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Calls for justice as Filipina maid's body returns home

Kuwait manpower authority keen to safeguard workers' rights

ILOILO, Philippines: More than a hundred relatives and supporters of a Filipina maid whose body was found stuffed in a freezer in Kuwait brandished banners demanding justice as her coffin was returned home yesterday. The family of Joanna Demafelis openly wept as the white casket was unloaded at an airport cargo terminal in the central city of Iloilo.

"Justice for Joanna D Demafelis," was emblazoned on banners and on T-shirts worn by the crowd which included a congressman and local officials expressing their anger over the death of the Filipina whose body was found in a freezer in Kuwait earlier this month after her employers, a Lebanese man and his Syrian wife, disappeared in 2016. The incident worsened a diplomatic flap between the Philippines and Kuwait with President Rodrigo Duterte alleging that employers routinely rape their Filipina workers, force them to work 21 hours a day and feed them scraps.

He has also banned the deployment of new workers to Kuwait and ordered airlines to fly home any of the 252,000 Filipinos working there who wish to return. About 10 million Filipinos work abroad and the money they remit back is a lifeline of the Philippine economy. Their treatment abroad is often a political issue at home. Kuwait's foreign minister previ-

ously condemned Manila's "escalation" of the issue but Philippine Foreign Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano said Friday the Kuwaiti ambassador had assured him his government was "outraged" over the killing and determined to find those responsible.

Cayetano said while the death was tragic, it would be a "rallying point" for governments to work harder to protect Filipinos overseas, while conceding that Philippine-Kuwaiti relations were going through a "very rocky period". He said only about three to five percent of Filipino laborers in Kuwait were having problems but acknowledged the government needed to do more. His department said Monday authorities were repatriating 10,000 Filipinos who had overstayed their visas in Kuwait, with more than 700 flown home already under an amnesty program announced recently by the Kuwaiti government.

A distraught Eva Demafelis could only say "I am sad," when asked by reporters about the death of her daughter. "She does not deserve the manner in which she died. She was beaten up," said an aunt, Rosela Demafelis Taunan, referring to local news reports about the 29-year-old maid's death. "She decided to go abroad because she wanted to help her

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ILOILO, Philippines: Eva (third left), mother of Filipina worker Joanna Demafelis whose body was found inside a freezer in Kuwait, cries in front of the wooden casket containing her daughter's body shortly after its arrival from Manila at Iloilo International Airport yesterday. — AFP

India, Iran agree to support Kabul, ink pact to lease Chabahar port

NEW DELHI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani agreed yesterday to step up efforts to bring stability to war-ravaged Afghanistan. Modi reiterated India's commitment to help Afghanistan become "a peaceful, secure, permanent, prosperous and pluralistic country" after holding talks with Rouhani in New Delhi on the last day of his three-day visit. "Looking at our common interests, we are committed to stopping the expansion of such forces that promote international organized crime in terrorism, extremism, illegal drug trafficking, cyber crime and various forms," Modi said "We want to see our region and the world free from terrorism."

There was no mention of financial assistance or providing weapons to help Afghanistan fight militants by either leader. They did not name Pakistan but it has long been accused of supporting insurgents in Afghanistan. India has been a key supporter of Kabul's government and has poured more than \$2 billion into the country since the Taliban were toppled



NEW DELHI: Iranian President Hassan Rouhani (left) shakes hands with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi before a meeting at Hyderabad House yesterday. — AFP

in 2001. In 2016, India offered \$1 billion in economic aid to strengthen various sectors in the war-torn nation including education, health and agriculture.

Modi said both countries wanted to increase economic cooperation, regional connectivity and improve energy security to reach landlocked Afghanistan and central Asia via the southern Iranian port of Chabahar. The port, which was inaugurated in December, has been touted as a way for India to establish trade routes that bypass its rival Pakistan. India has been a key purchaser of Iranian oil and gas, and maintained trade ties even as international sanctions were imposed on Tehran over its nuclear program between 2012 and 2016.

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Pak child killer handed four death sentences

LAHORE: A Pakistani court yesterday handed four death sentences to a man charged with raping and murdering a six-year-old girl, in a case that shocked the country and sparked major riots in his home district. Imran Ali, 24, was on trial for killing Zainab Fatima Ameen in the eastern city of Kasur last month. He faces further charges in the cases of at least seven other children attacked in the Punjab city - five of whom were murdered - in a spate of assaults that had stoked fears a serial child killer was on the loose. He has confessed to all eight attacks, including the death of Zainab.

Ali was handed four separate death sentences after being convicted of the rape and murder of Zainab, as well as terrorism charges, prosecutor general of Punjab province Ihtesham Qadir said after a special anti-terrorism court passed its judgement. Under Pakistani law, crimes that are considered to have spread terror in society can be charged as acts of terrorism. The prosecutors said he also received life imprisonment and fines totalling 3.2 million rupees (\$30,000) for additional charges of hiding his victim's body.

One million rupees of the fine would be given in compensation to Zainab's family, public prosecutor Abdul Rauf Wattoo told AFP. The trial was held in Lahore's Kot



ISLAMABAD: Ameen Ansari, the father of six-year-old Zainab who was found raped and murdered, leaves following a court verdict yesterday. — AFP

Lakhpur prison under tight security. Journalists were stopped 500 m from the prison and only relatives of the victim were allowed in court for the hearing. Zainab's mother Nusrat Bibi demanded he be executed in public. "I want him to be hanged publicly at the place where he took Zainab," she told reporters after the verdict.

Zainab's murder last month sparked outrage across Pakistan, with riots erupting in Kasur as thousands swarmed police stations and set fire to politicians' homes, while Pakistanis across the nation took to social media demanding action. Television stations repeatedly broadcast chilling CCTV footage purportedly showing the young girl walking hand-in-hand with an unidentified male in what may have been her last moments.

Continued on Page 11

'Screaming Mummy' displayed in museum

CAIRO: The Egyptian Museum in Cairo has put on display the "Screaming Mummy" of the son of a pharaoh who may have been hanged for plotting his father's murder. Dubbed "the unknown man E", the mummy - which is not usually exhibited - appears to be of a man who died an agonizing death. Egypt's antiquities ministry has said DNA analysis confirmed the mummy was a son of Ramses III, who ruled between 1186 BC and 1155 BC.

It showed signs that the man had been hanged and shrouded in sheepskin, which the ancient Egyptians considered impure. Pentawere, the son of Ramses III, was sentenced to hang for his role in the plot, according to an ancient papyrus record of the conspiracy. Pentawere conspired with his mother Tiye, the second wife of Ramses III, to murder the king. It is not clear if Ramses III was



CAIRO: A picture taken yesterday shows the "Screaming Mummy", known scientifically as "the unknown man E", on display at the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir Square. — AFP

killed in the plot, but there are indications that he was stabbed in the neck. An Eye of Horus amulet, representing healing and protection, was placed around Ramses III's throat, the ministry statement said. — AFP

MoH to open ENT depts in all hospitals

KUWAIT: Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah said the ministry has completed nearly 80 percent of the goals of a health survey that aims at early discovery of hearing disabilities in newborns. Sheikh Basel was speaking during the opening of a conference on the latest developments in throat and vocal cord surgeries, which ended yesterday. He said the survey, which was launched in 2013, aims at taking quick treatment and rehabilitation measures while reducing the rate of hear-

ing disabilities in newborns.

The conference coincided with health ministry's preparations to launch a Comprehensive National Program for the Prevention of Deafness and its celebration of the International Day for Hearing in March. Sheikh Basel said participants in the conference will carry out several tests and operations at Zain, Farwaniya and Adan Hospitals, adding that involving world experts in such conferences contributes to easing pressure on the treatment abroad program and enhancing Kuwaiti doctors' experience.

Sheikh Basel said the ministry is keen on opening ear, nose and throat (ENT) departments in all hospitals, in addition to developing the Sheikh Salem Al-Ali hearing and diction center and



KUWAIT: CEO of Central Circle Co Dr Ziad Al-Alyan (second left) discusses the latest ear, nose and throat technologies with Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah (second right) at an ENT conference.

equip it with state-of-the-art systems. Chairman of the Conference Dr Humoud Al-Arouj said the conference, in which 12 consultants from Kuwait, Saudi

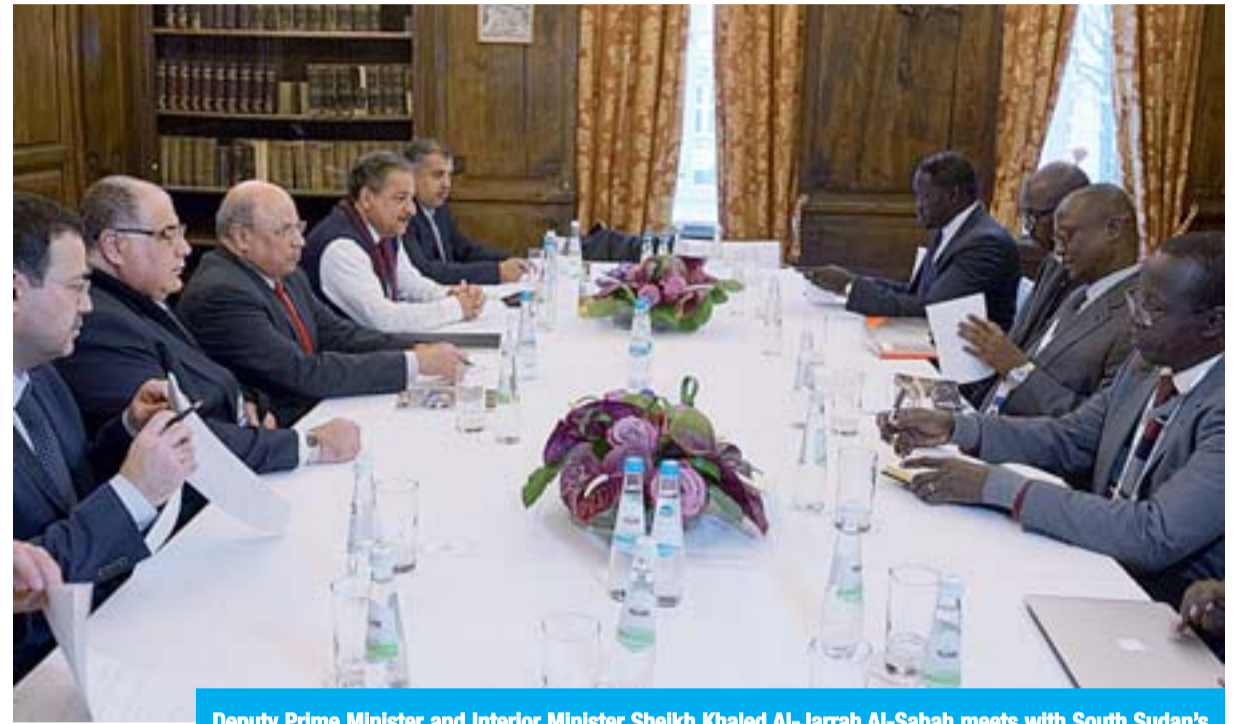
Arabia, UAE, US, Australia, Canada and Turkey participated, included 20 lectures, four workshops and two roundtable discussions. — KUNA

Kuwait stands by countries to resolve conflicts: Minister

Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah participates in Munich Security Conference



MUNICH: Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah meets with former UN chief Kofi Annan and former UN envoy for Syria Lakhdar Brahimi. —KUNA



Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah meets with South Sudan's First Vice-President Taban Gai.

MUNICH: Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah said on Friday that Kuwait backs peace everywhere and stands by states to resolve conflicts. Sheikh Khaled made the statement after heading a delegation to the Munich Security Conference, which kicked off earlier in the day. Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah affirmed that his participation in the conference is based on Kuwait's keenness to continue making mediation efforts to resolve differences between countries diplomatically in order to avoid the armed conflicts, and boost peace and security, mainly in the Middle East region.

He elaborated that this comes within the framework of the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in this regard. He referred to the Kuwaiti role played to resolve the Yemeni crisis, saying that Kuwait has hosted the intra-Yemeni peace talks for more than three months, and is ready to host the talks until a final agreement is signed.

On humanitarian field, the minister stated that Kuwait has hosted several conferences to back humanitarian situation of Syrians. "Kuwait took part in two international conferences in London and Brussels. It spared no efforts to meet needs of disastrous humanitarian situation of Yemenis. Also it is hosting the Kuwait International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq (KICRI)," he said.



Technological development utilized to recruit terrorists

Technological development

He noted that terrorist elements are mainly depending on technological development in recruiting new individuals and carrying out their attacks and plots. As a result, cyber space has become a source of concern for all and its effects are serious on security aspects, he explained, calling for setting up quickly a security space to combat terrorism, and drying up its intellectual and financial resources before confronting its armed cells. He voiced his hope that the conference would contribute to enhancing coordination among countries to achieve preventive security, which is one of the most prominent security challenges.

Meanwhile, German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen affirmed the necessity of concerted efforts in order to address security challenges facing the world. She noted that military action is not enough neither to

resolve international crises nor settle armed disputes. Military and defense operations should be associated with providing development aid to help poor countries and protect their youth from extremism, she stressed. The German minister underlined the need to back financially the international organizations like the United Nations to help them achieve their missions in a good manner. For her part, French Defense Minister

Florence Parly empathized her support for setting an independent EU strategy so as to overcome new security challenges. She commended the European initiatives aiming to boost cooperation among EU member states.

The three-day event includes more than 30 heads of state and government, in addition to 100 defense and interior ministers across the globe. It discusses means of overcoming security challenges in the world, mainly combating terrorism and conflicts in the Middle East, and the Ukrainian crisis.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim Al-Thani, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, British Prime Minister Theresa May, Turkish Prime Minister Ben Ali Yildirim and France's Prime Minister Edward Philippe are among the attendees of the conference.

Meetings

Separately, Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah held a meeting yesterday with President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Peter Maurer on ways of promoting and bolstering cooperation between the State of Kuwait and ICRC, and of protecting the victims of armed conflicts. The Kuwaiti minister then met with European Union (EU) Counter Terrorism Coordinator Gilles de Kerchove on how to prop up cooperation between Kuwait and EU in the fight against terrorism and extremism.

Furthermore, Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah held a meeting with Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq Nechirvan Barzani. The two officials discussed means of bilateral relations. Then



Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah meets with European Union (EU) Counter Terrorism Coordinator Gilles de Kerchove.

Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah held talks with former UN chief Kofi Annan and former UN envoy for Syria Lakhdar Brahimi on achieving peace and preserving human rights.

Finally, Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah held a meeting with South Sudan's First Vice-President Taban Gai in which they focused on enhancing bilateral ties. The Munich Security Conference kicked off on Friday, in the presence of world leaders, premiers, and foreign and defense ministers, with the aim of addressing security challenges. —KUNA

Military vehicle accident kills warrant officer

KUWAIT: A staff warrant officer of the Ground Forces was killed and another injured while on duty due to a military vehicle accident, Kuwait General Staff announced Friday. The accident killed the driver of the military vehicle Staff Warrant Officer Rakan Hadlan of the 35th Shaheed Armored Brigade, and injured his colleague Warrant Officer Malhan Nassar, the Defense Ministry's directorate of moral guidance and public relations said in a statement. The injured was transported immediately to Al-Jahra Hospital for necessary treatment, the ministry said, adding that investigations are currently underway to uncover causes of the accident. —KUNA

Army chief of staff oversees drill for enhancing coordination

KUWAIT: Kuwait Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Mohammad Al-Khuder has affirmed vital need for close coordination among the armed forces various forces and squads. The chief of staff made the statement yesterday during a visit to the site of the ongoing drill 'Al-Bairaq 7' involving units from the Ministry of Interior and the National Guard.

Lt Gen Khuder said he was briefed during the inspection of the exercising personnel by Brigadier General Mohammad Al-Kandari, the drilling chief and the chief of staff assistant for operations and planning, about phases of the exercise, role of the involved units and the set goals: coordination, expertise swap and enhancing coordination among the army units and the involved squads. Yesterday's drills, due to proceed till February 22, were attended by the Commander of the Ground Force Major General Khaled Al-Saleh Al-Sabah and a number of senior officers.

The drill, which kicked off on Friday, is carried out periodically to assess training and operation levels in all units, the Ministry's Directorate of Moral Guidance and Public Relations quoted Kandari as saying. The



KUWAIT: Kuwait Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Mohammad Al-Khuder visits the site of the 'Al-Bairaq 7' military drill. —KUNA

drill also aims to preserve the implementation of missions and duties of all military sectors, he added. It seeks to boost joint cooperation and coordination as well as share expertise among all army's units and

sectors taking part in the drill, he noted. Kandari called on land and sea-goers not to approach the military camps and gatherings at the training areas only for their safety. —KUNA

Kuwait highlights Palestinian cause, Syria crisis at UNSC

NEW YORK: Kuwait is leading efforts at the UNSC to highlight the Middle East's most urging matters namely the Syrian crisis and Palestinian cause, said a senior Kuwaiti diplomat late Friday. Kuwait permanent delegate to the UN headquarters in New York and current chair of the UNSC this month, Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi told Arab journalists at the UN that Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, for the first time, would partake in the council's meeting on the Palestinian situation on February 20.

The UNSC will also hold a similar meeting on

February 22, which will feature a speech delivered on the behalf of former US President Jimmy Carter. The Palestinian cause was always on the top list of priorities for the State of Kuwait, affirmed Ambassador Otaibi who indicated that Kuwait's leadership of the UNSC this month mainly focused on highlighting the situation in Palestine and specifically the catastrophic humanitarian state in the Gaza Strip. The numerous plights in the Gaza Strip and the dire situation there requires the world to continue assisting the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the Kuwaiti diplomat said.

Syrian crisis

Meanwhile, Ambassador Otaibi touched on the Syrian crisis during his address to the journalists, noting that Kuwait had organized and co-organized conferences aimed at providing aid to the Syrian refugees

since 2013. He affirmed that these events displayed Kuwait's utter commitment to resolve the humanitarian situation in Syria.

On the current status quo in Syria, the Kuwaiti diplomat said that there was a push on part of Kuwait to have the UNSC take considerable action to put an end to the brutal assault against innocent civilians in the war-torn country; however, the conflict amongst a number of Secretary Council members seems to derail these efforts. Ambassador Otaibi affirmed that Kuwait will continue to support and backup efforts aimed at resolving the Syrian crisis in a peaceful manner.

Resolution on Syria

Separately, Foreign Minister of Luxembourg Jean Asselborn said that after the Kuwait conference on reconstruction of Iraq he hopes that one can talk about reconstruction in Syria also. "I just came back from Kuwait, from the conference on the reconstruction

of Iraq, and I hope that in one year we will be able to talk about the reconstruction of Syria too," he told journalists ahead of the informal meeting of EU foreign ministers in Sofia, Bulgaria.

"I think that what we must support now is the resolution by Sweden and Kuwait at the UNSC. This would mean a small step towards humaneness. The war must end in Syria, it's been going on for seven years now. Secondly, we must be aware that no one will be able to stop this war with weapons," he stated. "We need to concentrate on this UN resolution and as European Union see to it that we reach a phase like we have now in Iraq of reconstruction and reconciliation," noted Asselborn.

"I think we must lead Syria into a transition phase, which is not easy as there are many factions to lead along, and then as international community we need to concentrate on the fight against Daesh, that is the task of the global coalition," he added. —KUNA

Local

Organ transplants conducted by visiting doctors for Kuwaitis only

Proper measures taken to treat prisoner with viral meningitis

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Health Minister Sheikh Dr Bassel Al-Sabah issued a ministerial decision restricting organ transplant surgeries conducted by visiting foreign specialized doctors to Kuwaitis only. In a different concern, the minister said work is currently in progress to increase the number of main medical warehouses and distributing them over various areas around Kuwait to be used during any possible contingencies that may result due to regional circumstances.

In other news, Dr Bassel said that the ministry, in collaboration with the Central Prison authorities, activated the necessary preventive measures after prisoner tested positive for viral meningitis. "The patient, who was rushed from the prison to Al-Farwaniya Hospital upon showing symptoms of the disease, is in a stable condition after taking the proper medication," the minister said on Friday.

Sheikh Dr Bassel said that he is following in person the health condition of the patient, noting that the public

health department and the health unit of the prison shouldered their respective responsibilities properly upon detecting the case. "As a precaution, tests were conducted on all prison inmates who were in contact with the patient but their results came negative," he revealed, adding that he ordered working out a detailed report on the level of healthcare for all prisoners. The minister reaffirmed the commitment of the government to ensuring proper healthcare for everybody without any exceptions.

Health insurance

The parliamentary health affairs committee will meet today to discuss proposals on amending law number 114/2014 pertaining health insurance for retired citizens.

The committee invited both Finance Minister Nayef Al-Hajraf and Minister of Social Affairs and Labor Hind Al-Sabeh to attend the meeting.



