatic group-stage revival.



**LIVERPOOL:** Liverpool's Brazilian goalkeeper Alisson Becker (2R) saves a shot from Napoli's Polish striker Arkadiusz Milik (L) during the UEFA Champions League group C football match between Liverpool and Napoli at Anfield stadium in Liverpool. — AFP

"I always believed it was possible to win the game," Spurs manager Pochettino told BT Sport. "We fully deserved to go through with Barcelona. We were the best (two) teams in a difficult group."

Borussia Dortmund snatched top spot in Group A with a 2-0 win over rock-bottom Monaco, as Atletico Madrid were held to a goalless draw at Club Brugge.

Raphael Guerreiro tapped in Maximilian

Philipp's low cross in the 15th minute against Thierry Henry's crisis-hit Monaco, before slamming in a second late on. "It's a perfect evening. On the whole it was a deserved victory," said Dortmund coach Lucien Favre.

Earlier on Tuesday in Group D, Galatasaray secured a Europa League last-32 place despite losing 3-2 to Porto in an entertaining game which saw two of three penalties scored. 00 — AFP

## Inter Milan out of Champions League after PSV stalemate

**MILAN:** Inter Milan crashed out of the Champions League on Tuesday after being held 1-1 by PSV Eindhoven at the San Siro as Group B rivals Tottenham Hotspur gained a point against Barcelona.

The Serie A side needed to better Spurs' result at the Camp Nou in order to overtake the Premier League outfit and snatch a place in the knockout rounds. Luciano Spalletti's side thought they had done enough in the 73rd minute when captain Mauro Icardi marked his 200th game for the club by equalising Hirving Lozano's 13th-minute opener, with Spurs a goal down in Catalonia.

However Lucas Moura levelled at 1-1 for Tottenham, enabling his team to advance to the last 16 thanks to the away goal they scored in their 2-1 defeat at the San Siro. Inter lost 1-0 at Tottenham last time out, meaning Spurs go through in second place with a superior head-to-head record.

"We got nervous, lost too many balls, created disorder at the tactical level and tension set in," said Inter coach Luciano Spalletti of the former three-time win-

ners. "We had the match we needed but didn't capitalise on the chances we had."

"As the anxiety grows, you lose sight of how to control the game." "We could have remained more balanced and instead we let ourselves be carried away by tensions, by the public mood," he added, as the goals from the Tottenham v Barcelona game were broadcast in the stadium. "How do you hide the result of your opponents? The public cheer."

The hosts, who lifted the title in 2010 with Jose Mourinho and were returning to the competition for the first time since 2012, got off to a good start against already-eliminated PSV, coached by former AC Milan midfielder Mark van Bommel.

Icardi sent in a long ball five minutes into the game which Ivan Persic got his head to but the Croatia winger's effort clipped the post. After the initial scare PSV regrouped their defence and proved increasingly dangerous on the counter-attack. The Dutch broke through following a monstrous blunder by Inter midfielder Kwadwo Asamoah. The Ghanaian was caught in possession by Steven Bergwijn, with the ball flying across the face of goal and Lozano nodding in at the back post.

Asamoah struggled throughout the first half and almost conceded a second with an accidental assist for Luuk De Jong, but Samir Handanovic rushed off



**MILAN:** PSV Eindhoven's midfielder Pablo Rosario (L) and Inter Milan's Croatian midfielder Marcelo Brozovic collide during the UEFA Champions League group B football match Inter Milan vs PSV Eindhoven on Tuesday at the San Siro stadium in Milan. — AFP

his line to parry. Icardi fired wide before the break before Handanovic tipped a Bergwijn effort over the bar.

PSV could thank goalkeeper Jeroen Zoet after the break when he denied Icardi, Stefan de Vrij and Keita Balde. But Icardi blasted in the equaliser midway through the second half, meeting a perfect cross from Matteo Politano to leave Zoet no chance.