Panel discusses strategic payroll alternative

Strategic payroll

The parliamentary financial affairs committee is due to meet today to resume discussing decree law number 15/1979 pertaining civil services (aka the strategic payroll alternative). Informed sources said the government had urged the parliament to complete discussing its visions on the proposed amendments, adding that the government is eyeing a partial reform of the payroll system divided into nine main professional categories

and involving a new mechanism for assessment, promotions and rewards, plus encouraging citizens to join less attractive jobs.

Meanwhile, MP Safa Al-Hashem renewed her call on the government to expose what she described as 'poisonous assets' in investments of Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA), warning that not revealing them would lead to losses worth billions. Hashem added that through KIA, the finance ministry stated that it is about to disclose a list of some valuable assets that she had earlier urged Finance Minister Nayef Al-Hajraf and KIA CEO Farouq Bastaki to disclose. She added that those assets are still 'bleeding losses'.

Power plants

Preventive maintenance of various units has improved the performance of power plants and reduced malfunctions to a total of 280 in 2017, compared to 317 in 2016, acting statistics manager at the Ministry of Electricity and Water Iqbal Al-Tayyar said.

Oil prices

Oil prices have dropped below to the lowest point this year of \$58.9, affected by international stock exchange plunges and a drop in demand, said analysts. Analysts also said Kuwaiti oil prices dropped by \$8 per barrel and that this might lead to a drop in oil revenues during the last quarter of 2017-2018, which might lead to increasing

the deficit to KD 6 billion compared to current predictions of KD 5.2 billion.

Meanwhile, oil sources at KOC said that the company has managed to achieve daily production of 801,000 barrels in the northern operations zone. The sources added that the actual daily production in this area was 732,000 barrels a day and that the highest was 772,000 bpd, until the number of drilling rigs was increased, with the result of increasing productivity to 801,000 bpd.

Low-cost homes

The Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) expects offering the first package of the low-cost housing project's infrastructure (with a total cost of KD 600 million) for public bidding by the end of March, said MEED, noting that the average area per unit would be 200 sq m, which is smaller than land plots in most residential areas currently being planned. MEED also expected the project to include 9,600 units. In addition, MEED noted that the housing authority currently has 100,000 pending housing applications with average waiting periods of 7-18 years. It noted that the new housing projects would reduce overcrowding in Kuwait City and help control soaring real estate prices. "Real estate prices have dropped by 30 percent ever since the government started executing the new housing projects," said informed sources.



Health Minister Sheikh Dr Bassel Al-Sabah

local spotlight

No cigarettes in Kuwait!



By Muna Al-Fuzai

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If you are a smoker or have a smoker in the family or a friend, then they must have complained to you about the disappearance of cigarettes from cooperatives and grocery stores in Kuwait. Why did the cigarettes disappear? How much truth is there in rumors that cigarette traders are refusing to provide stores with cigarettes? Will the prices really rise? What has caused this sudden disappearance?

It has been widely mentioned that cigarette companies in Kuwait have taken preparations to increase cigarette prices, while certain brands of cigarettes have disappeared from markets and grocery stores, and have thus opened up a black market! And prices of most brands of cigarettes have increased by 100 to 200 fils.

Some smokers are complaining that cigarette traders have intentionally blocked the supply of cigarettes since the past 15 days in preparation to raise prices. Is this true? I hope not, because Kuwait has postponed the application of VAT until 2019, and we are only in Feb 2018.

If so, then it's not for the first time. In 2015, a similar thing happened and provoked angry campaigns on social media. At that time, smokers denounced cigarette shops for hoarding large quantities of cigarettes and clearing the shelves in anticipation of an official announcement to raise prices. Some sellers sold cigarettes at higher prices, and this is happening again.

I understand that cigarette prices in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are rising due to the new tax system, but in Kuwait the tax has not been implemented yet. Many smokers see the trend towards higher cigarette prices to the benefit of tobacco traders, because smokers will not stop smoking.

I do not smoke, but I follow the subject as my son is a smoker and his friends are too. They have been making futile rounds of grocery stores all around the country in search of cigarettes. I too have made some rounds to find that cigarettes have really disappeared. I wonder why? It is said the reasons for the scarcity of cigarettes in the country is due to mass purchases by citizens of other Gulf countries, because prices here are cheaper compared to their countries. So they have created a cigarette crisis.

I have read reports that the borders between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have witnessed the confiscation of thousands of cigarette cartons. In November 2017, Al-Rai daily published a report showing images of large quantities of cigarettes smuggled by Saudis that were confiscated because the prices of tobacco increased there.

Many Kuwaitis are suffering in the search of their favorite brands, which have become so rare that some markets have banned the sale of more than two packs per person. Customs authorities have also stepped up inspection campaigns. The director of the Kuwaiti land customs assured that coordination with Saudi customs is ongoing to prevent smuggling at ports, except within the limits of personal use.

I think this disappearance of cigarettes in Kuwait has reflected negatively on the Kuwaiti market, and prompted the General Administration of Customs to tighten control over land ports and the airport, where instructions were issued to prevent the exit of more than one small carton with each car.

The fact is that the majority of shops are empty of cigarette packs. The owners think that discussions between the Ministry of Commerce and cigarette agents are currently underway, and may end soon. I think this is a temporary crisis, but I cannot find a justification for the rise in prices at some stores, even if it is only 100 fils. I hope that the commerce ministry will intervene to end this crisis now and for good and prevent its recurrence by controlling prices and punishing those who disregard the ministry's regulations, or such incidents will recur.

Society urges public to protect environment during celebrations

By Meshal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Kuwait Society for Environmental Protection (KEPS) urged the public to protect the environment during the national celebrations later this month. The society's secretary general Jenan Bahzad called for 'environmental discipline' and avoiding violations during this period. Bahzad added that seawater pollution by plastic and other non-decomposable materials will take long years to be dissolved. She added that 30 percent of the world's sea turtles and 90 percent of marine birds have been affected by such waste.

Bahzad added that desert camping also has negative environmental impacts. She said a single individual in Kuwait produces around 1.4 kg of waste daily, which usually increases during festive periods, costing the state budget around \$255 million annually.

In addition, Bahzad noted that overgrazing, random movement of vehicles and heavy military equipment and spring camps had caused the disappearance of highly valuable plants from the wild, stressing that camping in a way that affects the soil is punishable by a fine of up to KD 5,000, plus mandatory removal of the waste. She added that plastic waste has a dangerous impact on desert life, as plastic bags take around 20 years to decompose. Bahzad added that revellers every year waste a day's freshwater supply to 14 housing units on the national anniversaries.

The administrative court had issued a verdict last December giving the cabinet the authority to ban the usage of water guns in National and Liberation Days' celebrations. The verdict was made in response to a case filed by lawyer Mona Al-Arbash demanding the ban for public interest, on

grounds that thousands of water gallons are wasted every year during national celebrations, costing the country - which is already poor on natural water resources - a lot of money. Use of water guns and water cannons during national celebrations have become very popular in recent years after the government banned the use of spray foam for environmental reasons.

Mosques' charter

Minister of Justice and Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Fahd Al-Afasi issued a ministerial decision regulating mosques' work and enabling them to play their part in delivering awareness messages about moderation. Afasi added that the new charter came to help imams, preachers and muezzins do their jobs professionally on addressing and guiding the public. He added that the new charter includes four main parts addressing nature of work of imams, preachers and muezzins, the relations between them, their rights and responsibilities. He also noted that the charter includes penal measures to be taken in case of violations.

No injuries in Jleeb house fire



By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Firemen from five different fire stations battled a blaze reported Friday evening in a Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh house. The place contained woodwork and foam, so the house was evacuated, and the flames were contained after spreading to a neighboring house. No injuries were reported and investigations are underway to determine the cause of the fire.

New fire stations

Director of the facilities and maintenance department Col Abdelmohsen Al-Enezi inspected the buildings of the new fire stations on Sheikh Jaber causeway that are being built according to Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) specifications. The stations on the roads that stretch from Shuwaikh to Subbiya contain fire engines and fireboats. Enezi was accompanied by Acting Marine Fire Department Lt Col Ahmad Al-Ansari and Head of the Backup Center Maj Hamad Al-Rasheed.

Bedoons issued 9,521 documents in 2017

KUWAIT: The central agency addressing the status of illegal residents issued 9,521 governmental and non-governmental transactions and documents for bedoons in 2017, the agency announced yesterday. Director General of Information Department in the agency Abdullah Al-Farhan said that 14,397 of bedoons benefited from the process. A sum of 4,468 of transactions were addressed to the Ministry of Health while 625 health insurance papers were issued since January 1 until the end of December in 2017, he added.

The agency sent 2,356 papers to the sharia documentation department at the Ministry of Justice and 111 documents were sent to the Ministry of Interior, he said. A total of 94 papers were delivered to the Ministry of Defense and 575 transactions to other bodies, he said.

The agency approved 745 cases in the Civil Service (CSC) Commission database after studying their cases as they offered the needed documentations for their registration, he said. Farhan called on the newly graduates of holders of diplomats and higher certificates of whom are eligible to the conditions of employment in the governmental bodies to update their information. —KUNA

Kuwait Times

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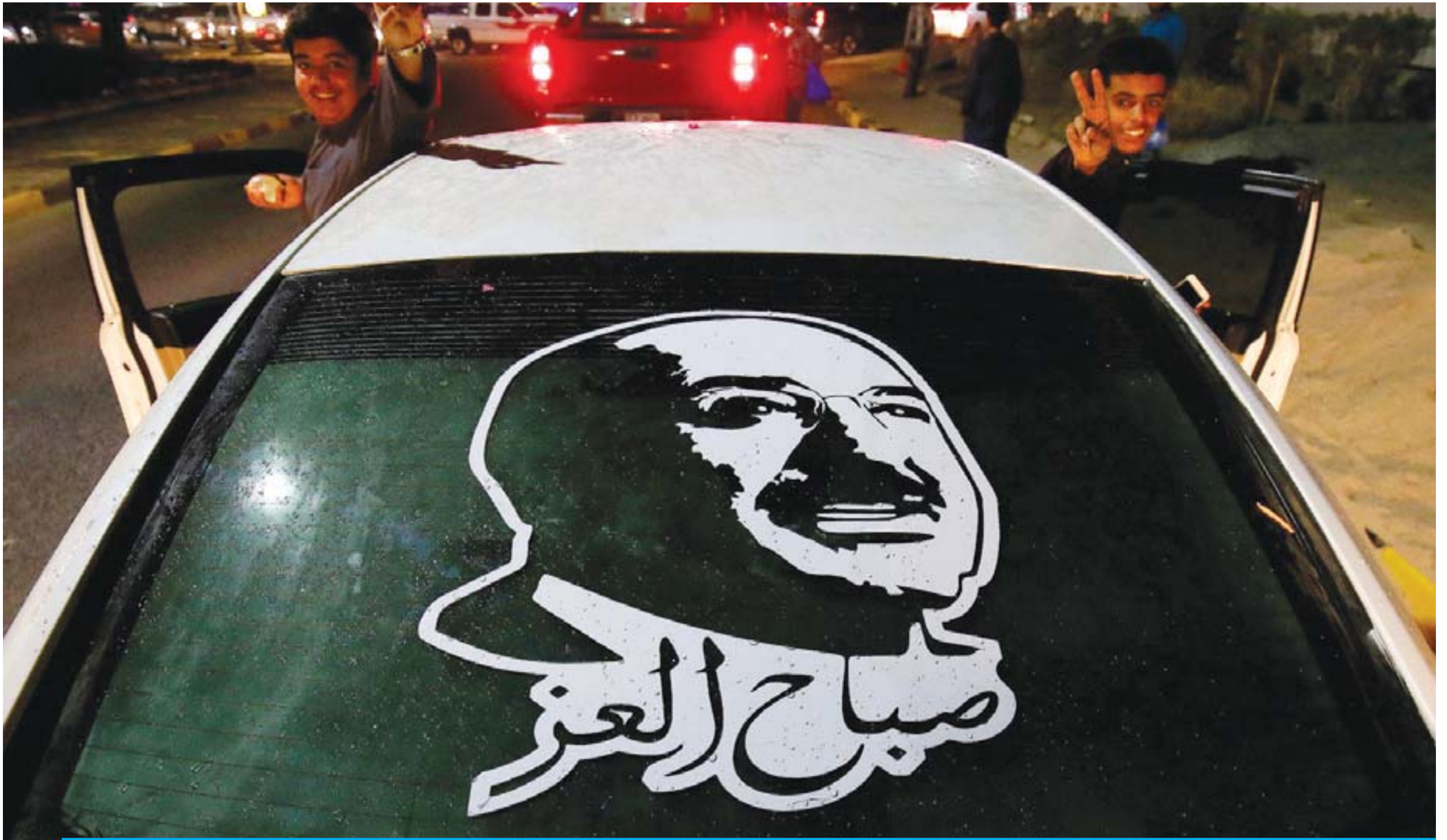
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Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti youth pose for the camera outside a car bearing a portrait of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in Ahmadi on Friday as Kuwait begins to prepare for National and independence day celebrations. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Fikra program participants conclude 3-month training phase

Gulf Bank continues to provide necessary support to participants



KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has announced that participants of Fikra Program are progressing as planned, the entrepreneurs just concluded the 20 entrepreneurship training programs scheduled for this edition, over the period of three months, and are now in the mentoring stage, and then will start preparing for the final ceremony in April 2018, where the entrepreneurs will pitch their ideas to the public and investors.

The mentoring stage has begun on Sunday, February 4, 2018 with a networking session where Fikra Program entrepreneurs met the 15 mentors from different industries that are assigned to their teams, following that session the entrepreneurs will be meeting with their mentors on a weekly basis.

Following the closing ceremony, the annual AIM

Startup Pitch Competition will be held, of which number of Fikra Program entrepreneurs from both second and third edition will take part. The 2018 AIM Startup Pitch Competition will be held at Dubai World Trade Centre in April 2018, under the patronage of Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum.

AIM Startup 2018 Pitch Competition is an initiative by the Ministry of Economy in the UAE which identifies and fosters startups from the region. The 5 selected winners in this year's Kuwait AIM Startup pitch competition are: 851 Animation from Fikra Program - 3rd Edition, Young Doctors Academy from Fikra Program- 3rd Edition, Environmental Projects Supports Company from Fikra Program - 3rd Edition and Kindaishen from Fikra Program- 2nd Edition and

Nabta Health. Participants were selected from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Jordan.

Laila Al-Qatami, Assistant General Manager for Corporate communications at Gulf Bank said: "We are glad that participants of Fikra Program are progressing as planned and making use of every single opportunity offered to them. We see a great potential in each individual and wish the whole group best of luck. Looking forward to the final ceremony and to the upcoming editions of this successful program"

Gulf Bank is proud to be a gold sponsor of the Fikra Program for the second consecutive year. Fikra Program is an intensive entrepreneurship training program that provides aspiring entrepreneurs with

the technical skills and business knowledge needed to launch their own businesses such as leadership skills, comprehensive business plan design, mentorship, financial analysis, media exposure, investment opportunities, and others.

Fikra Program is under the patronage of Khaled Al-Roudan, Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Youth Affairs and is proudly supported by Ministry of State for Youth Affairs; the National Fund for SME Development; Gulf Bank; Al-Hamra Real Estate Company; Ali Abdulwahab Al-Mutawa Commercial Company; Markaz Financial Center; Lexus Kuwait as a part of Al-Sayer Group; and Grand Cinemas. Fikra Program is managed by Cubical Services Business Incubator.



Local

Al-Shaheed Park ideal model for green standards: Official

Amiri Diwan minister patronizes green roof conference

KUWAIT: Al-Shaheed Park in Kuwait City is an ideal environmental model for the international Green standards, an Amiri Diwan official affirmed yesterday. The Park's green buildings and urban facilities have succeeded in attracting visitors from various countries around the world, and challenging the volatile weather nature in Kuwait, said Haifa Al-Muhanna, the Park's superintendent at Amiri Diwan.

Muhanna made her remarks on the sidelines of the fifth edition of the International Green Roof Congress, which kicked off in Kuwait earlier under the auspices of Amiri Diwan. The two-day event is hosted by the International Green Roof Association (IGRA) and brings together Green Roof experts from the Middle East, Asia, Europe, and the US to discuss major challenges facing the spread of the Green Roof concept around the world, including planning, application, and performance of Green Roofs in dry climates, she said.



Park welcomes 2,000 visitors on daily basis

Up-to-date
IGRA has contributed significantly in building and equipping Al-Shaheed Park with up-to-date technology that goes in line with international standards of modern construction, she noted, adding the non-profit organization's choice of Al-Shaheed Park as the venue for its fifth congress makes the Kuwaiti park an ideal model for green building systems.

The first IGRA event in the Gulf region will provide a unique opportunity to join the worldwide Green Roof network and connect with international and regional experts in this rapidly developing market, noted Muhanna.

With currently 2,000 visitors on daily basis, Al-Shaheed Park is the most significant Green Infrastructure project in Kuwait and one of the largest Green Roof projects in the world, said the Amiri Diwan official. During the first construction

phase (2013-2015), all buildings were almost fitted with roof greening, a total of 35,000 square-meter of Green Roofs, she said, adding that in 2017, the second expansion (Phase II) was opened for the public, thus, doubling the total Green Roof area of the park.

Khaled Al-Fouzan, General Manager of the Associated Engineering Partnership (TAEP) and member of IGRA, stated meanwhile that Al-Shaheed Park currently consists of 310,000 square-meter of greenery, featuring a modern conference center, beautiful botanical gardens, museums, a miniature of old Kuwait, walkways, jogging tracks, lakes, river landscapes, and a musical fountain.

Al-Shaheed Park is the largest urban park in Kuwait that represents as a prime example of how to meet the challenges of hot and dry climate by using appropriate Green Roof systems, said Al-Fouzan. He also indicated that the fifth edition event will provide an inspiring mixture of progressive thinkers, new technical developments, and innovative Green Roof applications in architecture, landscape architecture, and climate protection.

40 countries

The congress kicked off yesterday under the patronage of Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah. The conference, held with the participation of engineers and architects from over 40 countries, aims to shed light on the importance of green roofs, sky gardens and rooftop gardens in reducing desertification and global warming. During the event, Muhanna provided thorough information on the park, a project developed by the Amiri Diwan to gather different museums and Kuwait's historical events in one place. Meanwhile, the park won IGRA's annual award, received by the Amiri Diwan's assistant undersecretary for engineering affairs Niaz Khaja. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Haifa Al-Muhanna, Al-Shaheed Park's superintendent at the Amiri Diwan, speaks during the congress. — KUNA

KIB sponsors cervical cancer awareness campaign

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently sponsored the fourth cervical cancer national awareness campaign, which was organized by Safira CSR Company in partnership with the Ministry of Health. The national campaign was held at the Department of Women's Activities at the Patients Helping Fund Society (PHFS), in cooperation with the Business and Professional Women Network (BPWN).

As part of the campaign, Dr Ebtehal Al-Habib, Family Medicine Consultant, provided a carefully crafted introductory lecture, as well as an awareness lecture entitled "Causes and Prevention". Through which, she shed the light on the importance of maintaining a health triangle for women that measures three different aspects of a person's health, namely: physical, social and mental. Each aspect is equally

important in maintaining a healthy and effective professional and personal life.

Maha Al-Baghli, Founder and Managing Director of Safira CSR Company and manager of this health campaign, lauded KIB's highly-valued sponsorship. She added that cooperation between the public and private sectors in supporting awareness campaigns and social responsibility initiatives plays a huge role in promoting sustainable development in Kuwait.

Manager of the Corporate Communications Unit at KIB, Nawaf Najia, said: "As a national financial institution and a leader in social responsibility, KIB has always sought to sponsor high-impact initiatives and programs that aim at addressing pressing issues that affect diverse segments of the local community."

Najia added that KIB's sponsorship of this campaign came as part of its unwavering commitment to promoting women's health and supporting her role in the family and the community as a whole. Accordingly, the Bank is dedicated to promoting awareness about cervical cancer, particularly as a recent study by the Ministry of Health found that the majority of females in the population are unaware of the dangers of cervical cancer, or its causes and methods of prevention.

Ooredoo celebrates national days at Souq Murouj

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait celebrated Friday the National Days at Souq Murouj with a variety of musical and entertainment activities. Ooredoo organized a Samra which lasted for three hours. Ooredoo is proudly continuing its strategic partnership with Souq Murouj for the second consecutive year to bring to you Murouj Market, a monthly weekend market for local entrepreneurs and businesses. The market, which is held at Murouj Complex, includes an Ooredoo dedicated

booth, local farm produce, artisanal food products and crafts, with a 'street food' section aimed at highlighting the culinary diversity of Kuwait's local food community. The market also offers a section dedicated for children's activities. The market is held once a month on weekends, until March 2018.

Commenting on this, Ooredoo Kuwait Senior Director of Corporate Communications Mijbil Alayoub said: "We are happy to be celebrating our beloved country's National Days through this engaging project which supports local entrepreneurs and businesses. This sponsorship comes in tandem with our social responsibility strategy, which in turn is based on our core values of Ooredoo, of caring, connecting and challenging. We look forward to meeting those young enthusiastic small business owners as well as our valued customers at the market."



Kuwait to promote 2035 vision programs

KUWAIT: Minister of Information Mohammad Al-Jabri said the ministry has prepared programs to promote the Kuwait 2035 vision for development. The programs will include television and

radio, executed in cooperation with private media companies, he said in a statement yesterday. The Kuwait National Development Plan 'New Kuwait 2035' involves executing long-term development projects. It is organized around five themes, or desired outcomes, and seven pillars, or areas of focus for investment and improvement. The pillars include protecting the environment and boosting economy through creating different income sources. They also include developing healthcare, education, infrastructure and public administration. — KUNA

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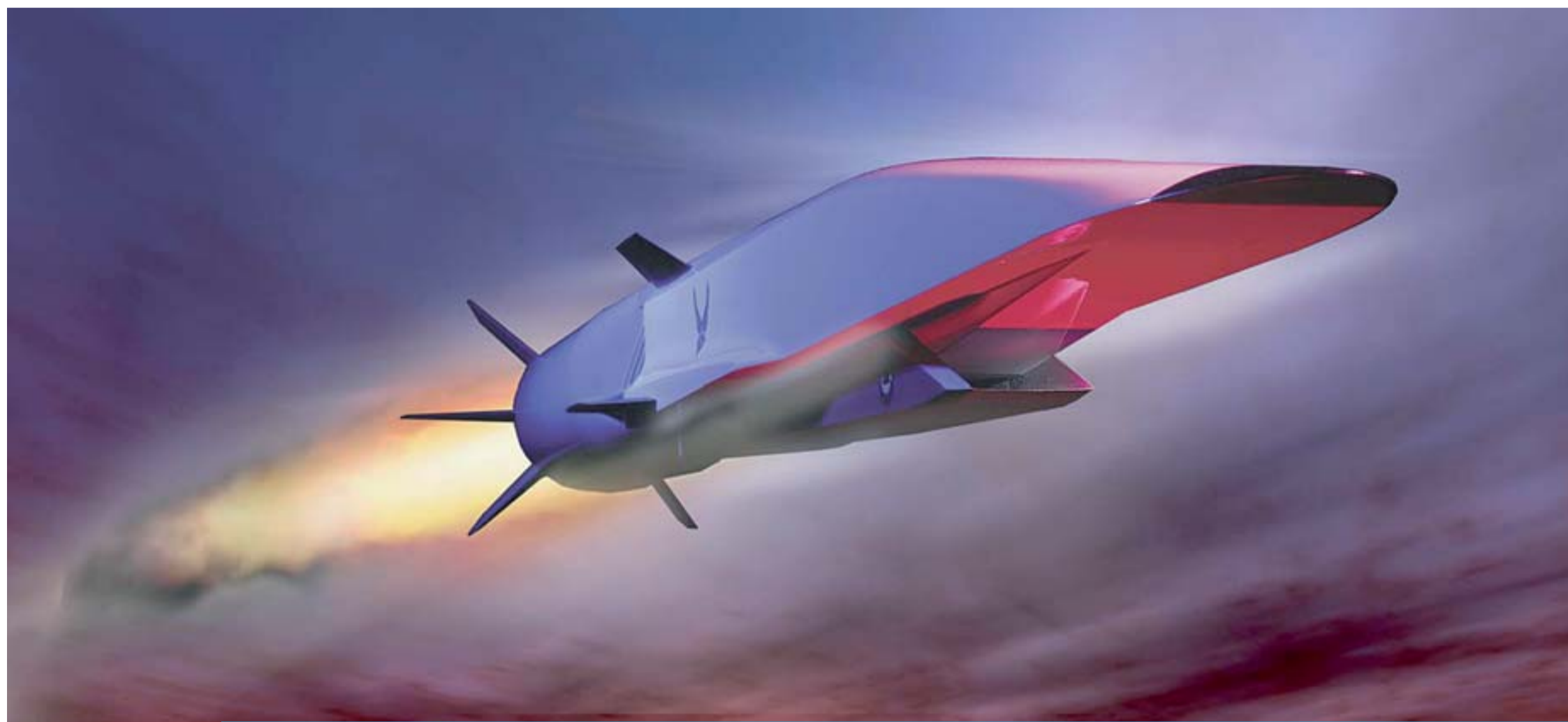


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CALIFORNIA: This undated photo illustration shows the X-51A Waverider set to demonstrate hypersonic flight, powered by a Pratt & Whitney Rocketdyne SJJ61 scramjet engine. —AFP

Pentagon to counter rivals' hypersonic missiles

Authorities turning attention to a new generation of threat

WASHINGTON: Even as the Pentagon hustles to ensure that its defenses keep pace with North Korea's fast-growing rocket program, US officials increasingly are turning attention to a new generation of missile threat. These weapons under development by China and Russia—as well as by the United States—can fly at many times the speed of sound and are designed to beat regular anti-missile defense systems. The hypersonic missiles could change the face of future warfare, as they can switch direction in flight and do not follow a predictable arc like conventional missiles, making them much harder to track and intercept.

"China's hypersonic weapons development outpaces ours... we're falling behind," Admiral Harry Harris, who heads the military's Pacific Command, warned lawmakers on Wednesday. "We need to continue to pursue that and in a most aggressive way in order to ensure that we have the capabilities to both defend against China's hypersonic weapons and to develop our own offensive hypersonic weapons," he added. In its proposed \$9.9

billion requested budget for 2019, the Missile Defense Agency (MDA) is asking for \$120 million to develop hypersonic missile defenses, a big increase from the \$75 million in fiscal 2018.

MDA Director of Operations Gary Pennett told Pentagon reporters this week that the potential deployment by America's rivals of hypersonic weapons—which could be launched from planes, ships or submarines and carry either nuclear or conventional payloads—would create a "significant" gap in US sensor and missile interceptor capabilities. "The key challenge to US national security and the security of US friends and allies is the emergence of new threats

designed to defeat the existing" ballistic missile defense system, Pennett said.

So, why the sudden alarm?

According to reports in the Japan-based Diplomat magazine, China has developed—and last year tested—a new type of hypersonic missile called the DF-17. The US Office of the Director of National Intelligence this week stated China "has tested a hypersonic glide vehicle." Russia too is

believed to be developing its own hypersonic weapon called the Zircon. According to Russian news agency Tass, it is to go into serial production this year.

A mile a second

Though the Pentagon is warning about hypersonics, the United States has been developing the technology for years. The Air Force says its X-51A Waverider cruise missile, tested in 2012, could travel at speeds faster than Mach 6 (3,600 miles per hour, 5,800 kilometers per hour). That's more than one mile a second, and future iterations are expected to go much faster. Part of the reason China has been able to advance its hypersonic missile programs is that it is not subject to anti-missile treaties signed between the United States and Russia. The 1987 Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty banned short- and intermediate-range ground-launched missiles. "Over 90 percent of China's ground-based missiles would be excluded by INF if they were now in it," Harris said. Still, by far the lion's share of the MDA's budget continues to go towards improving existing missile-defense systems. Various sensors and radars can track an incoming missile hurtling towards a target, then blast interceptor rockets toward it to pulverize it with kinetic energy. —AFP



Hypersonic missiles could change the face of future warfare

Counting the homeless in the City of Light

PARIS: Of Emmanuel Macron's many bold promises since sweeping to power last year, his pledge to completely banish homelessness from the streets of France was perhaps the boldest. The president gave himself until the close of 2017 to end rough-sleeping once and for all—but a midnight stroll through Paris shows that goal to be distant dream.

"We've failed there," Macron admitted last week, pointing to a continuing influx of African and South Asian migrants who often end up camping out. Visitors are often shocked by the grim poverty in pockets of the City of Light, the constant begging on the metro and the migrants' tents perched in the freezing cold along the scenic Canal St Martin. Charities estimate the homeless population of Paris to be about 3,000. Many are foreign, often from Eastern Europe. But there's no official data—an issue that city hall, under pressure to tackle one of the capital's most visible problems, is now trying to fix. After two blazing rows sparked by politicians' offhand remarks about homelessness, Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo carried out the city's first-ever homeless census on Thursday night. Some 2,000 volunteers and officials fanned out until 1 a.m., counting the bodies huddled in doorways and surveying those awake about their housing and health problems. Rail workers counted those sheltering at metro stations. Taking her cue from similar initiatives in New York, Brussels and Athens, Hidalgo hopes this "snapshot of reality" will lead to better policies to help those living in indignity as the city passes them by.

Heartbreak

Early figures will be released next week ahead of the full census next month. But what the figures won't show is the human misery behind them. "Welcome to the Hotel California," a stocky man slurred from his damp mattress near the lush Buttes Chaumont park. Barefoot as he huddled by a warm air vent, Danilo, a Croatian Serb who fought in the 1990s Balkan wars, gave his age as 44. But he looked a decade older. Beside him lay a friend with a badly bruised face, the pain numbed by alcohol. Danilo's is the story of a life spun out of control. An electrician who once worked for Siemens in Germany installing hospital machines, he moved to France two years ago after a painful divorce. Irregular work dried up. He spends his days drinking on his mattress and jovially greeting the neighbours. "Spring will come and I will change my life," he said. He pulled out a large silver cross from beneath his jumper. "I'm asking him for a little helping hand," he said, nodding heavenwards.

Ruth Owen, policy coordinator at the EU federation of homeless organisations FEANTSA, said rough sleeping had soared in Paris since the financial crisis, a phenomenon seen in other European cities like London, Dublin and Athens. "On a basic level, it's due to house prices rising faster than incomes," she said, adding that despite France having the strongest housing rights in Europe, this doesn't always amount to much. An estimate by statistics agency INSEE put France's national homeless count at 141,500 in 2012, but charities say this has likely rocketed due to a housing crunch and the migrant crisis. —AFP

Ethiopia declares state of emergency

ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopia announced a state of emergency on Friday, a day after the prime minister resigned, as pressure mounted on the country's ruling coalition. The coalition decided emergency rule was "vital to safeguarding the constitutional order", state-run Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation said. The announcement gave no further details. The defence minister was expected to hold a news conference yesterday morning giving further details, but it was delayed. Ethiopia only fully lifted its last state of emergency in August following months of curfews, restrictions on movement and the detention of 29,000 people.

Those measures followed two years of anti-government protests in which security forces killed hundreds of people in Amhara and Oromiya, the nation's two most populous provinces. The imposition of a new state of emergency may indicate that Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn's resignation on Thursday was the result of tensions among the four parties in the ruling coalition. The coalition has been in power since 1991 and controls all 547 seats in parliament. But cracks have appeared since the outbreak of unrest, with some senior officials resigning and others being sidelined.

Opposition demands

The two largest ethnic groups in the Horn of Africa country, the Oromo and Amharic, complain they are under-represented in the country's corridors of power. Mulatu Gemechu, deputy secretary of the opposition Oromo Federalist Congress, said on Friday Ethiopia needed a completely new political system. The Congress is one of seven parties that make up the biggest opposition coalition, MEDREK. "Ethiopians now need a gov-



ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopian journalist Eskinder Nega (center), who was given an 18-year prison sentence in 2012 on accusations of links to the banned Ginbot 7 group, reacts with people after being released from Kaliti Prison in Addis Ababa. —AFP

ernment that respects their rights, not one that keeps beating and killing them," he told Reuters. Mulatu's views are echoed in the Oromo heartlands that surround the capital Addis Ababa. It was there that protests against an urban development plan in 2015 sparked larger demonstrations demanding more freedom and civil rights.

"Oromos should not be jailed for exercising their rights," said Dinkissa, a university student in Ambo, a town in the region. "Oromos have been always mistreated. His (the prime minister's) resignation will not mean anything unless our rights are respected. Whoever comes to power should know that. Otherwise, we will not stop protesting." Rights advocates have frequently criticised Ethiopia's government for mass arrests and long jail terms handed to political opponents and journalists.

Prisoners freed

But more than 6,000 prisoners have been freed since January as the government strug-

gles to calm discontent. Most were detained during the mass protests; some were charged with terrorism offences. As well as tensions in its Oromo and Amharic regions, the government has grappled with several armed groups in the past decade. Among them is the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), which has fought the government since 1994 and draws support from some of the country's ethnic Somali population. Somalia and Ethiopia share a long and porous border.

This week the ONLF and Ethiopian authorities held private talks in Nairobi, an observer present at the discussions told Reuters on condition of anonymity. A tentative accord was reached on a ceasefire, prisoner releases, boundaries between the Somali and Oromiya regions of Ethiopia, and economic development, the observer said. But a final deal was not signed because the ONLF wanted a signatory from Ethiopia's central government, rather than the leader of the Somali region who represented the government at the talks. —Reuters

International

Desperate to come home, Syrians brave Islamic State mines in Raqqa

IS scatters mines across the ravaged city

RAQQA: Mohammed Kuraji returned to Syria's Raqqa to prepare a homecoming but ended up organising a funeral. Stepping into his home, an unexploded mine detonated and killed his elderly father. "It was terrifying. The blast was so strong that I couldn't hear," said the 26-year-old, who was also wounded in the incident two months ago. The Islamic State group was ousted from its de facto Syrian capital Raqqa in October, but it left mines scattered across the ravaged city.

Residents are desperate to return home, but they are being maimed and killed by unexploded—and sometimes insidiously hidden—ordnance. Under piles of rubble, behind old refrigerator doors, in blown-out buildings, IS has sown death everywhere. The explosives in Kuraji's home were triggered when his father leaned down to pick up a copy of the Quran. "I was thrown back into the neighbour's house and a wall collapsed onto my father," said Kuraji, who has two young children. He spoke to AFP from under a mountain of blankets, pulling back the covers to reveal his legs, set in place by splints and screws in his shins.



Islamic State has sown death everywhere

ed in mine blasts, many of whom died. Goh Mayama of the aid group Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said his clinic receives an average of six mine blast casualties a day on average in Raqqa, about a quarter of whom die.

'A view to kill'

Demining operations in Raqqa have been supported by the US-led coalition that backed the SDF's drive against IS. In December, the SDF said it had demined half the city. "The hospitals, public institutions, schools, power stations and bakeries are all demined," said SDF official Lokman Khalil. "Raqqa's a big city. There's a huge number of mines and it'll take time," he told AFP. He said the SDF had tried to keep civilians away, but Raqqa natives eager to leave displacement camps and come home had ramped up the pressure.

Now, the city's main streets have been cleared for traffic, though mounds of debris still line the sidewalks. Outside one damaged building, a group of children in oversized sweaters rummage through a pile of twisted metal and corrugated iron. Men with picks and shovels poke through the ruins, emerging occasionally with an unexploded mine. "We're paying people out of our own pockets to clear our streets and houses," said Abu Mohammed, a resident in his forties. The four-storey apartment building he owns has been completely destroyed, but he cannot begin rebuilding because of mines inside. "I have three kids. I keep them locked at home so that mines don't go off as they walk in the streets," he said.

According to the United Nations, some 60,000 people have returned to Raqqa despite warnings of the danger. "The number of unexploded ordnance in Raqqa is something that we have never seen before. It's extreme," said Panos Moutzis, the UN regional humanitarian coordinator for Syria. Between 50 and 70 people were being wounded or killed every week because of mines in the city. "Just to give you a point of comparison, it's the number that takes place in Afghanistan in a year," Moutzis said. "It's planted with a view to kill." —AFP



RAQQA: Photo shows shells and undetonated mines strewn near a burnt-out vehicle on a street in Raqqa that were left by the Islamic State (IS) group. — AFP

Strong quake shakes Mexico, causing panic

MEXICO CITY: A strong earthquake shook southern and central Mexico Friday, causing panic less than six months after two devastating quakes that killed hundreds of people. No buildings collapsed, according to early reports. But two towns near the epicenter, in the southern state of Oaxaca, reported damage and state authorities said they had opened emergency shelters. Later in the day, a helicopter en route to the scene carrying the country's interior minister and the governor of Oaxaca crash landed, killing two people on the ground even as the passengers survived. Both Mexico's National Seismological Service and the US Geological Survey put the quake's magnitude at 7.2.

It triggered Mexico City's alarm system and caused buildings to sway in the capital. It was also felt in the states of Guerrero, Puebla and Michoacan. Panicked residents flooded into the streets, fearing a repeat of the two quakes last September, which caused buildings to collapse and killed a total of 465 people. "To be honest, we're all pretty upset. We start crying whenever the (earthquake) alarm goes off," 38-year-old publicist Kevin Valladolid told AFP through tears after evacuating from his building in La Roma, in central Mexico City.

"We're stressed out, we have flashbacks. So we run out into the street. It's all we can do." On the north side of the city, Julia Hernandez said she felt like she was "in a boat" as the ground swayed beneath her feet. "Is it ever going to stop?" she said. Standing in the middle of the street, her eyes glued to her fifth-floor apartment, Graciela Escalante, 72, could hardly speak. "It was terribly strong. We barely managed to get down the stairs. It was the longest staircase in the world," she said. "We thought everything was going to collapse again." —AFP

Cameroon's separatists prepare for guerrilla war

IKOM: For the first time in his life, Victor Obi believes that the only way to win freedom in Cameroon is with a gun. "I don't want to die, but the only future is our independence, and they will not give it to us," said the student, whose name has been changed for his own safety. The 25-year-old is camped out in a small Nigerian village just kilometres from his home in Cameroon where authorities have launched a crackdown on English-speaking separatists.

"They killed my sister and my brother," said Obi, his voice heavy with hatred. "I have nothing to lose." In December, Obi says soldiers invaded his hometown of Kajifu and started shooting indiscriminately at suspected separatists, said to be running a major training camp in the thick equatorial forest surrounding the village. Kajifu is located in one of Cameroon's two English-speaking regions that have been pushing for independence from the French-speaking elite who rule the West African country.

On October 1, separatists declared the two regions as the self-proclaimed republic of "Ambazonia", marking a turning point for the country's English-speaking minority, which makes up around a fifth of the population. Cameroon President Paul Biya dispatched troops, combat helicopters and armoured vehicles to root out the dissidents, forcing tens of thousands to flee to neighbouring Nigeria.

At least 26 soldiers have been killed in the violence, according to an AFP tally. But the civilian death toll isn't known, with non-governmental organisations and independent media barred from the area. Though the original Ambazonia leaders have dissociated themselves from militant offshoots—they claim their struggle is peaceful—there are a growing number of attacks against the government.

'Raise an army'

On Sunday, before a national youth day parade in Batibo, a town near the Nigerian border, a government official was kidnapped and his car was burnt in an attack claimed by separatists. Lucas Cho Ayaba, leader of the Ambazonian Defence Forces (ADF), took credit for the kidnapping, declaring: "You kill my people, we will chase you to the gates of hell." The ADF, along with three other militias, represent the main groups which count more than 300 fighters, according to an International Crisis Group (ICG) estimate. There are also 10 much smaller but violent factions engaged in the conflict.

Few claim attacks and it's difficult to know exactly who



BASHU, Nigeria: Cameroonian refugees, including women and children gather for a meeting at Bashu-Okpambe village in Boki district of Cross Rivers State in Nigeria. — AFP

is responsible, said ICG researcher Hans De Marie Heungoup. "The main issue for Ambazonian groups is that they really lack finance," he said. "If they had money to buy weapons, train and feed their people, they could raise an army." But amidst the chaos, one thing seems certain: the crackdown has radicalised many English-speakers, among them the farmers and managers who have long felt marginalised by Yaounde but have never been interested in politics—until now.

'They are angry'

English-speakers in Cameroon have been marginalised for too long, said Pastor John Mbe, one of more than 33,000 refugees in Cross River State, Nigeria. "Many people have died already, we can't go back home," he said. "young people may not have guns and bullets, but I can tell you they're angry." A source close to the militants says they have adopted the guerilla philosophy of freedom fighters in Eritrea as well as that of Nelson Mandela's anti-apartheid movement in South Africa.

In Manyu, a region at the epicentre of the conflict, separatists block roads with tyres and tree trunks to ambush and attack military bases. —AFP

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International

US indicts 13 Russians for vote interference, secret campaign

Facebook faces big challenge to prevent meddling

WASHINGTON: The US special prosecutor investigating Moscow's meddling in the 2016 presidential election has indicted 13 Russians for allegedly running a secret campaign to tilt the vote, prompting claims of vindication from President Donald Trump. The indictment—which includes the first charges laid by special counsel Robert Mueller for election interference—detailed a stunning operation launched in 2014 in a bid to sow social division in the US and influence American politics “including the presidential election of 2016.” Mueller alleges that by mid-2016, the campaign—under the direction of Yevgeny Prigozhin, a close ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin—became focused on boosting Trump and demeaning his rivals including Democrat Hillary Clinton. It allegedly involved “hundreds” of people working in shifts and with a budget of millions of dollars. Three companies were also indicted. Moscow dismissed the allegations as “absurd.”