The Italians piled forward in search of the winner but could not break through, with substitute Lautaro Martinez sending a header over the bar late on. The Dutch club, who won the European Cup in 1988, achieved just their second point of the competition as they finished bottom of the group behind Inter who go through to the Europa League. — AFP

## PSG keeping cool heads after making Champions League last 16

**BELGRADE:** Paris Saint-Germain coach Thomas Tuchel said his side needed to "stay humble" after they thumped Red Star Belgrade 4-1 on Tuesday and qualified for the last 16 of the Champions League, finishing ahead of Liverpool and Napoli to top a tight Group C.

First-half goals from Edinson Cavani and Neymar set the French champions on their way, before a bullet header from Marquinhos, Kylian Mbappe's injury-time strike and Liverpool beating Napoli 1-0 ensured first place in the group after Marko Gobeljic pulled one back for the hosts early in the second half.

"We made mistakes, but I really liked the reaction after Belgrade's goal. We controlled the match," said Tuchel to RMC Sport after the win. "We need to stay humble and have a professional attitude. We are improving and we are hard to beat."

PSG finished the group stage on 11 points, two ahead of second-placed Liverpool and Napoli, who were eliminated due to their defeat at Anfield. Topping such a keenly-contested group is a huge boost for PSG, who have dominated French football since being taken over by Qatari investors but flattered to deceive on the continent.

Arrival in the knockout stage comes after two straight wins for PSG, with Tuesday's beating of Red Star coming after a crucial 2-1 victory over Liverpool that put qualification in their hands.

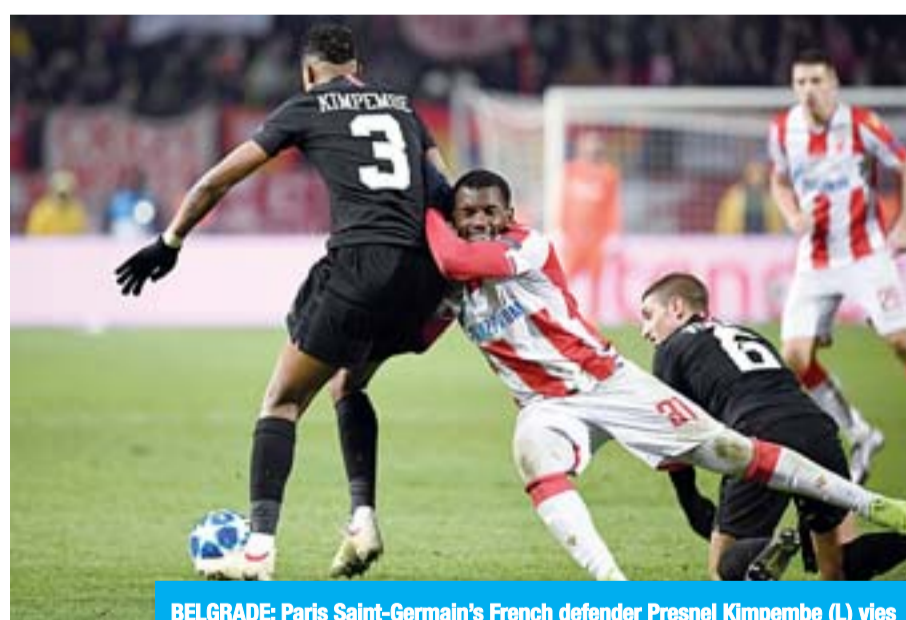
"We showed for a second time after the match against Liverpool that we are ready for this kind of match," added Tuchel, whose side began the group stage with a 3-2 defeat by the Reds at Anfield and then struggled to contain Napoli in the two draws with the Italian side.

However, PSG scored 10 goals in two games against Red Star, who beat Liverpool and drew with Napoli in Belgrade-dropped points that allowed the Ligue 1 leaders to finish top.

"We are happy, we came for qualification and we showed our intentions (with the win)," said Mbappe, who also laid on Cavani's opener. Asked about PSG's chances of winning the Champions League, Mbappe added: "We need to see what we'll have in front of us. The goal is to get to the quarter-finals, but we'll deal with what we are given in the draw."