According to the indictment, members of the group posed as US citizens on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram, posting content that reached “significant numbers” of Americans. The group was allegedly in contact with “unwitting” members of the Trump campaign, but had a broader “strategic goal to sow discord in the US political system.” Content created by the group was retweeted by the president's two eldest sons Don Jr and Eric, as well as other top campaign officials and members of Trump's inner circle. “There is no allegation in this indictment that any American was a knowing participant in this illegal activity,” said Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein. He added that there was also no judgment on whether the campaign “altered the outcome.”



13 accused of running secret campaign to tilt the vote

ble-edged sword for Trump, who has repeatedly dismissed claims of Russian interference as “fake news” and a “hoax” designed to take away from his election victory.

On one hand, they confirm Russia interference, but they also seem to clear his campaign of knowing involvement with at least a portion of Moscow's efforts to influence the contest. Russia is also suspected of hacking and leaking embarrassing Democratic emails. Four Trump campaign officials, including his campaign manager Paul Manafort and his national security advisor Michael Flynn, have already been indicted as part of Mueller's broader investigation. Trump has publicly mulled firing the former FBI director and has repeatedly sought to influence his investigation through public warnings. On Friday, Trump seemed to say that the new indictments should put an end to allegations of campaign collusion. “It's time we stop the outlandish partisan attacks, wild and false allegations, and far-fetched theories, which only serve to further the agendas of bad actors, like Russia,” he said in a subsequent statement issued by the White House.

Troll farm

The group was said to be based in Putin's home town of Saint Petersburg,

but some of the accused traveled to the United States for political intelligence gathering. Stops included Nevada, California, New Mexico, Colorado, Illinois, Michigan a pivotal state in the election-Louisiana, Texas, Georgia and New York, according to the indictment. An unnamed Texas-based American political operative is said to have instructed them to focus on so-called “purple states”—which swing between Republican and Democratic control.

The group organized pro-Trump rallies in Florida, New York and North Carolina, but much of its work was focused on producing material that was damaging to Clinton and Trump's Republican rivals Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio. The group purchased ads on social media and other websites either “expressly advocating for the election of then-candidate Trump or expressly opposing Clinton,” the indictment said. Other ads encouraged blacks and Muslims not to vote, and alleged voter fraud in



WASHINGTON: US Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein announces the indictment of 13 Russian nationals and 3 Russian organizations for meddling in the 2016 US presidential election. —AFP

several states. Two of the firms are said to have Russian government contracts.

Facebook's challenge

The Russian influence operation designed to tamper with the 2016 US presidential election used a combination of old-school espionage tactics and 21st-century technologies that will not be easy to stop, even now that the methods have been exposed, experts said. Social media companies, especially Facebook Inc and Twitter Inc, have been under heavy pressure to find ways of stopping what is often referred to as “information warfare” on their services.

The indictment of 13 Russian nationals on Friday, announced by US Special Counsel Robert Mueller, made extensive use of records from Facebook and Instagram, according to people familiar with the matter. Yet the combi-

nation of tactics revealed in the indictment, including the use of shell corporations and stolen IDs, deployment of virtual private networks to avoid online detection, and payments to unwitting Americans, suggests even a company as powerful as Facebook could struggle to stop such activities by itself as they happen. US spy agencies have said Russia would try to interfere in the 2018 midterm elections, again by using social media to spread propaganda. “They can't out of hand stop it, because it's very difficult for them to trace those things,” said Ann Ravel, a former member of the US Federal Election Commission. The clandestine purchase of advertising on the site through fake personas was particularly alarming, she said. To know the identities of ad buyers, internet companies might need to duplicate the “know your customer” practices of banks and regularly share information with authorities, Ravel said. —Agencies

Murder, outrage, impasse: How gun crime bedevils US

WASHINGTON: The United States has once again been forced to confront its deadly distinction as the world's only developed country to be plagued by mass school shootings. After a teenager shot dead 17 people in a Florida high school on Wednesday, there is zero indication that the United States is in any way ready to adopt major new reforms to stop such tragedies occurring again. In a recurring nightmare that appalls millions of Americans and is unfathomable overseas, the Florida carnage was the 18th US school shooting since January 1. Each year, the country loses around 33,000 people to gun violence. Yet each time, the event unfolds in the same way.

First come the horrified reactions, then unity in the face of tragedy, followed by outrage, political polarization and then impasse. If the debate rings hollow, it's because both sides are immutable. At one end stand those who oppose any gun control in the name of the second amendment to the US Constitution, which provides for the right to bear arms. They argue that no law can prevent deranged individuals and criminals from obtaining a weapon, nor from opening fire in a school. Given the dangers, law-abiding citizens might as well be armed to protect themselves.

On the other side stand the likes of former Democratic president Barack Obama, who issued a new appeal for action on Thursday, insisting “we are not powerless.” “Caring for our kids is our first job. And until we can honestly say that we're doing enough to keep them safe from harm, including long overdue, common-sense gun safety laws that most Americans want, then we have to change,” he tweeted. But many gun control advocates have given up hope of meaningful, national reform in a majority-led Republican Congress where Obama failed to enact curbs amid partisan rancor.

Access to guns

Instead reformers concentrate their fight on local politics, trying to convince elected officials in a greater number of states to make criminal and psychiatric background checks compulsory before any gun sale. But even this is often unachievable in a country that places the gun at the heart of its mythology—that of a nation born in the blood of its revolution and which remains proud of its Wild West heroes.

Politicians bankrolled by the National Rifle Association, the powerful lobby group that endorsed Donald Trump's presidential run, refuse even to accept that a firearm is by definition a lethal object and that widening access is risky. On Thursday, Trump delivered a televised address to declare the United States a country in mourning—but avoided all mention of guns. He portrayed the Florida massacre as the act of someone mentally disturbed, without mentioning how the shooter could have acquired an assault rifle at 19, an age at which most Americans cannot legally buy alcohol. —AFP

Britain pleads for 'urgent' EU security deal

MUNICH: British Prime Minister Theresa May pleaded yesterday for an urgent deal with the European Union on post-Brexit security cooperation, warning that citizens' lives were at stake. In a speech at the Munich Security Conference, she acknowledged that no deal currently exists between the EU and a third country “that captures the full depth and breadth of our existing relationship.”

But she said there was no reason both sides could not come up with practical ways to create a “deep and special partnership” on security. “We cannot delay discussions on this,” May said. She also warned European partners not to put politics above cooperation against crime and terrorism. “This cannot be a time when any of us allow competition between partners, rigid institutional restrictions or deep-seated ideology to inhibit our cooperation and jeopardise the security of our citizens,” May told an audience that included European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker.

The premier warned that if there was no deal on security by the time Britain leaves the bloc in March 2019, speedy extraditions under the European Arrest Warrant “would

cease”. And if the UK were no longer part of Europol, the EU's law enforcement agency, information sharing would be hampered—undermining the fight against terrorism, organised crime and cyberattacks. “This would damage us both and put all our citizens at greater risk,” May warned, urging European leaders to show “some real creativity and ambition” in coming up with a bespoke UK-EU security pact. “We must now move with urgency to put in place the treaty to protect all European citizens wherever they are in Europe,” May said. Some experts have warned that cooperation on police and security matters could be limited by Britain's refusal to accept the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) after Brexit. May appeared to respond to those concerns by saying that the UK would “respect the remit” of the ECJ when working with EU agencies, in return for “respect for our unique status as a third country”. “But as a country outside the European Union, we will have our own sovereign legal order, so the European Court of Justice will no longer have jurisdiction in the United Kingdom.”

'Substantial disagreements'

May has in the past drawn criticism for appearing to link security—in which Britain is a major player—with her hopes for a new trade deal with the EU. But there was no hint of that in yesterday's address, the latest in a clutch of speeches by senior British officials recently as the government seeks to clarify its ambitions for Brexit. There has been little progress in recent months in Britain's negotiations with the EU on the



MUNICH: British Prime Minister Theresa May gives a speech during the Munich Security Conference yesterday in Munich, southern Germany. —AFP

island nation's future relationship with the bloc. EU negotiator Michel Barnier warned last week that there were “substantial disagreements” with Britain on a post-Brexit transition period. May's comments came a day after the heads of key British, French and German spy agencies warned in a rare joint appearance that intelligence sharing and cooperation must continue even after Britain leaves the EU. —AFP

Pressure mounts on FBI director to quit

PARKLAND: Pressure is mounting on the FBI director to resign after his agency admitted it failed to investigate a warning that the man accused of killing 17 people at a Florida high school possessed a gun and the desire to kill. The disclosure spread angry disbelief among residents of the Miami suburb of Parkland where Wednesday's massacre unfolded, and led Florida's governor Rick Scott to call for FBI chief Christopher Wray to resign. “The FBI's failure to take action against this killer is unacceptable,” Scott, a Republican, said in a statement. “We constantly promote ‘See something, say something’, and a courageous person did just that to the FBI. And the FBI failed to act.”

Scott's comments came after the Federal Bureau of Investigation said in a statement that a person described as someone close to accused gunman Nikolas Cruz, 19, called an FBI tip line on Jan 5, weeks before the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, to report concerns about him. “The caller provided information about Cruz's gun ownership, desire to kill people, erratic behavior, and disturbing social media posts, as well as the potential of him conducting a school shooting,” it said. That information should have been forwarded to the FBI's Miami field office for further investigation, but “we have determined that these protocols were not followed”, it said.

US Attorney General Jeff Sessions said he has ordered a review of FBI procedures following the shooting, carried out by a gunman armed with an AR-15-style assault rifle and numerous ammunition cartridges. “We have spoken with victims and families, and deeply regret the additional pain this causes all those affected by this horrific tragedy,” Wray said in a statement. The FBI has also separately been criticized by some Republicans over its investigation of allegations of Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential election, heaping further scrutiny on the agency led by Wray since President Donald Trump fired James Comey last year. Russia denies any involvement.



LAS VEGAS: People hold up candles during a vigil put together by the Route 91 Foundation at the Las Vegas Community Healing Garden for victims of Wednesday's shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. —AFP

Safety rally

The mishandled information followed a tip-off to the FBI in September about a YouTube comment in which a person named Nikolas Cruz said: “I'm going to be a professional school shooter.” The FBI said it investigated that comment but was unable to trace its origins, closing the inquiry until Cruz surfaced in connection with Wednesday's shooting. Broward County Sheriff Scott Israel told a news conference his office had received about 20 “calls for service” in the last few years regarding Cruz and would scrutinize all of them to see if they were handled properly. But Israel said law enforcement should not be held responsible for Wednesday's tragedy. “The only one to blame for this killing is the killer himself,” he said.

More vigils and funerals will be held over the weekend in and around Parkland. Two gun shows and a rally calling for the firearm safety legislation are due to be held nearby. “We

cannot have one more family, one more student, one more life taken because of a failure to hear and enact comprehensive firearm safety legislature in Florida,” said organizers on Facebook of the rally to be held at the federal courthouse in Fort Lauderdale yesterday. Organizers of the gun shows to be held in Boca Raton and at the Miami-Dade County's fairgrounds could not be reached by Reuters.

The massacre has raised concerns about potential lapses in school security and stirred the ongoing US debate pitting proponents of tougher restrictions on firearms against advocates for gun rights, which are protected by the US Constitution's Second Amendment. Some political leaders including Trump have said mental illness prompted the shooting. Cruz had been expelled for undisclosed disciplinary reasons from the school where the attack occurred. Former classmates have described him as a social outcast trouble-maker with a fascination for weaponry. —Reuters

International

Kosovo celebrates 10 years since splitting from Serbia

Sovereignty remains fiercely contested by Serbia

PRISTINA: Kosovo yesterday celebrated 10 years since it declared independence, a moment of pride for its ethnic Albanian majority, although sovereignty remains fiercely contested by Serbia. The capital Pristina is covered in the blue-and-yellow Kosovan flag for a weekend of festivities, with Kosovo-born British pop star Rita Ora due to headline a concert in the main square.

A decade after a war between Kosovo's ethnic Albanian rebels and Serbian troops left 13,000 people dead—most of them Albanians—the Kosovan parliament declared independence from Serbia on February 17, 2008. "It was the happiest moment for all of us as a people," said President Hashim Thaci in a statement on Friday, as children in Kosovo's Albanian schools began the day with lessons dedicated to the anniversary.

This was not the case in the completely separate schooling system of Kosovo's Serb minority, which remains loyal to Belgrade. Children from the two ethnic communities rarely mix. Although more than 110 countries have recognised Kosovo as a state in the past 10 years, Belgrade refuses to do so. Sovereignty is also rejected by Russia, whose Security Council veto prevents Kosovo from joining the United Nations, and five EU countries including Spain and Greece.



Kids from ethnic communities rarely mix

Serbian Defence Minister Aleksandar Vulin said on Thursday. The former foes have reached deals on issues such as freedom of movement since talks began in 2011, but the EU-brokered dialogue has stalled over the past two years.

Federica Mogherini, EU representative for foreign affairs, nevertheless said on the eve of the anniversary that she was "realistically optimistic" that a "legally binding agreement" could be reached by the end of 2019. Some officials in Belgrade have raised the prospect of redrawing Kosovo's borders along ethnic lines. In the far north, heavily dominated by Serbs, the Kosovo flag is shunned in favour of the red, blue and white stripes of Serbia. But Thaci insists that Kosovo is "indivisible" and many fear a partition deal would destabilise the fragile Balkans.

Father Sava Janjic, a prominent Serb Orthodox monk in Kosovo, warned that the "collapse" of a multi-ethnic Kosovo would be a dangerous precedent for the region. "The Balkans will again become a powder keg," he wrote on Twitter on Friday. The Kosovo war started in 1998 and came to an end the following year when Belgrade pulled out after NATO bombarded its forces, citing a need for a humanitarian intervention.

Trump applauds progress

From Washington, one of Pristina's staunchest allies, President Donald Trump, sent his congratulations to Kosovo for making "great strides in strengthening its sovereignty and multi-ethnic democracy". "While more work must be done, we applaud your progress." Kosovo's ties with the West have at times been strained in the past year, as it awaits



PRISTINA: Young Kosovar boys dressed as police officers salute in the street in Pristina they celebrate the 10th anniversary of Kosovo independence. —AFP

the first indictments from an EU-backed war crimes court trying former members of the Kosovo Liberation Army. A number of leading KLA figures, such as Thaci, remain dominant in Kosovo and ruling coalition MPs recently attempted to block the tribunal—a move that sparked strongly worded warnings from the US and other Western allies.

Kosovo's milestone is also marred by huge economic challenges. With the unemployment rate at around 30 per-

cent—and 50 percent among young people—tens of thousands have moved abroad in search of work over the past decade. Home to 1.8 million people, Kosovo is one of the poorest parts of Europe and hugely dependent on remittances from its diaspora to drive economic growth of around four percent. "The conditions for a decent living in Kosovo have not been fulfilled, so it is clear why people are leaving," said law student Berat Mumi, 17, in Pristina—AFP

Partition concerns

The "normalisation" of ties between Belgrade and Pristina is crucial to both sides' bids to join the European Union, but Serbian officials say recognition of independence is a red line. "Serbia will not recognise Kosovo and it will especially not recognise it in order to become an EU mem-

Kosovo Roma, the forgotten victims of war

PODGORICA: It was not their war, but the Kosovo conflict in the 1990s forced tens of thousands of Roma—the Balkans' eternal scapegoats—into exile. So for those living in a Roma camp in the capital of neighbouring Montenegro, the 10th anniversary of Kosovo's independence on Saturday is little cause for celebration. They fled Kosovo almost 20 years ago for fear of being accused by pro-independence ethnic Albanian rebels of collaborating with Serb forces in the 1998-1999 war that claimed 13,000 lives. Many Kosovo Roma who stayed were accused, most of them falsely, of such collaboration or other crimes. Serdjan Baftijari, now 25, says his family paid for "not taking sides" in the war.

He was a child when he left the central ethnic Serb enclave of Gracanica in the summer of 1999, as the tide of the conflict was turning. A NATO bombing campaign was forcing Serb troops out of the breakaway territory. The ethnic Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was taking control. "We lived in a majority-Serb area. We were scared," Baftijari said. Now he is among about 2,000 people living in the camp in the suburb of Konik in Podgorica. Most of them recently moved into apartments but about 60 families remain in converted containers or huts. Children play in the rubbish and the communal water pipes where residents fill up their cans are leaking.

'Serious abuses' of Roma

Kosovo Roma were victims of "serious abuses" during the war, according to the Belgrade-based Humanitarian Law Centre (HLC), a prominent non-governmental organisation in the Balkans. They were sometimes forced by Serbs "to bury the bodies of Albanian civilians and KLA members, to dig trenches for the military, and to pillage and destroy ethnic Albanian property," it said in a 1999 report. Today there are about 35,000 Roma in Kosovo, said Gazmen Saljievic, a Roma activist in Kosovo.

Several thousand refugees have returned there, but the number is still far from the estimated 100,000 or more who lived in Kosovo before the war. Those who did not flee faced danger—HLC's Kosovo branch said that 240 Roma were either killed or went missing in the war. "The



PODGORICA: Roma children play outside their makeshift house in a camp in the suburb of Konik in Podgorica. It was not their war, but the 1990s Kosovo conflict forced tens of thousands of Roma—eternal scapegoats in the Balkans—into exile. —AFP

Roma were collateral damage in all the conflicts in former Yugoslavia," said Saljievic. "It is easy to attack us. We have nobody to back us, no state, no system to protect us."

With aid from the European Union, Montenegro has ramped up the construction of apartments in the camp. The goal is to eradicate provisional facilities in 2018. But that will not end the inhabitants' social isolation, said Elvis Berisha of the Walk With Us youth organisation, which campaigns for Roma education. "Of course it is better to live in an apartment than in a container," he said. But among the locals, he says, the camp has come to be known as a place for "garavi"—an insulting term for Roma.

'Never return to Kosovo'

Ferdi Bahtiri's family is one of about 50 at the camp waiting to be relocated. In the meantime, the 28-year-old has set up two containers to live in with his wife and their

five children. For money, he unloads trucks at a market in Podgorica, earning between five and 15 euros (\$6-18) a day. The camp's shared toilets are unusable. The Bahtiris use the ones at the home of their cousins, who were fortunate enough to be relocated to an apartment.

A native from the northern Kosovo town of Mitrovica, Bahtiri is convinced that this unhygienic environment caused the liver cirrhosis suffered by his youngest daughter, 18-month-old Aida. She needs treatment abroad but he cannot afford it. Like Baftijari, he had to briefly return to Kosovo to get a passport and avoid becoming stateless. Few of these refugees have managed to obtain Montenegrin nationality. Despite the harsh conditions of life in the camp, Bahtiri said he "will never return to Kosovo". "My children were born here. My parents were buried here," he said. "I do not know anyone there anymore."—AFP

'I fear for my life': Philippine lawyer behind Duterte investigation

MANILA: Philippine lawyer Jude Sabio felt it was his duty to bring President Rodrigo Duterte's deadly war on drugs to the attention of international war crimes prosecutors, but now that a probe into the killings is under way, he fears he too has become a target. Sabio, who describes himself as penniless and on the run, said he had received death threats from Duterte supporters on social media after filing a petition with the Hague-based International Criminal Court in April last year. "I'm in a state of constant paranoia because I fear for my life," Sabio, 51, told AFP in an interview. "It could be very possible that a bullet will hit me."

ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda launched a "preliminary examination" after receiving Sabio's petition, which alleges around 8,000 extrajudicial killings, and this could lead to a full investigation by the court. Sabio wants the president arrested. Duterte won a landslide victory in 2016 elections largely on a pledge to eradicate drugs. He is accused of stoking the killings with inflammatory statements and repeated promises to pardon any police officer charged with murder. Police say they have killed 4,021 drug suspects in self-defence, but rights groups claim police and shadowy vigilantes have actually killed more

than 12,000 people. Duterte maintains he is beyond the ICC's jurisdiction and has threatened to withdraw his country from the treaty that created it if the tribunal pursues a formal investigation. "The problem with me is when I see something wrong I fight," said Sabio, who had a low-key legal practice for two decades and unsuccessfully ran for public office twice. "Now to the question of how it feels to be standing against Goliath, to me the fact that he is president, I'm sorry to say this, doesn't matter to me."

'Traacherous'

The unassuming lawyer—the son of public school teachers of modest means lost the 2010 election for mayor of a southern town and was disqualified for being a "nuisance" senatorial candidate in 2016, officially ruled as lacking funds to run his campaign. But his life started to change course when in October 2016 he agreed to represent Edgar Matobato, a self-confessed assassin whose deposition forms part of the ICC case.

Matobato had spectacularly confessed at a Senate public hearing a month earlier that he was a member of the "Davao Death Squad" that killed at least a thousand people on Duterte's orders when the president was mayor of Davao city. The lawyer alleged in the suit that the drug war was the "Davao Death Squad" on a national scale, which Duterte rejects. "It is targeting a vulnerable civilian population, composed mostly of the poor living in depressed communities," Sabio said.

"The only way to stop the killings is to issue a warrant of arrest. Arrest president Duterte and bring him to The Hague," Sabio, a short, stocky man with an unruly moustache, has feared for his life ever since and he left his southern home city of Cagayan de Oro for his own safety a



MANILA: Lawyer Jude Sabio gestures as he shows the communication he submitted to the International Criminal Court against Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, during an interview in Manila. —AFP

year ago—the last time he saw his 75-year-old mother. His assassins could be "riding in tandem" he said, referring to gunmen on motorcycles, said by witnesses to be behind many of the unsolved street murders of known small-time drug dealers. Responding to questions about the threat against Sabio, Duterte's spokesman Harry Roque said Tuesday the president bore no "ill will" against the lawyer. "Let's make sure that if there's a threat, he should report it to the police," Roque told reporters. However, Sabio hit back Friday, saying "these people are treacherous". He said he does not know Duterte personally and denied working for the opposition, taking on the case purely on principle.—AFP

News in brief

Exporting drone parts

WASHINGTON: Federal authorities have charged three men with illegally exporting drone parts and other material from the United States to Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group, the US Justice Department said on Friday. It said in a statement that suspects Usama Darwich Hamade and Issam Darwich Hamade were in custody in South Africa while Samir Ahmed Berro remained at large. According to the indictment, the trio conspired and attempted to export goods including inertial measurement units suitable for use in drones, a jet engine, piston engines and recording binoculars to Hezbollah in Lebanon from 2009 to 2013, the statement said. Hezbollah is a heavily armed Shi'ite movement which is part of the Lebanese coalition government and backed by Iran.—Reuters

Indonesia inks deal

JAKARTA: Indonesia has inked a billion-dollar deal to buy 11 Sukhoi Su-35 jets from Russia, an official said yesterday. The contract, signed by both countries' representatives in Jakarta on Wednesday, is worth a total \$1.14 billion, Indonesia defence ministry spokesman Totok Sugiharto said. "Two units of Sukhoi jets will be delivered in August 2018," he said. Another six jets would be delivered 18 months after the contract comes into effect, and the final three a further five months later, he said. The deal comes after Indonesia said in August that it would seek to trade palm oil, coffee and tea for Russian fighter jets, saying it wanted to capitalise on international sanctions on Moscow.—AFP

Armenian 'genocide' motions

ANKARA: Turkey summoned the Dutch charge d'affaires to Ankara yesterday to express its unhappiness with a pair of proposed bills that would see the Netherlands recognize as genocide the 1915 killing of as many as 1.5 million Armenians. The four Dutch governing parties have expressed support for two proposals by the conservative Christian Union party which are due to be debated in parliament in coming weeks. One recognises the deaths as genocide and a second calls for a Dutch official to attend the country's formal genocide remembrance day on April 24. The bills risk further souring relations between Turkey and the Netherlands.—Reuters

Suicide blasts kill 19

KANO: Three suicide bombers killed 19 people at a fish market in northeast Nigeria, civilian militia leaders said yesterday, in an attack blamed on Boko Haram jihadists. Friday's deadly attacks came in the week that hundreds of Boko Haram suspects went on trial at civilian courts at a military base. One fighter involved in the 2014 abduction of more than 200 schoolgirls from the Borno state town of Chibok was jailed for 15 years. The suicide blasts happened at about 8:30 pm on Friday in Konduga, some 35 kilometres southeast of the Borno state capital, Maiduguri. Babakura Kolo and Musa Ari, from the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) assisting Nigeria's military against the Islamists, said the bombers were all men.—AFP

Fire kills 9 in China

BEIJING: Nine people have died in a fire at a waste processing facility in southern China that is suspected of being sparked by fireworks residue, state news agency Xinhua said yesterday. The fire broke out in the early hours of the morning in Qingyuan city in the southern province of Guangdong, Xinhua said, citing the local government. The fire has been extinguished and a survivor with serious burns was sent to hospital, the report said. Police have detained several suspects in connection with the fire. Xinhua said, without giving details. "Preliminary investigation showed that fireworks residue initially caused the fire. When three workers were trying to put out the flames, an explosion occurred, killing more people living nearby," it said.—Reuters

Analysis

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Washington Watch

15 years later

By Dr James J Zogby

Over the next few weeks, I want to take a look back to February and March of 2003, to those fateful days leading up to the Bush administration's disastrous invasion and occupation of Iraq. I remember all too well the lies that were told, the hysteria that was created, the bullying tactics that were used to silence debate, and the mass mobilization that was organized in opposition to the war.

In the end, then President George W Bush ignored American public opinion and the sage advice of senior Republican statement like former Secretary of State James Baker and former National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft and invaded Iraq leading to the most consequential disaster in recent US history.

The Iraq war has had a staggering impact that continues to grow over time. The magnitude of this disaster can be measured in lost lives, treasure, capacity, and prestige. From 2003 to the formal withdrawal of US fighting forces in 2011, the war took the lives of 4,500 Americans and well over 150,000 Iraqi civilians. And more than 600,000 US thousand veterans of these wars are now registered as disabled.

To fully understand the war's impact, however, we must also factor in the number of young men and women, who after multiple tours in Iraq and Afghanistan (400,000 served three or more tours of duty in these two wars) have returned home suffering from post-traumatic shock disorder (PTSD) - about 10 percent of veterans suffer from PTSD.

A great number of them have tragically joined the ranks of the homeless or the addicted or they have committed suicide. Studies show that on an average night almost 40,000 veterans are homeless. And in recent years, the average number of suicides among this group of PTSD veterans is a staggering 22 per day - meaning that more young veterans of these two wars die each year at their own hands out of despair than died in battle in both wars combined.

The direct costs of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have been estimated to be almost two trillion dollars, with trillions more needing to be factored in to cover the long-term healthcare and disability payments to the wars' veterans. The two long unwinnable wars resulted in grounding down and exhausting the US military. It also demonstrated their inability to decisively beat insurgencies and resistance movements. This proved demoralizing to US troops and also established the limits of the world's most powerful and expensive military machine.

At the same time, the Bush Administration's reckless and arrogant unilateralism ("you're either with us or against us") caused friction with allies and contempt for public opinion world-wide. By the end of the Bush Administration, US favorable ratings were at their lowest point, worldwide. US abhorrent behaviors exhibited during the war (Abu Ghraib, torture, Guantanamo, etc) also fueled extremist currents giving new life to Al-Qaeda which, though routed in Afghanistan, metastasized, spreading their anti-American hate across many continents. And the weakened and depleted US military spawned the unforeseen consequence of enabling the emergence of multiple and competing regional powers who were emboldened to expand their influence.

Of course, it wasn't supposed to be that way. As envisioned by the wars' main protagonists, the neo-conservative "Project for a New American Century", a decisive US victory in a war like the one they encouraged in Iraq was needed to secure American hegemony in the New World Order. They worried that at the end of the Cold War the US had to project decisive strength to dissuade any would-be competitors. After a display of overwhelming force, they were convinced that the danger of a multi-polar world could be averted and the 21st Century would be an American Century.

Campaign of lies

As they rushed to war, the Bush administration and its neo-conservative acolytes engaged in a massive propaganda campaign of lies to win support for an invasion. When I say that they lied, I don't mean their fabricated case about Saddam's "nuclear program" or their false efforts to portray the Iraqi regime as the region's principle sponsor of terror - this was the brief presented by then Secretary of State Colin Powell at the United Nations in his failed effort to win international backing for the invasion. No, the more serious lies they told were done so in their effort to sell the war to the American as an easy, cheap, and lofty venture.

In Congressional testimony and press briefings, high-ranking administration officials argued the war would only require between 60,000 to 90,000 troops (in fact, the Administration fired the Pentagon general who at a Congressional hearing had admitted that the invasion and occupation of the country, if they were to succeed, would require over 350,000 troops). The fighting, administration spokespeople said, would be over in a few weeks. US troops would be greeted as liberators. And the total cost to the US treasury would be between \$1 to \$2 billion before Iraqi oil production would kick in and cover the rest. If all this were not fanciful enough, the promoters of the war repeatedly told the American people that when the dust settled Iraq would become a "model democracy" that would serve as a "beacon for the New Middle East". In his speeches leading up to the invasion, Bush went further saying that the war "will free people" and that his motivation was to bring "God's gift of freedom" to the Iraqi people.

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



Fears of expanding war might trigger peace

Syria's civil war is in danger of flaring into a regional or even global conflict, but some diplomats hope the high stakes could, paradoxically, pave the way for a peace accord. Last week, five Russians were likely killed in a US-led coalition bombing on pro-regime Syrian fighters, the Russian government said. A few days later Israel lost an F-16 warplane in reprisal attacks against Syrian and Iranian military targets after intercepting an alleged Iranian drone.

These serious and unprecedented events were discussed in an urgent mid-week UN Security Council meeting. "The ingredients for a regional or potentially major global confrontation have come together now, and the risk must be taken seriously," France's UN ambassador Francois Delattre told AFP. Since the destruction of the Iranian drone "there has been no escalation", said a colleague of Delattre's on the UN Security Council, speaking on condition of anonymity. But there is now a risk of direct confrontation between the United States and Russia, possibly with new deaths, another diplomat countered.

Russia cooling on Syria?

On Wednesday, a Security Council meeting on Syria that was initially slated to be public but was ultimately held behind closed doors, suggested a turning point had been reached. The language that emerged was a mix of tension and caution that converged on one point: The need for unity to calm things down. UN ambassador Nikki Haley said peace "is urgent" in Syria, then blamed Iran for its role in the violence. "On every front of this conflict, we find fighters imported by Iran from Lebanon, Iraq, and

Afghanistan," she said. Haley described it as "a dangerous game of pushing boundaries, instead of behaving responsibly and committing to peace."

Russian ambassador Vassily Nebenzia told reporters that his country is "doing everything to prevent any major international confrontation in Syria. We are working on that hard". According to Nebenzia, no country has "delivered more than us on the political process in Syria." He

committee to amend the Syrian constitution. Syria does not want its make-up to be dictated by the United Nations, nor does Moscow seem keen on seeing Iran making inroads in Syria and risk regular clashes with Israel.

'Dark hours'

In closed door meetings, Russia, which may be at the end of its military and financial commitment in Syria, speaks of its will to get out of the conflict, insists it has no hidden agenda, and even goes so far as seeking Western help to persuade Damascus, according to this diplomat. This is a new position after the series of Russian vetoes in late 2017 of Western resolutions that went against Syria. "The road to peace will come when all of the parties stop provoking each other, and choose the responsible path," Haley said.

In that sense the risk of a major international clash in Syria might open the doors for a breakthrough. This can serve as "leverage to obtain a peace accord in Syria at a time when lines are beginning to move," said Delattre. After seven years of a complex and devastating war that has brought in many regional and international actors, "we are back to the darkest hours," diplomats say.

They point out a list of besieged areas such as eastern Ghouta, Idlib and Afrin, the target of a Turkish military operation against Kurdish militia forces allied with the United States. The operation has created tension between the United States and Turkey, two key members of NATO, a military alliance dominated by Washington. Due to this tension, NATO strategic interests are now affected by how the balance of power in the Syrian war evolves. —AFP



Need for unity to calm things down

cited Moscow's ties with the Damascus regime and the opposition, its support for so-called "de-escalation zones," and peace talks in Astana and Sochi which Russia says are aimed at facilitating other talks in Geneva.

A diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that Russia is losing ground even after all it has invested militarily in Syria. Moscow's influence over Damascus remains tentative, as seen in a recent warning from the Syrian regime on the results of talks in Sochi aimed at forming a

Pak could face pain from return to 'grey list'

The prospect of Pakistan being placed back on a global terrorist financing watchlist could endanger its handful of remaining banking links to the outside world, causing real financial pain to the economy just as a general election looms. Washington and its European allies have co-sponsored a motion calling for the nuclear-armed nation to be placed on a "grey list" of countries deemed to be doing too little to comply with anti-terrorist financing and anti-money laundering regulations, with a decision expected next week when member states of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) meet in Paris.

The move is part of a broader US strategy to pressure Pakistan to cut its alleged links to Islamist militants waging chaos in Afghanistan. Pakistan, which denies such links, last month shrugged off a US aid suspension worth \$2 billion. But inclusion on the FATF watchlist could inflict real damage, bankers and government officials say. Islamabad has sought to head off the motion by amending its anti-terrorism laws and by taking over organizations controlled by Hafiz Saeed, a Pakistan-based Islamist whom Washington blames for the 2008 Mumbai attacks that killed 166 people.

But there are concerns Pakistan's nearly \$300 billion economy, expanding at its fastest rate in a decade at above 5 percent, could lose steam if it ends up on the FATF watchlist, from which it was removed in 2015 after three years. "We don't think the consequences are going to be drastic but it's definitely not good," said one senior finance ministry official.

Military successes against militants and massive Chinese infrastructure investments have restored some vim to an economy hobbled by a long-running Islamist insurgency and wrecked by the 2008/09 global financial crisis. Officials are aiming for economic expansion to hit 6 percent this fiscal year (July-June) and Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi's ruling party will want to

avert a slowdown in the lead up to a general election due in about six months.

Being placed on the FATF watchlist carries no direct legal implications, but brings extra scrutiny from regulators and financial institutions that can chill trade and investment and increase transaction costs, according to experts. Mike Casey, a partner at law firm Kirkland & Ellis in London, said being put back on the grey list would heighten Pakistan's risk profile and some financial institutions would be wary of transacting with Pakistani banks and counterparties. "Others might elect to avoid Pakistan altogether, viewing the legal risks associated with doing business there to outweigh any economic benefits," he said.

Current account deficit

A decline in foreign transactions and a drop in foreign currency inflows could further widen Pakistan's large current account deficit, the Achilles heel of an economy that required an IMF bailout in 2013 following a balance of payments crisis. Another major worry is that the likes of Standard Chartered, the largest international bank in Pakistan with 116 branches, or Citibank and Deutsche Bank, who mostly deal with corporate clients, would pull out.

Banks have been retreating from high-risk countries in recent years amid intense pressure from global regulators to guard against money laundering and terrorist financing. "The level of due diligence is already high in countries like Pakistan, but if this goes ahead then the banks will really have to reassess the risk-reward scenario," said a senior executive with a large foreign bank, which has business interests in Pakistan.

In September, Pakistan's biggest lender, Habib Bank, was fined \$225 million and effectively forced to shut its US operations by the New York regulator due to compliance failures over money laundering and terrorist financing. US watchdogs have dished out more than \$16 billion in fines for anti-money laundering (AML) compliance failings since the end of 2009, according to data compiled by Hong Kong consultancy Quinlan & Associates. "No one wants to be get caught in a situation where for a few million dollars of business the bank will have to pay billions in fines," added the foreign bank executive. —Reuters

Indictments could set stage for more Mueller charges

Special Counsel Robert Mueller's indictment of 13 Russian individuals and three organizations for allegedly interfering in the 2016 US presidential election sets the stage for the prosecution of Americans who may have helped the Russian effort, some legal experts said. Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein told reporters on Friday there was no allegation in the indictment that any American knew about the alleged scheme. It said Russians did contact "unwitting" members of the campaign of now President Donald Trump in a bid to support him while denigrating his opponent, Democrat Hillary Clinton.

The indictment said the Russians conspired "with persons known and unknown", which could include Americans. "While they went to great pains to say they are not indicting any Americans today, if I was an American and I did cooperate with Russians I would be extremely frightened today," said former federal prosecutor Patrick Cotter. The White House took a different view, issuing a statement saying that Trump had been briefed on the matter and was "glad to see the Special Counsel's investigation further indicates there was NO COLLUSION between the Trump campaign and Russia."

Mueller has been silent on where the probe is headed. It has so far led to guilty pleas from Trump's former national security advisor and a one-time campaign aide to lying to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, as well as indictments of his former campaign manager Paul Manafort and Manafort's business partner Rick Gates. Moscow has denied meddling in the election.

Leah Litman, a law professor at the University of California, Irvine, said that meant the Russian government was extremely unlikely to turn over any of its nationals for US prosecution. There is no

formal extradition agreement between the United States and Russia. There is no crime called collusion in US law, but former federal prosecutor Randall Eliason, now a professor at George Washington University Law School, said the same conduct is often covered by the offense of conspiracy. "The fact is that collusion is potentially a crime," Eliason said. "This has always been clear, and it is even clearer now."

The indictment alleges a scheme to impede the functioning of the US Federal Election Commission and other government agencies. Prosecutors also accuse the Russians of opening bank accounts under false names and unlawfully using stolen identities of Americans to post on social media in support of Trump. To charge an American with conspiracy, legal experts said, Mueller would need to show that person was aware the Russians were trying to interfere in the election and knowingly aided them.

For example, people who participated in activities to support the Trump campaign could be charged if they knew Russians had organized them to help sway the vote. If an American helped direct the Russian acts, that could lead to charges as well, said Harvard Law School Professor Alex Whiting. "If there were meetings between the Trump campaign and the Russians, and the Trump campaign officials encouraged the Russians or guided them to particular types of work, or provided their assistance so that they could focus their interference, that would be collusion," said Whiting, a former federal prosecutor.

Some experts said Friday's indictment does not indicate Mueller's probe was broadening. Bill Jeffress, a criminal defense lawyer at Baker Botts, said he thought it was significant that Mueller made clear that members of the campaign only dealt with Russians unwittingly. "If they had enough evidence that an American were complicit they would have included it," said Jeffress. But Cotter said the narrative set forth in the indictment could easily include many more participants. "The net is tightening," he said. "They have moved up a whole other step on the ladder." —Reuters

News

Qatar calls for EU-style security pact for Mideast

MUNICH: Middle Eastern states should put their differences behind them and forge a security pact modeled on the European Union in order to pull the region back from the brink, Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani said on Friday. He asked the international community to keep up diplomatic pressure on the countries concerned to achieve that, but offered few other details.

"I believe that it is time for wider regional security in the Middle East. It is time for all nations of the region to forget the past, including us, and agree on basic security principles and rules of governance, and at least a minimum level of security to allow for peace and prosperity," Sheikh Tamim told a security conference in Munich. "This should not be a pipe dream. Too much is at risk. The Middle East is at the brink. It's time to bring it back."

Qatar, a tiny but rich Gulf Arab state, has been isolated over the past seven months by trade and travel sanctions imposed by the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Egypt over accusations - denied by Doha - that it supports terrorism and regional rival Iran. Efforts by the United States and Kuwait to end the rift have failed to produce any results.

In addition to the Gulf row, Sheikh Tamim referenced violent conflicts in Syria, Yemen and Libya which have sparked humanitarian catastrophes and one of the largest refugee crises ever with millions of people washing up in Europe in recent years. "We can mirror efforts of the European Union, its ability to find common ground to rebuild and prosper," he added. "Shifting from feuds to cooperation will require that we each be held accountable."

Meanwhile, US National Security Adviser H R McMaster called yesterday for more forceful action to halt Iran's development of what he said was an increasingly powerful network of proxy armies in Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and Iraq. McMaster accused Iran of escalating a campaign to increase its influence in the



MUNICH: Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani gives a speech during the 54th Munich Security Conference on Friday. — AFP

Middle East by building and arming "Hezbollah-style" proxy armies in Iraq, Syria and elsewhere as it has done in Lebanon.

The goal was to weaken Arab governments and turn the proxy forces against those states if they pursued policies that ran counter to Tehran's interests, he said. "So the time is now, we think, to act against Iran," he told the Munich Security Conference, calling on US allies to halt trade that was helping underwrite the expansion of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, the most powerful military and economic force in the Islamic Republic. The United States deems Lebanon's Hezbollah a terrorist organization.

"What's particularly concerning is that this network of proxies is becoming more and more capable," he said. Iran has denied accusations that it meddles in the affairs of its Middle East neighbours and has dismissed suggestions it stop supporting groups such as Hezbollah. McMaster also railed against the 2015 nuclear accord signed by Iran and six other countries, saying investments made by German firms and others were helping fund Iran's missile program and its other activities in the Middle East. — Reuters

13 killed in minister's quake zone copter crash

MEXICO CITY: A 7.2-magnitude earthquake that rattled Mexico on Friday triggered a tragedy when a minister's helicopter killed 13 people during a crash-landing on the way to the epicenter. The UH-60 Black Hawk military helicopter landed on its side, crushing a van. There were no reported casualties from the quake itself, which damaged buildings. The chopper was carrying Interior Minister Alfonso Navarrete and Oaxaca state Governor Alejandro Murat, who were unharmed, President Enrique Pena Nieto said.

"Unfortunately, multiple people on the ground lost their lives and others were injured," he wrote on Twitter late Friday. Yesterday, the Oaxaca prosecutor's office said five women, four men, and three children were killed by the helicopter, while another victim died en route to hospital. Fifteen other people were injured, the office said in a statement. Rescuers quickly swarmed the accident site searching for survivors.

Navarrete told the Televisa TV network that the helicopter pilot lost control of the aircraft about 40 m above the ground as it was coming in to land. He added that some passengers were hurt. The helicopter went down in the southwestern town of Pinotepa de Don Luis - 37 km from the quake epicenter, according to the US

Geological Survey. About 50 homes in the nearby town of Santiago Jamiltepec were damaged, as well as the town hall and church, but no one was killed in the quake, the interior ministry said.