PSG had Red Star on the back foot from the start, and their blistering attacking trio of Neymar, Mbappe and Cavani did not waste time in putting the away side ahead.

Just eight minutes were on the clock when Cavani tapped Mbappe's pass into an open goal, after the French teenager sensation met the excellent Marco Verratti's through ball, brushed Filip Stojkovic aside and slipped a perfect pass for the Uruguayan.



**BELGRADE:** Paris Saint-Germain's French defender Presnel Kimpembe (L) vies for the ball with Red Star Belgrade's midfielder El Fardou Ben (C) during the European Champions League football match Crvena Zvezda Belgrade vs Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) at Rajko-Mitic stadium in Belgrade. — AFP

torrid evening, and Neymar made light work of the 25-year-old on his way to a wonderful solo goal in the 31st minute, dribbling into the box and sitting down the hosts' keeper Milan Borjan before lifting the second into the net.

The Ligue 1 leaders should have been out of sight three minutes before the break, but Mbappe wasted an excellent chance to make it three, again bursting through past Stojkovic on the left only to fluff his shot into the side netting.

Red Star came out firing in the second half, and could have scored twice

before Gobeljic smashed past Gianluigi Buffon in the 56th minute to set the Rajko Mitic stadium ablaze with noise. However Marquinhos snuffed their enthusiasm out when he met Di Maria's beautiful deep free-kick to make sure of the three points with 17 minutes remaining.

Mbappe's neat finish as the final seconds ticked away and Liverpool's win were the icing on the cake for PSG. "We knew it was going to go to the very end ever since the draw," said Marquinhos. "We knew this group was very difficult, so it's great to finish first, it's a good sign for the future." — AFP

## Playing top Asian sides key for India, says captain Chhetri

**MUMBAI:** India must have regular competition against the continent's top sides if they are to have any hope of taking their game to another level, captain Sunil Chhetri has said ahead of next month's Asian Cup in the United Arab Emirates.

Since their last appearance at the finals in Qatar in 2011, India have played twice against a top-six Asian side when they were grouped with Iran for the Russia World Cup qualifiers. Chhetri, who will lead India in just their fourth appearance at the finals, said they had to be given the chance to stretch themselves more.

"It's very, very important for us to keep playing against the big giants - the UAEs, the Australians, the Korea Republics," Chhetri told FIFA.com. "It's one thing to do well against your neighbours, and without demeaning any one of them, it's a different thing when you go out and play the giants of Asia."

Cricket-loving India has a population of 1.3 billion but it is a massive underachiever as far as football is concerned. The national side is 97th in the FIFA rankings and yet to make an appearance at the World Cup finals.

The Asian Football Confederation's (AFC) decision to increase the number of finalists at the Asian Cup to 24 teams from 16 has helped the country return to the tournament. "I was really dejected when we missed out on the last edition," Chhetri said of the 2015 tournament in Australia.

"I think it's very, very important for a country like us to keep qualifying for this big tournament, because that tells you where you are and if you're doing well. It also gives you a chance to rub shoulders with the biggest teams in Asia. If you do well, other teams take notice of you." — Reuters

## Japan shuns Kagawa for bid to reclaim Asian Cup

**TOKYO:** Japan dropped former Manchester United star Shinji Kagawa from the Blue Samurai's bid to reclaim the Asian Cup, opting instead for a squad filled with young Europe-based talents.

Coach Hajime Moriyasu yesterday selected several players with only a handful of caps to their names for Asia's showcase football tournament in the United Arab Emirates starting in January. The likes of Ritsu Doan of Groningen, Shoya Nakajima of Portimonense and Takumi Minamoto of Salzburg will lead Japan's bid for a record-extending fifth title. But there was no place for midfielder Kagawa, 29, now struggling for playing time at Borussia Dortmund.

Kagawa has long been among the leading stars of Blue Samurai and at his German outfit, but the attacking player has found himself unable to get regular first-team football under Dortmund coach Lucien Favre.

He told Japanese media last month that he wished to move to Spain to take on a new challenge. Moriyasu suggested he had been tempted to turn to veterans like Kagawa, but said he needed to pick players in their best form. — AFP

**25** Broncos, Browns on playoff fringe ahead of matchup



**26** India quicks getting the thoroughbred treatment



**27** Salah's first-half goal sends Liverpool into last 16



LOS ANGELES: Kyle Lowry #7 of the Toronto Raptors shoots the ball against the LA Clippers on Tuesday at STAPLES Center in Los Angeles, California. —AFP

## Ibaka, Lowry lead Raptors' rout of Clippers

Spurs smash Suns as Pop hits number 4 on wins list

LOS ANGELES: Serge Ibaka scored 25 points and grabbed nine rebounds, and the visiting Toronto Raptors ended a two-game losing streak with a 123-99 win against the Los Angeles Clippers on Tuesday. Raptors guard Kyle Lowry came in 4-for-28 from the floor over the past four games, but he shot 8-for-13 while scoring 21 points. Jonas Valanciunas added 16 points off the bench, and Pascal Siakam finished with 13 points for Toronto, which was opening a four-game road trip. Goban Marjanovic scored 18 points and fellow reserve Tyrone Wallace finished with a season-high 15 points to lead the Clippers, who won in overtime at Phoenix on Monday night. Danilo Gallinari led the starters with 11 points, and Tobias Harris finished with 10, well below his season average (21.4).

The Eastern Conference-leading Raptors played without Kawhi Leonard, who entered Tuesday eighth in the NBA in scoring (26.1). Leonard, who played just nine games with the San Antonio Spurs last season because of a lingering quad

injury, played in a season-high nine straight games before Tuesday. Leonard hasn't played in games on consecutive days this season, and Toronto plays the defending NBA champion Golden State Warriors today. Fred VanVleet moved into the starting lineup and finished with a career-high 14 assists, including 10 in the first half, when the Raptors shot 63.8 percent from the floor.

Toronto led 70-57 at the break, and the Clippers never pulled any closer. Ibaka's dunk made it 81-61 with 7:57 left in the third quarter, and the Clippers' largest deficit of the season grew further when Lowry sank a 3-pointer to make it 103-71 with 1:02 left in the third. The Raptors sprinted out to a 13-point lead in the first quarter but missed six of their first seven shots to start the second, and the Clippers began cutting into the advantage.

Milos Teodosic made 3-pointers on back-to-back possessions to pull Los Angeles within 42-38 with 8:04 left in the second quarter. The Clippers couldn't get any closer,

however, and the Raptors made a late push to re-establish the 13-point lead at the break. The Clippers played without sixth man Lou Williams, who is averaging about 17 points a game. Williams is expected to miss two to three weeks with a left hamstring injury, coach Doc Rivers told reporters earlier in the day.

### SPURS 111, SUNS 86

Bryn Forbes scored a season-high 24 points and pulled down a career-high 11 rebounds to lead a balanced San Antonio attack as the Spurs strolled past the visiting Phoenix Suns 111-86 on Tuesday. Spurs coach Gregg Popovich earned his 1,211th career win, moving him past Pat Riley for fourth place on the all-time NBA coaching victories list. Ahead of him are Don Nelson (1,335), Lenny Wilkens (1,332) and Jerry Sloan (1,221). LaMarcus Aldridge added 18 points for San Antonio, which earned a third consecutive victory. Dante Cunningham hit for 14

points. T.J. Warren paced the Suns with 23 points. De'Anthony Melton scored 17, and Deandre Ayton notched 12 points and 11 rebounds for Phoenix, which has lost 10 straight.