Oaxaca state authorities opened shelters for those affected, and nearly 6,000 soldiers and federal police were deployed to help with the emergency response. Both Mexico's National Seismological Service and the US Geological Survey put the quake's magnitude at 7.2. It struck at 5:39 pm (2339 GMT) at a relatively deep 24.7 kilometers, said the USGS.

Panic and flashbacks

The earthquake came less than six months after two quakes killed hundreds of people in the country. On Sept 7, an 8.2-magnitude earthquake shook the nation and killed 96 people, mostly in the states of Oaxaca and Chiapas. Then on September 19 - the 32nd anniversary of a 1985 quake that killed 10,000 - a 7.1-magnitude quake hit the country, leaving 369 people dead. Friday's quake triggered Mexico City's alarm system and caused buildings to sway in the capital. It was also felt in the states of Guerrero, Puebla and Michoacan.

Panicked residents flooded the streets, fearing a repeat of last September's deadly quakes.

"To be honest, we're all pretty upset. We start crying whenever the (earthquake) alarm goes off," 38-year-old publicist Kevin Valladolid told AFP through tears after fleeing his building in La Roma, in central Mexico City. "We're stressed out, we have flashbacks. So we run out into the street. It's all we can do."

Patients from a nearby hospital were forced outside, some in wheelchairs or carting their IV lines. Similar scenes played out in Veracruz. On the north side of Mexico City, Julia Hernandez said she felt like she was "in a boat" as the ground swayed beneath her feet. "Is it ever going to stop?" she said. Standing in the middle of the street, her eyes glued to her fifth-floor apartment, Graciela Escalante, 72, could hardly speak. "It was terribly strong. We barely managed to get down the stairs. It was the longest staircase in the world," she told AFP. "We thought everything was going to collapse again."

Seismic hotbed

Officials in affected states said they were inspecting buildings damaged by last year's quakes, which are especially vulnerable to collapse. "Obviously people are afraid," said the emergency response chief for the city of Puebla, Gustavo Ariza. Pena Nieto tweeted that the National Emergency Committee had been activated because of the magnitude of the quake. Mexico sits at a spot where five tectonic plates come together, making it particularly vulnerable to earthquakes. — AFP



JAMILTEPEC, Mexico: Soldiers of the Mexican army walk in front of a military helicopter that crashed into a van yesterday. —AFP

Calls for justice as Filipina maid's body...

Continued from Page 1

parents repair the house that was damaged by Super Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan)," in 2013, the aunt recalled. The slain maid also wanted to finance the college education of her youngest sister, Joyce, the aunt said.

Residents lined the highway as the funeral convoy escorted by police cars and motorcycles made its way to Demafelis' hometown, about a two hour's drive from the city. Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello said late Friday that "working groups" from both countries were discussing forging a memorandum for protecting the rights of Filipinos in Kuwait, many of whom are working as maids. Domestic workers in that country are not covered by ordinary labor legislation, and accounts of Filipinas being subjected to abuse and exploitation in the Middle East have long circulated.

On Friday, the victim's wailing sister threw herself at her sibling's coffin after it was unloaded at Manila airport, while her stunned brother Joejet Demafelis tried to comfort her. "This is a huge loss for us. Her dream,

she told my mother, is that she was leaving only because she wanted to help our parents and our youngest sibling," the brother told reporters at the cargo terminal. "My parents can't accept this. Every so often, they start weeping," he added. "I hope they can find those who killed my sister".

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Public Authority of Manpower's spokesman said yesterday PAM is properly playing its due role in protecting workers of various nationalities. PAM is using legal means and specific measures, according to its competence and powers, in order to safeguard the rights of the private sector's workers. Aseel Al-Mezaid said in a press statement. Mezeid, who doubles as head of the PAM's public relations and media department, dismissed as "incredible" recent reports about workers' rights, along with statements by some countries' officials on the conditions of their citizens in Kuwait.

The PAM is eager to protect the rights of workers, but it takes into account the necessity of avoiding possible negative effects on projects and governmental contracts, she added. In this context, several meetings were held between the PAM and representatives of the embassies of the Philippines and India in order to resolve problems regarding some companies' failure to pay the salaries of their workers, PAM's spokesman pointed out. — Agencies

Pak child killer handed four...

Continued from Page 1

The killing sparked calls for the public execution of Ali after officials said his DNA had been recovered from the scene of the crime and matched samples from similar cases. At least 12 cases of rape and murder have been

recorded in the Kasur area in the past two years. Ali confessed to eight cases, but it is not clear if the four others are linked. "It was a fair trial," said Mian Sultan Masood, the defense lawyer provided by the state. "The accused had confessed his crime. In this context he was correctly sentenced to death," he added.

According to the victim's father Ameen Ansari, Ali - who lived nearby - had taken part in the initial protests that erupted after Zainab's body was discovered. Prior to the recent flood of cases, Kasur was already infamous for sexual abuse, after authorities uncovered a huge pedophilia ring in the city in 2015. — AFP

India, Iran agree to support Kabul...

Continued from Page 1

However, local Indian media have reported frustrations over delays in awarding a contract to develop a major gas field known as Farzad B in the Gulf. India's foreign ministry said yesterday that "discussions continue" on Farzad B. The two leaders also signed agreements for avoidance of double taxation and the implementation of an extradition treaty from 2008. As part of a lease contract, India will help Iran run a multipurpose container terminal at Chabahar for 18 months. India,

Iran and Afghanistan signed a three-way transit agreement in 2016 to develop Chabahar port aiming to boost economic growth in the region.

The \$85 million project, just 90 km from the China-sponsored Gwadar port in Pakistan, creates a transit route between India, Iran and Afghanistan. India is trying to develop Chabahar as a way to gain access to the markets of central Asia as well as Afghanistan. But progress is slow because of concern that President Donald Trump's administration in Washington may eventually scrap the Iran nuclear deal. "We will support the construction of the Chabahar-Zahedan rail link so that Chabahar gateway's potential could be fully utilized," Modi said. "We want to expand connectivity, cooperation in the energy sector and the centuries-old bilateral relationship." — Agencies

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Sports

Return to number one at 36 was even beyond my dreams: Federer

One of the most stunning late-career runs witnessed in any sport

LONDON: If someone had told Roger Federer 13 months ago that reclaiming the world number one ranking would require three more grand slam titles and three Masters 1000s, even he might have declared it mission impossible.

Fast forward a year and a bit, however, and the 36-year-old is back at the summit—the oldest man to make it since the ATP rankings came into being in 1973. One of the most stunning late-career runs witnessed in any sport has seen Federer put together a sustained spell of brilliance few believed was possible when he missed half of the 2016 season with knee and back problems.

On Friday a 4-6 6-1 6-1 victory over Dutchman Robin Haase in the quarter-finals of the ABN AMRO tournament in Rotterdam guaranteed that the Swiss would rise to number one for the fourth time in his career.

Fourteen years after he first achieved it, this one felt extra special, said the 20-times grand slam champion. "Well it's a deep sense of satisfaction," Federer told a selected few reporters on a conference call hours after his milestone victory.

"A lot of work went into it, coming back from the injury obviously. Just having had the year that I've had, winning three slams, that's what it took to get the ranking. "I think I've shown resilience. I have a great team around me and we took a lot of good decisions in the last three years. I always planned for longevity and I never gave up that I could get back to winning ways, without ever dreaming of world number again to be honest, that was too far."

Federer took a wildcard for Rotterdam, knowing that a run to the semi-finals would knock Rafa Nadal off the top and become the oldest player, man or woman, to be world number one. Haase looked as

though he had not read the script when he took the first set but Federer was never going to let the opportunity pass him by—saying afterwards that it had been the perfect scenario to complete a fairytale comeback.

"I think it was great that I had to play for it this week," he said. "I just didn't just get it by Rafa losing somewhere or dropping points or me sitting on the sidelines like in 2012 when I was on holiday and got the ranking two weeks after Wimbledon."

"This way to play a match where you know that you are going to be world number one if you win it, in front of a crowd, is a great feeling." Incredibly Federer first became world number one in 2004 when he beat Juan Carlos Ferrero in the semi-final of the Australian Open before going on to take the title.

On that occasion he stayed there for 237 weeks. "The goal (this time) was to be world number one for a week, that's plenty for me," he said. "If it's more, great, I'll take it. If I play well, good things will happen. "It's the ultimate achievement in our sport to get the number one ranking, it just doesn't come easy."

While Federer's vast army of fans took to social media to laud a player who continues to defy time, the man himself was just happy to be part of good day for Swiss sport. "I was just watching the Olympics, got distracted in a good way, because Switzerland won three medals today," he said. "Was watching the highlights and that helped me, it distracted me, gave me a great motivation." Asked to compare the 22-year-old Federer to the 36-year-old model, he said the older version had the edge. "I hope I will win—the 36-year-old me!" he said. "We hit harder now, you have less time." — Reuters

“ Well it's a deep sense of satisfaction ”



ROTTERDAM: Switzerland's Roger Federer celebrates after victory over Netherlands Robin Haase in their quarter-final singles tennis match for the ABN AMRO World Tennis Tournament in Rotterdam on Friday. — AFP

Watson thrives on Hollywood vibe

LOS ANGELES: Bubba Watson's bid for a third US PGA Tour title at Riviera Country Club isn't the only thing occupying his time this week. Watson raised eyebrows before the Genesis Open started when he said he'd withdraw if an unfavorable tee time might cause him to miss the NBA All-Star celebrity game, across town at Staples Center on Friday evening.

In the end, he didn't need to worry. Watson teed off at 7:43 a.m. and produced a second-round 70 that left him three shots off the clubhouse lead of Patrick Cantlay with plenty of time to spare. "Hoping my car doesn't break down so we get there," Watson said. "So I can say I played or sat on the bench. "It's just the atmosphere," he added. "Saying I sat on the bench at Staples Center, seeing some of the greats, some of the people that I love and have friendships with, it will be a blast."

The NBA's All-Star festivities aren't the only extra-curricular attractions taking up Watson's time in star-studded Los Angeles. He said he "may or may not have" taped a show with US comedy icon Jay Leno. He visited

comedian and chat show host Ellen DeGeneres and watched a taping of TV sitcom "The Big Bang Theory".

"It's Hollywood," Watson said. "Do stuff! Let's have some fun and enjoy life." All the activity hasn't seemed to hurt Watson's on-course performance. He leapt up the leaderboard on Friday with a run of five birdies in six holes in the middle of his round before a couple of late miscues slowed his progress. "It was just a good stretch of holes," said Watson, who teed off on 10 and bogeyed the 15th before rolling in an eight-footer for birdie at the par-three 16th.

"Eighteen I birdied yesterday, birdied it today. And number one somehow I made another seven-footer for a birdie. "Then made a nice recovery out of the rough there on two, which was my 11th hole, made about a 12-, 15-footer. So it's just making the putts at the right time."

"Then I missed a short one that I felt would go one way and it decided to go the other way. That's golf." Watson, 39, is coming off a disappointing 2016-17 season in which he dropped out of the top 100 in the world rankings.

The two-time Masters champion missed the cut at Augusta National last April. But Watson says he's now healthy and ready to contend. Riviera, where he won in 2014 and in 2016 — the most recent of his nine US PGA Tour titles—would seem an ideal spot for him to do so. "Anybody that's won at a place, they love it," Watson said. "You get energized." — AFP

Woods misses cut at Riviera after eight bogeys

CALIFORNIA: A struggling Tiger Woods failed to make the cut at the Genesis Open in California on Friday as he had eight bogeys in a round of five-over-par 76. The disappointing play left the 14-times major champion at six-over 148, four strokes over the projected cut of +2.

"I've just got to play more tournaments," said Woods, making his second start of the PGA Tour season after a year-long absence following back surgery. Britain's Graeme McDowell and American Patrick Cantlay shared the clubhouse lead at seven-under 135.

Northern Ireland's McDowell shot a five-under 66, while Cantlay posted a 69. American Sam Saunders also was at seven-under through 15 holes with countryman Ryan Moore another stroke back after a 68.

Bad light forced play to be abandoned with about 20 players still to finish their second rounds. They will return today to finish. Still troubled by his driving and putting, Woods made only three birdies during his second round and had more bogeys than scores of par.

Despite his problems, the former world number one committed to play in next week's Honda Classic in Florida, marking the first time in three years he has entered tournaments on back-to-back weeks.

"I need some tournament rounds," Woods said of the event near his Florida home. Despite the problems, Woods said he



PACIFIC PALISADES: Tiger Woods plays his shot on the 13th hole during the second round of the Genesis Open at Riviera Country Club on Friday in Pacific Palisades, California. — AFP

believed he was progressing in his comeback. "I haven't played golf in years," he said. "I'm starting to come back and it's going to take a little time. I am progressing, I'm starting to get a feel for tournament golf again. I just need to clean up my rounds."

Woods' troubles began on the front nine and went downhill when he had birdies around a bogey at the fourth hole before three bogeys in four holes from the sixth left him at two-over. A birdie at 10 appeared to give him fresh hope, but it did not last.

"I thought I could pump a drive down there at 11 and get to it with an iron and turn the tide around and play a good solid back nine," Woods said. "But I didn't do it." Three successive bogeys and another at 16 followed, wiping out any hope of salvaging the round.

Poor putting did not help. "Today was the first day I felt bad with a putter this year," Woods said.

"I didn't feel very good when I was warming up about putting." — Reuters

KFH renews partnership with Kuwaiti Olympic champion, Al-Mudhaf

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) renewed its sponsorship to the Kuwait's national team trap shooter, Khaled Al-Mudhaf during the 2018-2019 season. This comes as part of the bank's social responsibility and efforts to support the youth, particularly those talented people who raise Kuwait's flag in the international forums and championships.

The Olympic champion Khaled Al-Mudhaf received sev-

eral gold medals in different shooting championships at the GCC and Asia levels. He won an Olympic seat and participated in Brazil's Olympic Games.

KFH's sponsorship and strategic partnership with Al-Mudhaf reflects the interest in supporting the national players to participate in prominent international, regional, and local tournaments. Such players attract positive attention to their country through their achievements.

Meanwhile, Al-Mudhaf valued KFH's sponsorship applauding the Bank's outstanding role in achieving the social responsibility.

It is worth noting that KFH had inked a significant strategic agreement to support the youth in collaborating with the Ministry of State for Youth Affairs. This agreement embodies the bank's keenness to recognize those who contribute in raising the Kuwaiti flag high in the international forums and championships, while confirming its instrumental role in the corporate social responsibility.



Al-Mudhaf receiving the partnership agreement from a KFH official.

Sports

World trounces USA to jump start all-star weekend

Simmons won the battle of two hottest rookies in the league

LOS ANGELES: Team World attacked the rim and dominated from three-point range as the internationals kicked off the NBA 2018 All-Star Weekend festivities with a 155-124 victory over Team USA on Friday. Serbian guard Bogdan Bogdanovic scored 26 points and drained seven of 13 from beyond the arc and his Sacramento Kings teammate Buddy Hield tallied a team-high 29 points in the Rising Stars Game at Staples Center arena. "I got hot first and then Bogie (Bogdanovic) got hot and he continued to stay hot," said Hield, of the game which features 20 of the top first- and second-year NBA players. "I think Bogie had 29 and I had 26. So it was good tonight for both of us."

"We represented Sacramento well and represented our countries well. The whole thing was to come here and stay aggressive and get the win." Canada's Jamal Murray, who plays for the Denver Nuggets, delivered 21 points and seven assists and Dario Saric, of Croatia, scored 18 and made four-of-seven three pointers. Boston Celtics Jaylen Brown led Team USA with a game high 35 points and 10 rebounds while Los Angeles Lakers Kyle Kuzma scored 20 points and Jayson Tatum of the Celtics had 15.

Australia's Ben Simmons won the battle of the two hottest rookies in the league this season, scoring 11 points and dishing out 13 assists for Team World compared to Donovan Mitchell's seven points and seven assists for the USA. Team Worlds 10 players came from nine different countries with Canada leading the way

with two, Murray and Toronto's Dillon Brooks. The World led 78-59 at the half then stretched that to a whopping 36 points at the end of the third quarter. Their biggest lead was 39 points.

WORLD BEATERS

"It was the all-star game so it wasn't like a really competitive game," said Hield, of the Bahamas. "But the world is getting better. I am proud to see a lot of guys around the world from France, Australia, you have (Joel) Embiid from Cameroon. The world is showing progress catching up to American basketball."

The World dominated from three-point range hitting 41 percent (23 of 56) of their attempts compared to just 27 percent for the Americans. "It seemed like somewhere in the late first quarter and early second quarter we just started making a bunch of threes and pulled away," said World coach Rex Kalamian, who is an assistant coach with the Toronto Raptors. USA coach Roy Rogers said they tried to mix it up in the second half but they just didn't shoot well enough to win.

"Even at halftime we talked about adjustments we were trying to make. They tried. But unfortunately it was just one of those nights where the shots didn't go down for us," said Rogers, an assistant coach with the Houston Rockets. "What I told the guys afterwards is every game is a learning experience."

You choose what you want to learn from this game."

“World is showing progress catching up to American basketball”



LOS ANGELES: Jaylen Brown #7 of the USA Team goes up for the dunk against the World Team during the Mountain Dew Kickstart Rising Stars Game during All-Star Friday Night as part of 2018 NBA All-Star Weekend at the STAPLES Center on Friday in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

Rogers said he even had to do some in-game coaching because he didn't want it to turn into a slam-dunk contest at the end like several of these all-star games have in the past. "The last two minutes I got on my guys about not finishing the game the right way and they got back on track," he said. "Overall I was satisfied with

their competitive spirit." Rogers said this rookie class is helping re-define the style of play in the NBA.

"It is no longer a cookie-cutter league where big guys just stay on the post," he said. "This rookie class symbolises where the NBA is headed-speed, athleticism and shooting ability." — AFP

It's not finished yet says 'world best' Kohli

JOHANNESBURG: Indian captain Virat Kohli, labelled the best batsman in the world by head coach Ravi Shastri, wants his team to rise to one more challenge before they finish their gruelling South African tour.

"The tour is not over," said Kohli ahead of a three-match Twenty20 series starting at the Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg on Sunday. After leading India to a crushing 5-1 one-day international series victory to compensate for a 2-1 Test series defeat to the South Africans, Kohli said India were still hungry for success.

"That is the frame of mind we are in and we are looking forward to the T20s now," he said. Kohli capped an exceptional personal performance by hitting 129 not out in the sixth one-day international in Centurion on Friday, taking his aggregate to a world bilateral one-day series record of 558 runs at an average of 186. Shastri lauded Kohli's leadership and his batting skills: "I've seen him batting across all conditions, all formats. It's not just averages, it's the way you get runs, when you get it and then to back those runs up on what the team does. I would safely say he is the best batsman in the world."

'NO BACKWARD STEPS'

Asked whether he considered himself the best, Kohli told journalists: "I am not competing with anyone. I only look to help my team. If you are thinking about the team special things happen. "If you are thinking about being ahead of someone else, you'll be found



CENTURION: India batsman and captain Virat Kohli celebrates his half century during the sixth One Day International cricket match between South Africa and India at the Super Sport Park in Centurion on Friday. — AFP

out very soon by this game."

Kohli said India had pledged not to take "a backward step" after losing the first two Tests in South Africa. He said their win in the third and final Test had been a turning point. "We have created momentum which has lasted until now. It's with us and we have to make the most of it, even until the last day of the tour."

Ten of the 13 Indian players who appeared in the one-day series are in the T20 squad, while eight of South Africa's squad played in the one-day games. With a Test series against Australia starting on March 1, South Africa have rested all their likely Test players with the exception of AB de Villiers.

De Villiers, who was once himself described by Kohli as the best batsman in the world, had a poor one-day series in comparison to his Indian Premier League teammate, making only 62 runs in three innings and needs to find his best form ahead of the Tests against Australia.

A key for South Africa will be to master Indian wrist spinners Kuldeep Yadav and Yuzvendra Chahal, who took a combined 33 wickets in the one-day games.

Squads:

South Africa: JP Duminy (captain), Farhaan Behardien, Junior Dala, AB de Villiers, Reeza Hendricks, Christiaan Jonker, Heinrich Klaasen (wkt), David Miller, Chris Morris, Dane Paterson, Aaron Phangiso, Andile Phelukwayo, Tabraiz Shamsi, Jon-Jon Smuts.

India: Virat Kohli (captain), Rohit Sharma (vice-captain), Jasprit Bumrah, Yuzvendra Chahal, Shikhar Dhawan, MS Dhoni (wkt), Dinesh Karthik (wkt), Kuldeep Yadav, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Manish Pandey, Hardik Pandya, Axar Patel, Lokesh Rahul, Suresh Raina, Shardul Thakur, Jaydev Unadkat

Fixtures:

March 18, Johannesburg
March 21, Centurion
March 24, Cape Town. — AFP

NZ quick to bury T20 debacle as England loom

AUCKLAND: New Zealand wasted no time debating bowling woes after a record Twenty20 loss to Australia as they regrouped yesterday ahead of their tri-series showdown against England.