### ROCKETS 111, TRAIL BLAZERS 104

James Harden scored a team-high 29 points, but it was a mangled group of reserves who helped carry host Houston to a come-from-behind victory over Portland. Following a change in their starting lineup, with guard Eric Gordon replacing James Ennis, the Rockets received 37 points from their bench. Gerald Green (13 points), Danuel House Jr. (12) and Nene (10) all scored in double figures to help Houston snap a three-game skid. Rockets guard Chris Paul (11 points, 11 rebounds, 10 assists) sealed the win at the free-throw line as Portland took its fifth consecutive road loss. Damian Lillard paced the Trail Blazers with 34 points, while CJ McCollum chipped in 22. —Reuters

## CAR football boss held in France on war crimes charges

THE HAGUE: France yesterday arrested a member of Africa's top footballing body on war crimes charges in the Central African Republic (CAR), the International Criminal Court said.

Patrice-Edouard Ngaissosa, a former minister, is accused of being a top coordinator of armed groups in the conflict-hit country, the Hague-based court said in a statement. Ngaissosa "has been arrested by the authorities of the French Republic pursuant to an arrest warrant" issued by the court for war crimes and crimes against humanity, it added.

Ngaissosa was controversially elected to the executive board of the Confederation of African Football (CAF) general assembly in February. His spokesman told AFP he was also Central African Republic's football chief.

The ICC issued a warrant for Ngaissosa for coordinating so-called anti-Balaka militias which emerged after civil war broke out in 2013 with the declared aim of defending

Christian communities from mostly Muslim rebels. France, the former colonial power, sent 2,000 troops to quell the rebels, winding down the operation in 2016 after President Faustin-Archange Touadera was elected.

Since then, thousands of people have been killed in deadly clashes between the rival armed groups and more than a million forced to flee their homes, UN figures show. The warrant issued in December is for "alleged criminal responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the western part of the Central African Republic", the court said.

The court had previously "submitted a request to the French authorities for the arrest and surrender of Mr Ngaissosa to the court upon completion of necessary national proceedings."

The arrest comes just weeks after another suspected Central African militia leader-Alfred Yekatom, known as Rambo-was arrested and deported to The Hague.

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) said it welcomed the arrest.

"Ngaissosa is a major anti-Balaka leader. After the arrests of Rambo and Ngaissosa, the ICC must now also deal with the ex-Seleka leaders," said Pierre Brunisso, FIDH coordinator in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic.

Ngaissosa was the "most senior leader and the 'National General Coordinator' of the Anti-Balaka" and

therefore responsible for crimes in several parts of the country, the ICC said.

The crimes include murder, torture, mutilation, intentionally targeting and displacing civilians, pillaging and enlisting child soldiers, it added.

Before the violence erupted, Ngaissosa briefly served as minister of sport under former president Francois Bozize, whose overthrow in 2013 by mainly Muslim Seleka rebels triggered the conflict.

Ngaissosa, who is in his 50s, has described himself as the "political coordinator" of the anti-Balaka groups.

In 2015, he was barred from running in CAR's presidential elections over concerns about his role in the violence, but has previously said that "everything I've done has been for the good of my country."

In February, he was elected to the CAF board seat representing eight central African nations, winning by 30 votes compared to his Gabonese rival, who secured 23.

The CAF said at the time that his candidacy for the board respected "strict statutory criteria" but added that the body did not have an ethics committee.

"If the allegations were true, I wouldn't be here today," Ngaissosa told AFP in February, saying he didn't want "to mix politics and sport."

More than five years after the war, CAR remains a deeply poor and volatile country.

Touadera can only claim control over a fraction of the



Patrice-Edouard Ngaissosa

country. Most of the territory remains in the sway of militia groups and violence is entrenched.

In Bangui, the head of an anti-Balaka chief who had been among the first to accept enrolment in a post-conflict disarmament and reintegration programme, said yesterday he feared the arrest could spark violence.

"This is too much," he told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"We showed goodwill by laying down our weapons, but it's twice now that a former anti-Balaka (leader) has been arrested. People are starting get upset, but we are appealing for calm while we await further information." —AFP