Martin Guptill described Friday night's loss to Australia as "disheartening" but quickly added: "We haven't really got a lot of time to dwell on it." When Guptill was flailing away at the top of the New Zealand innings in Auckland, victory seemed certain, which would have made Sunday's clash with England in Hamilton a mere training exercise before Wednesday's final for which Australia had already qualified.

But after the big-hitting opener smacked 105 off 54 balls as New

Zealand posted a seemingly daunting 243, Australia canded the New Zealand bowling to produce the highest run chase in Twenty20 history to win by five wickets.

Ben Wheeler was severely put away and had gone for 64 from 3.1 overs when he was forced out of the attack for bowling two waist-high no balls. Senior bowlers Tim Southee and Trent Boult both went for more than 40 but Guptill refused to blame the attack for the dramatic defeat.

"I don't think you can really say that," he said. "Australia came out and played extremely well and struck it well pretty much from ball one. "To put 240 on the board and to lose the game, it's a little bit disheartening, but we haven't really got a lot of time to dwell on it, because we've got another game in two days' time, so it's a quick turnaround, and get out there tonight."

New Zealand beat England by 12 runs when they met earlier in the week setting up an all-or-nothing showdown today. Should England win the return match, then the side with the superior overall run rate will progress to the final against Australia. —AFP

Kenya's Simader draws inspiration from super-G shock

PYEONGCHANG: Kenya's Sabrina Simader said yesterday she would be inspired to surprise a few people herself after watching Czech skier Ester Ledecka win one of the most astonishing Winter Olympic races of all time.

Simader, the first speed skier to race for Kenya and only its second Winter Olympic athlete, finished 38th out of 44 in the women's super-G, in which Ledecka - better known as a snowboarder - came from nowhere to beat defending champion Anna Veith of Austria by a hundredth of a second.

"It was so cool and so emotional, also for me, because I mean - a Czech girl wins the Olympics, and nobody expected that before," Simader told reporters. "I hope I can also surprise some other people in the next race."

That won't be at the Olympics, however, as the teenager has finished her programme in Pyeongchang - rebounding in the super-G from the disappointment of failing to complete the second run of the giant slalom



PYEONGCHANG: Kenya's Sabrina Simader reacts after competing in the Women's Giant Slalom at the Yongpyong Alpine Centre during the Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympic Games in Pyeongchang. — AFP

on Thursday.

It was the biggest milestone yet for the young woman, born in Kenya and raised in Austria, who hated skiing when she first tried it out as a little girl. "I learned it at three years (old) from my stepfather in Austria. He has his own ski lift, a small one, so I learned it there and I fell in love - not at

the beginning, but afterwards."

She remembered her first reaction: "Oh no, it's too cold and I never saw snow and it was like, 'Oh my gosh, no.'" Sixteen years on, she is still living in Austria, training with the Austrian team and hoping she can get more funding to pursue her ambitions in the sport. — Reuters

Iran protests ban on wrestler who threw bout to avoid Israel

TEHRAN: Iran's wrestling federation said late Friday it would protest a decision to ban one of its athletes and the national coach for deliberately throwing a match to avoid fighting an Israeli opponent. Alireza Karimi Mashiani threw a match against his Russian opponent in the under-23 world championships in Poland in November to avoid fighting Israel's Uri Kalashnikov in the next round.

The Islamic republic does not recognise the Jewish state, placing it in the same "Great Satan" category as the United States, and forbids its sportsmen from competing against Israelis.

On Friday, the United World Wrestling Disciplinary Chamber banned Karimi Mashiani from competition for six months, and banned his coach Hamidreza Jamshidi for two years. "The federation will protest the verdict," Iran Wrestling Federation president Rasoul Khadem said on state television. Khadem blamed the ban on pressure from the International Olympic Committee, which he said was itself "under the influence of big political and economic powers of the

world". "During his six-month ban, Karimi Mashiani can take part in domestic competitions and in the final stage of the national team selection. "His ban will be over before the 2018 Jakarta Asian Games and the World Championship," Khadem added.

Karimi Mashiani threw his quarter-final bout against Russian Alikhan Zhabrayilov in the under-86 kilogramme freestyle contest. Footage shows him leading in the match until his coach starts shouting "Alireza, lose" from the sidelines.

Karimi Mashiani then repeatedly rolled over to hand his opponent a dozen points and victory. He also refused to take the mat against an Israeli opponent at the World Championships in Hungary in 2013.

The United World Wrestling Disciplinary Chamber found that Karimi Mashiani "on instruction of his coach Jamshidi, wilfully lost his quarter finals match against Alikhan Zhabrayilov". "Both wrestler and coach were found to have acted in direct violation of the International Wrestling Rules and the UWW Disciplinary Regulations," it said in a statement.

Iran said it had fought for months to limit the impact of the decision and reduce the proposed fine. A statement from the Iran Wrestling Federation on its website said such situations were bound to recur and be even "more serious and complicated" in future.

"It is hoped that a solution is thought of by competent authorities for resolving this issue." — AFP

Sports



Czech snowboarder Ledecker stuns Alpine world with super-G gold

Veith takes silver, Weirather bronze

PYEONGCHANG: Czech snowboarder Ester Ledecker produced one of the biggest shocks in the history of the Winter Olympics when she tore down Jeongseon slope in bib number 26 to win the women's Alpine skiing super-G yesterday.

The 22-year-old rank outsider-rated 43rd in the World Cup standings in super-G-was thought to have a much better chance of gold in the snowboarding events she will also contest in Pyeongchang, an unprecedented doubling up.

Bib 26 was the starting position for a racer with only the slimmest chance of getting near the podium, and the top contenders clearly thought the medals had been sewn up by skiers in the top 20 spots.

When Ledecker started her run, Austrian Anna Veith was at the bottom of the slope already taking phone calls and receiving the congratulations of her rivals for becoming the first woman to win back-to-back titles in the Olympic super-G.

Even a smiling International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach seemed to be congratulating her. Clearly, nobody had accounted for Ledecker's near-miraculous performance. Indeed, the Czech's run had appeared on a par with her starting position until halfway down the course but she simply carved up the bottom of the run to clock one minute 21.11 seconds.

Ledecker could barely believe it herself when the green light indicated she had

bumped Veith out of the gold-medal position by one hundredth of a second to give her country its first Alpine skiing gold medal. "I was wondering what just happened. Is this a kind of mistake?", she said.

"I was thinking okay, they're going to change the time, I'm going to wait for a little bit and they're going to switch and put some seconds on. "I was just staring at the board and nothing was happening and everybody was screaming. I just started to think okay, this is weird."

Veith's time of 1:21.12 was only enough

congratulate her because the Olympics is so special and anything can happen. It was so tight."

Weirather's bronze enabled her to join her mother Hanni Wenzel and uncle Andreas Wenzel as an Olympic medallist with the family now having contributed seven of the 10 won by athletes from the tiny principality.

The 28-year-old said Ledecker's win was "amazing" and credited her own medal-winning performance to a lot of hard work and a little bit of luck. "There were plenty of racers who had no chance because of the wind," she said.

"It's difficult when it's at the Olympics and you want a really fair race; today you needed the luck for sure. I wasn't really lucky this season with that, but today I was." Swiss racer Michelle Gisin dismissed the idea that the design of the course could have contributed to Ledecker's shock win. "We have an amazing slope and we have an amazing course and it's really fair," said Gisin, who went out just behind Veith and finished ninth. "We have fair chances from bib one to bib 50, the slope is so good."

BIG CROWD

Despite a delay of an hour because of high winds, the race got underway under bright blue skies with a big crowd packed into the stands at the Jeongseon Alpine Centre. Lindsey Vonn went out first but



American star Lindsey Vonn finishes sixth

for silver, while Liechtenstein's Tina Weirather claimed bronze in 1:21.22 after earlier bumping Swiss World Cup leader Lara Gut off the top of the timesheets by the slenderest of margins.

"I thought I had gold," Veith said. "For me it was a big surprise that she could do this. At first I thought 'is this possible?' "She did a really good run and I want to



PYEONGCHANG: (L-R) Austria's silver medallist Anna Fenninger Veith, Czech Republic's gold medallist Ester Ledecker and Liechtenstein's bronze medallist Tina Weirather pose on the podium during the medal ceremony for the alpine skiing women's Super-G. — AFP

made a mistake before the final jump and skied into soft snow, getting a time that was good enough only for sixth. The 33-year-old American, who will have another chance to become the oldest female medallist in Olympic Alpine skiing in her favoured downhill on the same mountain next week, was as surprised as anyone by Ledecker's win.

"It's definitely shocking, in the Olympics a lot of weird things happen," said Vonn, the downhill champion in Vancouver eight years ago. "Different people can jump in there

that maybe wouldn't be in there before."

While Vonn is the second most decorated woman on the Alpine World Cup circuit with 81 victories, Ledecker has never graced the podium on the circuit as she has spent her time with her snowboarding career.

World champion in the parallel giant slalom snowboarding and a former world champion in the parallel slalom, she could yet enjoy unprecedented medal success in the two separate snow sports in Pyeongchang. — Reuters

Russians blank US in intense Olympic hockey showdown

GANGNEUNG: Ilya Kovalchuk and Nikolai Prokhorin each scored two goals and the Olympic Athletes from Russia blanked arch-rival United States 4-0 in an electric atmosphere yesterday at the Pyeongchang Winter Olympic men's hockey tournament.

Russia has not won Olympic hockey gold since 1992 but an all-star OAR lineup from the country's two top clubs showed the skill and tenacity that made them 2018 favourites, securing a quarter-final berth with the win.

Slovakia, which upset the Russians 3-2 in their opener, faced Slovenia in a later match, but the emotional and hard-hitting USA-Russia showdown was the day's marquee event. The political rivals stirred passions long before players began warming up as rowdy fans waved Russian and US flags with chants of "U-S-A" and "Russ-i-a" — screaming that only grew louder as the game unfolded in an intense setting.

While US coach Tony Granato played down any "Miracle on Ice" repeat talk, there were echoes of the 1980 Lake Placid Olympic upset of the Soviet Union by a collection of US amateurs. With NHL talent absent for the first time since 1994 over money issues and injury fears, a young US squad with four college stars and mostly Europe-based talent faced an all-star lineup from Russia's two best clubs, including five-time Olympians and ex-NHL stars Kovalchuk and Pavel Datsyuk. But these Americans found no goals, much less miracles. Bobby Sanguinetti and Datsyuk traded early hits against the boards to set a physical tone, with rock music during breaks and crowd noise feeding into the game's quick-pace tempo.

Two shove-filled melees exchanged near the



GANGNEUNG: Russia's Andrei Zubarev and US Brian O'Neill vie for the puck in the men's ice hockey preliminary round group B game between the Olympic Athletes from Russia and the United States during the Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympic Games at the Gangneung Hockey Centre in Gangneung. — AFP

Russian goal heated player emotions until they boiled over 91 seconds before the end of the second period.

US forward Chris Bourque, the smallest man on the ice, answered a takedown by going after Prokhorin, who responded in kind as both were sent off for roughing. The Russians were already leading 2-0 by then thanks to a Prokhorin brace.

Kovalchuk blasted a shot past US goaltender Ryan Zapolski from the right faceoff circle with 0.2sec remaining in the period, boosting their lead to 3-0. Kovalchuk struck again 28 seconds into the third period, zipping a laser shot from the opposite circle for a 4-0 Russian edge.

Russian goaltender Vasili Koshechkin made 29 saves in the shutout. The red-clad Russians opened the scoring 7:21 into the game, the unguarded Prokhorin at the crease tapped in Sergei Mozyakin's pass.

Prokhorin rifled a slapshot from the top of the left faceoff circle past Zapolski 2:14 into the second period to double the Russians' lead.

CZECHS EDGE CANADA

Jan Kovar and Petr Koukal scored in a penalty shootout to lift the Czech Republic to a 3-2 win over defending champion Canada 3-2. Canada could still qualify directly for the quarter-finals by beating South Korea today.

"We have to keep our heads up and come in tomorrow confident. We can't dwell on it," said Canada's Maxim Noreau, whose final shootout effort clanked off the left post to seal the Czech triumph. "It was a good game for us," Canada coach Willie Desjardins said. "We created lots of chances. Now we move ahead. We know we have to get better." The Czechs would clinch a quarter-final spot Sunday by beating Switzerland, which routed South Korea 8-0. — AFP

Korean teen Choi triumphs in 1,500m short track

PYEONGCHANG: South Korea's world record-holder Choi Minjeong shed tears of joy as she seized her first Olympic title in the women's 1,500m short track yesterday, making up for her disqualification in the 500m final.

Choi, 19, eased to the front with two laps to go and she glided well clear of the field to win in 2min 24.948sec, more than a second faster than China's Li Jinyu. Choi threw her arms into the air as she did a lap of honour for the ecstatic 12,000-capacity crowd, and the tears flowed as she hugged her coach.

Kim Boutin of Canada, who received abuse on social media over Choi's disqualification in the 500m, grabbed her second bronze medal of the Games. But the agony continued for British world champion Elise Christie, who was stretchered away and taken to hospital after she crashed out painfully in the semi-finals.

Christie was also a crash casualty in the women's 500m final and at Sochi 2014, she went home empty-handed after being penalised in all three of her events. "It's too early to tell anything, we'll have some scans and find out exactly what the story is," said Mike Hay, Team GB



GANGNEUNG: South Korea's Choi Minjeong celebrates winning the gold medal in the women's 1,500m short track speed skating. — AFP

chef de mission.

"It's tough. But right now it's about Elise's health. She was in a great form and I saw her a couple of times and she was in a great place, it's just incredibly unfortunate." — AFP

Russians romp into women's s-finals with Swiss rout

GANGNEUNG: The Olympic Athletes from Russia team trounced Switzerland 6-2 in an entertaining clash at the Kwandong Hockey Centre yesterday to book a spot in the semi-finals of the women's Olympic ice hockey tournament.

The Russians will take on four-times defending champions and heavy favourites Canada on Monday for a place in the final. The Canadians beat the Russians 5-0 in the group stages today. Anna Shokhina capitalised on Lara Stalder's mistake to give the Russians an unlikely lead seven minutes into the first period after the Swiss forward took a fraction too long to control a routine pass.

The Russians were shorthanded by two when Shokhina pounced on Stalder to force a turnover before bearing down on the Swiss goal and scooping a wrist shot high into the net.

The Swiss equalised with less than 10 seconds played in the second period after Alina Muller collected a Christine Meier pass and wove her way past three defenders before flick-

ing a backhanded shot over Russian goaltender Nadezhda Alexandrova.

"We had a big goal of winning a medal here," said the disappointed Muller, who was in tears after the defeat. "We started well, we kept going, we were one-nothing behind but didn't stop fighting. I am proud of my team."

Muller is the tournament's top scorer with seven goals, but the personal milestone was overshadowed by the exit of her team, who won bronze at the Sochi Games four years ago. "Now it's not worth anything," she added. "I am happy about that but at the moment it's hard to be happy about anything. Maybe in some days I can look back and be proud of my team and maybe we can regret nothing."

Stalder made amends when she put the Swiss ahead on the powerplay with a classy shot into the top corner, but the Russians were back on level terms minutes later when Viktoriya Kulishova tucked home a rebound.

Liana Ganeyeva took advantage of a powerplay for the Russians to extend the lead with just over a minute left in the second period by directing Shokhina's powerful shot from just inside the blue line past Swiss goaltender Florence Schelling.

Shokhina scored again in the final period and Olga Sosina added a sixth late on to put the finishing touches on the rout. Switzerland will play the unified Korean team, who they beat 8-0 earlier in the tournament, in a classification game today. — Reuters

Champion Kushnir fails to qualify for aericals final

PYEONGCHANG: There was a shock during qualifying for the final of the men's aericals yesterday night when defending Olympic champion Anton Kushnir of Belarus failed to qualify. The top six men from the first round of qualifying progressed automatically to today's final, with the remaining athletes moving into a second qualifying round. The top six after the second round also progressed to the final.

However, after a first round score of 120.80 failed to seal qualification for the final, the pressure was on Kushnir to reach the final with the last jump of the second round. Needing to beat the score of 121.72, set by Mischa Gasser of Switzerland, to qualify in the top six of the second round, the Sochi gold medal-

ist fell just short, scoring 121.27 to miss out by 0.45 points.

Kushnir's absence will be felt strongly in the final and as his result was read out, shock spread across the faces of his team mates, coaches and rivals. The 33-year-old, competing in his fourth Olympics, was hoping to defend his title and continue Belarus's dominance of the sport. The country has had a man on the aericals podium at the last four Olympics, winning gold in both Vancouver and Sochi. Now, the baton passes to Stanislav Hladchenko, who is the only Belarusian representative in the final, after world number four Maxim Gustik also failed to qualify.

American Jonathon Lillis top-scored with 127.44 and the world champion will be joined in Sunday's final by Sochi silver medallist David Morris. The Australian needed a second jump but delivered to qualify in second place from round two.

It was a good night for the Chinese, who had three athletes progress as they look to get revenge for the result in the women's final on Friday. Hanna Huskova of Belarus edged China's Zhang Xin and Kong Fanyu into second and third respectively. — Reuters

Sports



'Ice Prince' Hanyu defies injury to retain skate crown

Shoma Uno takes silver, Javier Fernandez bronze

GANGNEUNG: Japan's Yuzuru Hanyu disclosed he had never "fully healed" from the serious injury that almost scuppered his Olympics after clinching the first back-to-back men's figure skating title in more than six decades yesterday.

The 23-year-old cemented his status as the modern day 'ice prince' when overcoming a three-month injury hiatus to add Pyeongchang gold to his Sochi 2014 success and emulate American Dick Button, Olympic champion in 1948 and 1952.

"I'm not fully healed, I really pushed it hard and there were some jumps and elements that I could not perform, but I forced myself to do so," revealed Hanyu, who damaged ankle ligaments in a training accident in November.

"My injuries were more severe than I thought, but I've been fortunate to make it to the Olympics, and that I'm able to smile now explains what I'm feeling. "I've had a slew of injuries since Sochi, but I wanted to have the courage to be bold enough to challenge myself."

The charismatic skating icon had promised to reward his army of ardent supporters with "a dream performance" and he didn't let them down as he led a Japanese one-two with Shoma Uno taking silver, ahead of Spain's Javier Fernandez with bronze.

"I worried a lot of people as I could not practise because of my injury. So, there was stronger support than before." Hanyu's Sochi triumph had elevated him to cult status in Japan, and his exploits in South Korea will only serve to propel his standing even further.

After his not-quite-spotless free skate, which opened with a quickfire quad salchow and quad toe loop, he bowed to his fans as they in turn tossed his Winnie The Pooh stuffed toys, his mascot, onto the Gangneung Arena ice.

But this was no teddy bear's picnic for the two-time world champion, that was evident from his tears of relief after his score of 206.17 points came over the tannoy. He then had to sit and suffer as first six-time European champion Fernandez, and then Uno, attempted valiantly but in vain to topple the rink king.

He took the Pyeongchang plaudits with a combined score of 317.85 to give him a cushion of almost 11 points over 19-year-old Uno (306.90), with Fernandez (305.24) just behind.

REMARKABLE JOURNEY

For Fernandez, it was the best of his last Olympics, claiming Spain's first ever figure skating medal. "It was a good experience, I know I didn't do the perfect programme but I was satisfied with what I did and it got me an Olympic medal, that's all I've got to say.

"I've been dreaming about it and it's been a big goal for me. I knew it was going to be my last one (Olympics) so it's true that I was a little bit more nervous than yesterday."

Hanyu was visibly moved by his latest triumph in a remarkable journey from the day in 2011 he had to flee a Sendai ice rink when a devastating earthquake hit Japan.



GANGNEUNG: Japan's Yuzuru Hanyu competes in the men's single skating free skating of the figure skating event during the Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympic Games at the Gangneung Ice Arena in Gangneung yesterday. — AFP

As well as claiming only the third ever skating title for Japan, his gold medal was also the 1,000th awarded in Winter Games history. Aside from Hanyu's heroics, the free skate was marked by the first ever routine featuring six quads from American teenager Nathan Chen, who scored an Olympic record of 215.08.

It was enough for fifth place for the 18-year-old, whose bid to upstage Hanyu had come unstuck when

he flopped in the short programme on Friday to leave him trailing in 17th.

Hanyu meanwhile, pushed by the likes of his training partner Fernandez, Uno, Chen and company, has pushed figure skating to new limits. The number of quads, skating's most difficult jump, executed in the free skate final topped the 50-mark - something that would have astounded Button. — AFP

Bjoergen makes history with Norway relay gold

PYEONGCHANG: Marit Bjoergen skied a triumphant final leg to write her name in the Olympic record books, delivering gold for Norway in the women's 4x5km relay yesterday and joining countryman Ole Einar Bjoerndalen as the most successful winter Olympian of all time on 13 medals.

Sweden took silver, two seconds behind, after powerful performances by Charlotte Kalla, Ebba Andersson and Stina Nilsson, while the Olympic Athletes from Russia came third to take the bronze, 43.3 seconds behind the winners.

Bjoergen got the glory but Norway's win was firmly rooted in a stunning third leg by Olympic 10km freestyle champion Ragnhild Haga, who erased a gap of almost half a minute to tee up Bjoergen for victory.

The Swedes also had to overcome a big gap to the leaders after a slow first leg by Anna Haag but Kalla, who took Olympic gold in the women's skiathlon, charged around her two laps to put them back in contention.

Led by superb runs from Natalia

Nepryaeva and Yulia Belorukova, Olympic Athletes of Russia made the early running but when the Nordic nations upped the tempo they gradually fell away and had to be content with a bronze medal.

Andersson managed to take the lead for the Swedes as the race reached its final leg but Haga's power, consistently applied over her two laps, left Bjoergen in a position to seal the victory. The 37-year-old accelerated up the first hill with Nilsson snapping at her heels at the front of the field but Olympic sprint champion Nilsson had no answer when Bjoergen rounded the final corner and sped over the line for victory.

"I have been nervous, I haven't been able to train for this," Bjoergen told Norwegian television. "But I just had to grind and wear out her (Nilsson's) legs, and I did that. She didn't manage the last turn and I'm surprised I managed it. She was on my heels in the last uphill," Bjoergen added.

Bjoergen received plenty of plaudits from her competitors following her historic achievement. "She is an absolute legend, it's really, really cool to see her race every single time, she just skis with absolute control," American racer Jessica Diggins told Reuters. The United States continue their wait for a first cross-country medal since 1976. Sophie Caldwell struggled on the first leg, leaving her team mates with too much to do and they eventually finished fifth behind Finland. — Reuters

Switzerland's Hoefflin wins slopestyle gold

PYEONGCHANG: Sarah Hoefflin claimed the Olympic gold medal in women's freestyle skiing slopestyle in a Swiss one-two at Pyeongchang's Phoenix Park yesterday. Compatriot Mathilde Gremaud won silver, while Britain's Isabel Atkin took the bronze in a final that had confounded many pre-competition predictions.

Sochi gold medallist Dara Howell was eliminated in qualifying, while none of the top-10 of the World Cup standings got on the podium. In glorious sunshine at Phoenix Snow Park, fans were treated to an entertaining final and it was Swiss pair Gremaud and Hoefflin who made the early running to lay down the two highest scores of the first round. Norway duo of Johanne Killi and Tiril Sjastaad Christiansen both fell on the rails in first run. Sweden's Emma Dahlstrom, who qualified in first place with a 91.40 - the highest score of the day - also fell on the first kicker. Further falls for Sjastaad Christiansen and Dahlstrom and a disappointing run for Killi in the second round meant the top three in the world were all struggling going into the final runs.

Hoefflin, currently 12 in the FIS World Cup, then raised the bar further as she improved her score to 91.20, taking the lead off her compatriot. Gremaud, who admitted afterwards she had been suffering from a head injury in the build-up to qualification, went for the switch double 1080 on the final kicker of her last run to take back the gold, but fell going for glory.

Britain's Atkins produced a clean third run to score 84.60 and move into third place. She then faced a nervous wait as the final three athletes took their final runs. After neither of the highly-touted Norwegians could break into the top three with their final attempts, it was down to world championship silver medallist Dahlstrom in the final run of the afternoon. However, the Swede couldn't deliver and Switzerland got their first freestyle skiing gold since Evelyn Leu won the aerials in 2006. "I think there were a lot of girls who could have won," Hoefflin told reporters afterwards.

"But one thing that is so great about women's free skiing is it really is anyone's to win." "But I was really lucky in the finals because I didn't have any wind in my runs, compared to some of the others. That helped me a lot."

Atkin, who is also a FIS World Championship bronze medallist, celebrated with friends and family after sealing the bronze medal. In doing so, Atkin won Britain's first Winter Olympic medal on skis.



PYEONGCHANG: Switzerland's Sarah Hoefflin falls during a run of the women's ski slopestyle final event during the Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympic Games at the Phoenix Park in Pyeongchang yesterday. — AFP

"I wasn't aware that was the case until someone told me earlier in an interview," said the 19-year-old. "I was just stoked I got to ski with my team-mate Katie (Summerhayes) today." "I wasn't too concerned about the result (coming in the final) but I am so pleased to come away with the bronze."

It was a disappointing afternoon for many of the world's top skiers. Fifteen-year-old Jennie-Lee Burmannson, first in the world cup rankings, was aiming to become Sweden's youngest ever winter Olympic medallist but could only manage an eighth place finish.

Birthday girl and Sochi silver medallist Devin Logan couldn't repeat her feat from four years ago and finished in 10th. — Reuters

Kuzmina finally gets her gold in mass start

PYEONGCHANG: After two silver medal finishes in the pursuit and individual races, Slovakian biathlete Anastasiya Kuzmina finally got her gold at the Pyeongchang Olympics yesterday with a superb shooting performance in the women's 12.5km mass start.

The 33-year-old mother of two, who claimed back-to-back sprint titles in the 7.5km event at Vancouver and Sochi, became the first woman to clinch biathlete golds in three successive Games, winning with a time of 35 minutes 23 seconds.

Belarusian triple Olympic champion Darya Domracheva grabbed silver, 18.8 seconds behind Kuzmina, while Norway's Tiril Eckhoff took bronze. "I expected to have the best chance in the gold medal for sprint here," Kuzmina told reporters.

"When this didn't happen I was really sad and nervous before the next races. But it happened here ... A different event from Vancouver and Sochi, so it's an incredible feeling." With the 30 athletes split into 10

groups of three, Kuzmina started in the second row, battling for position all the way to the first shoot.

Her accuracy on the range laid the foundation for her victory, but despite showing nerves of steel on a chilly night, eventually even she got rattled. Having built up a considerable lead, Kuzmina arrived at the fourth shoot and made her first four shots before taking a very long pause and then missing her final effort as the rest of the field skied in towards the range.

"In my career I never shoot clean four times, and today after three times zero, I was reaching for my last shooting, and I was worried about it," she said. "I'm so happy that my ski time was good enough, and saved my position."

The miss meant she was diverted to ski a 150-metre penalty lap, but she remained in the lead and surged away to the finish, waving a Slovakian flag proudly as she crossed the line.

Germany's Laura Dahlmeier, who started the Games with golds in the sprint and pursuit races, struggled with the rifle, missing once in each of her first two shoots before finishing a disappointing 16th. Kuzmina's triumph equalled the Slovakian record held by twin brothers in canoe slalom, Pavol and Peter Hochschorner, of three gold medals at Summer and Winter Games. — Reuters

Suarez and Alba strikes give Barca win at Eibar

EIBAR: Barcelona got back to winning ways yesterday after two consecutive draws, with a 2-0 victory at Eibar, thanks to goals from Luis Suarez and Jordi Alba, to go 10 points clear at the top of the Liga standings.

Suarez latched on to a pass from Lionel Messi to dribble round the home side's goalkeeper and slot into an empty net in the 16th minute, while Messi hit the woodwork later in the game as did Eibar's Fabian Orellana, who was sent off with 25 minutes remaining for a second booking.

Eibar coach Jose Luis Mendilabar was also dismissed later for angry protests against referee Alejandro Hernandez Hernandez. Barca finally made the most of their extra man when Alba sidefooted into the near corner with his weaker right foot in the 88th minute to give his side a first win in three games after surprise successive draws against Espanyol and Getafe.

The hard-fought win takes Barca on to 62 points for the season, 10 above nearest challengers Atletico Madrid, who play Athletic Bilbao at home today. Champions Real visit Real Betis the same day. — Reuters



Matches on TV
(Local Timings)

SPANISH LEAGUE		
Real Sociedad v Levante	beIN SPORTS HD 3	14:00
Atletico de Madrid v Athletic de Bilbao	beIN SPORTS HD 3	18:15
Espanyol v Villarreal	beIN SPORTS HD 3	20:30
Real Betis v Real Madrid	beIN SPORTS HD 3	22:45
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE		
Torino v Juventus	beIN SPORTS HD 4	14:30
Bologna v Sassuolo Calcio	beIN SPORTS	17:00
Napoli v Spal	beIN SPORTS HD 4	17:00
Benevento v Crotone	beIN SPORTS	17:00
Atalanta v Fiorentina	beIN SPORTS HD 4	20:00
Milan v Sampdoria	beIN SPORTS HD 4	22:45
GERMAN BUNDESLIGA		
Augsburg v Stuttgart	beIN SPORTS HD 5	17:30
Borussia Monchengladbach v Borussia Dortmund	beIN SPORTS HD 5	20:00
FRENCH LEAGUE		
Nice v Nantes	beIN SPORTS HD 6	17:00
LOSC Lille v Olympique Lyonnais	beIN SPORTS HD 6	19:00
Olympique Marseille v Girondins de Bordeaux	beIN SPORTS HD 6	23:00

13 World trounces USA to jump start all-star weekend



14 Czech snowboarder Ledecka stuns Alpine world with super-G gold



15 'Ice Prince' Hanyu defies injury to retain skate crown



Lukaku eases Man Utd into Cup quarters

West Brom knocked out of FA Cup



HUDDERSFIELD: Huddersfield Town's Moroccan midfielder Abdelhamid Sabiri (C) cannot direct his header at the goal during the English FA Cup fifth round football match between Huddersfield Town and Manchester United at the John Smith's stadium in Huddersfield. — AFP

LONDON: Debate over the merits of video assistant refereeing was again raised as a Romelu Lukaku double eased Manchester United into the FA Cup quarter-finals in a 2-0 win at Huddersfield despite a controversial call going against Jose Mourinho's men.

Juan Mata thought he had put United into a 2-0 lead just before half-time only for the Spaniard's effort to be ruled out by the video referee after a lengthy delay, and without conclusive proof the officials on the field had made the wrong decision.

Thankfully for United, and the authorities, that decision didn't have a definitive influence on the outcome as Lukaku struck early in both halves to take his tally for the season to 21. Brighton and Southampton were also fifth round victors to join Chelsea and Leicester, who beat Hull and Sheffield United respectively on Friday, in the draw for the last eight later on Saturday.

United were without Paul Pogba due to illness as a frustrating few weeks for the Frenchman continued after

a dramatic dip in form that has seen him hauled off by Mourinho in recent defeats at Tottenham and Newcastle.

Mourinho made six changes in all from last weekend's shock reverse at St. James' Park, but his decision to retain Lukaku paid dividends when the Belgian burst onto Mata's pass to open the scoring inside three minutes.

Mata then had the ball in the net himself a minute before the break. A delay in referring the decision was exacerbated as the lines used to help the video official decipher offside decisions appeared to be far from straight.

United were left to mull over their grievance at half-time, but quickly ensured it wasn't to cost them too dearly as a brilliant one-two between Lukaku and Alexis

Sanchez freed the former to slot low past Jonas Lossel.

MORE WEST BROM WOE

Elsewhere, a week to forget for West Brom was rounded off with an FA Cup exit as fellow Premier League strugglers Southampton won 2-1 at the Hawthorns yesterday.

West Brom boss Alan Pardew named Jonny Evans and Gareth Barry in his starting line-up despite the experienced duo forming half of a group of four players questioned by Spanish police this week over the theft of a taxi on the club's warm weather training trip to Barcelona.

"There was a problem in terms of selection because of the incident to go with my strongest team," said Pardew. "I decided to do that. I felt I

needed to make a little bit of a statement about the events. I was far from happy over them and made Gareth (McAuley) captain today."

Wesley Hoedt took advantage of some slack West Brom marking to head home his first goal for Southampton just 11 minutes in. Dusan Tadic doubled the visitors' advantage on the counter-attack after the break and Southampton held out despite Salomon Rondon's spectacular volley pulling a goal back.

Brighton cruised into the last eight as fourth-tier Coventry City's fairytale run came to a crashing end in a 3-1 defeat. Sheffield Wednesday and Swansea City face an unwanted replay after an insipid 0-0 draw on Swansea boss Carlos Carvalhal's return to Hillsborough.

"It's a score nobody wants," said Carvalhal, whose side are also battling for Premier League survival. "Maybe in the future, if the managers and referee agree after the first game we can go to penalties, we can finish the game today. — AFP

Lewandowski late penalty rescues Bayern

BERLIN: Robert Lewandowski converted a 91st-minute penalty to rescue Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich with a 2-1 win at Wolfsburg yesterday which took their winning streak to 13 and extended their advantage at the top of the table to 21 points.

With Bayern hosting Besiktas in the last 16, first-leg, of the Champions League on Tuesday, they rested several stars and were almost made to pay. Wolfsburg striker Daniel Didavi gave the hosts an early lead while Bayern winger Arjen Robben had a second-half penalty saved.

However, Sandro Wagner headed Bayern level in the 64th minute before substitute Lewandowski hit the winning penalty in injury time. The win extended Bayern's run-away lead to 21 points as they steam towards a sixth straight title.

Bayern coach Jupp Heynckes named a weakened team with David Alaba, Jerome Boateng, Mats Hummels, Joshua Kimmich,

Thomas Mueller and Lewandowski started on the bench. Wolfsburg profited from Bayern's slow start after only eight minutes when Yunus Malli's cross was headed home by Didavi.

Bayern winger Franck Ribery was then booked when the video referee spotted he had swatted Renato Steffen in the face in a challenge for the ball. It was 1-0 at the break, but Bayern were awarded a penalty when Steffen barged over Corentin Tolisso in the area on 53 minutes.

Steffen was booked for his furious protest, but Wolfsburg goalkeeper Koen Casteels palmed Robben's spot kick onto the post. Bayern drew level when Robben's cross was met in the middle by Wagner-Lewandowski's back-up-to head home on 64 minutes. Heynckes responded by bringing on captain Mueller, Alaba and Lewandowski in the final half an hour. When Germany Under-19 international Gian-Luca Itter pulled Robben back in the area, the referee pointed to the spot. Casteels got a glove to the ball, but Lewandowski claimed his 20th league goal this season with the last-gasp spot kick.

BAILEY STRIKES AGAIN

RB Leipzig are at Eintracht Frankfurt in the Bundesliga's first Monday night kick-off

which allowed Bayer Leverkusen to climb to second with a 2-1 win at Hamburg. Leon Bailey continued his stellar season by rounding Hamburg's goalkeeper Christian Mathenia on 40 minutes.

It was the 20-year-old Jamaican's ninth league goal this season. Leverkusen's 18-year-old striker Kai Havertz doubled their lead after the break, finishing a move Bailey started. Hamburg forward Andre Hahn came off the bench to claim a consolation goal. Freiburg captain Nils Petersen converted a first-half penalty in their 1-0 win at home to Werder Bremen in persistent falling snow. The win ended Freiburg's three-match run without a win while Bremen stay just above the relegation places.

Bottom side Cologne remain nine points from safety as they drew 1-1 at home to Hanover. Japan striker Yuya Osako gave Cologne an early lead before Hanover forward Niclas Füllkrug equalised with his 10th league goal of the season.

In the dying stages, Claudio Pizarro, 39, came off the Cologne bench and had the ball in the net, but his header was ruled offside. Today, Borussia Dortmund can go second with a win at Borussia Moenchengladbach as Michy Batshuayi looks to add to his five goals in three games. — AFP



WOLFSBURG: Bayern Munich's Polish forward Robert Lewandowski (R) celebrates with Bayern Munich's Austrian defender David Alaba after scoring during the German first division Bundesliga football match between VfL Wolfsburg and FC Bayern Munich. — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2018

18 Japan reappoints Kuroda as BOJ chief for another term**19** Oil prices drop on bearish US data, capital markets sell-off**21** Kinshasa joins flydubai's growing network in Africa

A general view of the site of the Chinese-funded \$1.4 billion reclaimed land next to Colombo's main sea port. China will invest \$1 billion in the construction of three 60-storey buildings at a mega-project near Sri Lanka's main port, Colombo. — AFP

China vows to act against US trade curbs

Washington eyes hefty import tariffs on steel and aluminum industries

BEIJING: China yesterday warned it would take necessary measures to protect its interests if the US imposes tough trade sanctions against its steel and aluminum exports.

The US Commerce Department on Friday recommended imposing heavy tariffs on China and other countries to counter a global glut in steel and aluminum, laying out an array of possible options in a report to President Donald Trump. The move gives Trump the opportunity to strike a highly public blow for his "America first" trade policy—he is due to decide on the measures next month—but has stoked fears of retaliation and a trade war between the world's two largest economies.

"If the United States' final decision affects China's interests, we will take necessary measures to defend our rights," said Wang Hejun, a director at China's commerce ministry, in a statement responding to the US report. The US report framed concerns about Chinese overproduction in terms of national security and defense—an approach refuted by Wang. "The findings of the investigations (of

the US Department of Commerce) are groundless and do not correspond to reality," he said. Washington "should not lightly adopt restrictive measures under the pretext of 'national security' ... a vague formula that can easily lead to abuse," he said.

China produces about half of the world's steel but supplies less than two percent of the steel imported by the United States. The US and EU argue Chinese overproduction is heavily subsidized by the state and has depressed world prices, hurting their own domestic production.

Trump on Tuesday accused Beijing of decimating American steel and aluminum industries, saying he was "considering all options".

The US Commerce Department has recommended that President Donald Trump impose steep curbs on steel and aluminum imports from China and other countries ranging from global and country-specific tariffs to broad import quotas,

according to proposals released on Friday.

The long-awaited unveiling of Commerce's "Section 232" national security reviews of the two industries contained global tariff options of at least 24 percent on all steel products from all countries, and at least 7.7 percent on all aluminum products from all countries.



Proposal to slap tariff of at least 24%

The recommendations were presented to Trump last after he authorized the probes under a 1962 trade law that has not been invoked since 2001. He has until April 11 to

announce his decision on steel import curbs and by April 20 to decide on aluminum restrictions. US Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross emphasized that Trump would have the final say, including on whether to exclude certain countries, such as NATO allies, from any actions. "The president has the discretion to modify any of these or to come with something totally different," he told reporters on a conference call.

He said a global tariff would cover every steel and aluminum product entering the American market from China. Steel stocks soared with US Steel closing up 14.7 percent, AK Steel up 13.7 percent, Nucor ended up 4.5 percent and the broader S&P 1500 steel index 5.3 percent higher.

Century Aluminum shares closed up 8.3 percent, while Alcoa, which has operations across the globe, ended off 0.44 percent. Alcoa said in a statement the US trade actions should focus on Chinese overcapacity and not penalize nations that abide by

the rules. Ross said he would not be surprised if countries challenged the measures at the World Trade Organization.

He said "there has been no dialing back" of the recommendations due to objections from industries that use steel and aluminum. "The objective of both reports is to get the production up to a level which will result, in our judgment, in the long term viability of each industry," Ross said, adding that he did not believe that the recommendations would lead to significant price hikes. US Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said he hoped the proposals "are the beginning of efforts by this administration to finally get tough on China."

Alternatively, Commerce recommended a steel tariff of at least 53 percent on all steel imports from 12 countries—Brazil, China, Costa Rica, Egypt, India, Malaysia, Russia, South Korea, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey and Vietnam. Other countries would be subject to a quota limiting their tariff-free access equal to their 2017 steel exports to the United States. — Agencies

Indian police arrest three in \$1.8bn PNB fraud case

NEW DELHI: India's federal police arrested two employees at Punjab National Bank believed to be at the center of a staggering \$1.77 billion fraud, a police source said yesterday, in the first arrests so far in the country's biggest-ever bank scam. The arrests late on Friday come amid an intensifying probe involving various authorities after India's second-largest state-run lender said on Wednesday it had been hit by massive fraud.

The two bank employees who were arrested, Gokulnath Shetty and Manoj Kharat, are suspected of steering fraudulent loans to companies linked to billionaire jeweller Nirav Modi and to entities tied to jewellery retailer Gitanjali, which is led by Modi's uncle, Mehul Choksi.

The accusations against the two relatively junior officials at PNB were detailed in the lender's disclosure, and were also contained in a preliminary police report.

Police also arrested a third person, Hemant Bhat, whom the source described as the "autho-



MUMBAI: Indian Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) officials escort Gokulnath Shetty (C, grey hair), the former deputy manager of the Punjab National Bank (PNB) into a special CBI court in Mumbai yesterday. — AFP

rized signatory" of the companies tied to Nirav Modi. All three are being questioned, and will appear in a Mumbai court later on Saturday, the source said, adding an "examination of others is continuing."

The whereabouts of Modi, whose high-end jewellery has been worn by Hollywood stars including Kate Winslet, is unknown. TV Station NDTV on Friday reported he was at a suite in a hotel in New York, citing household staff who answered the door. The scale of the fraud has

sparked a slew of probes into the lender, as well as into Modi, his uncle Choksi and companies affiliated to both.

India's Income Tax Department has also extended a probe into Modi and his group companies, looking into possible tax evasion and suspected investment of illegal funds, a spokeswoman told Reuters yesterday. The spokeswoman said 29 properties and 105 bank accounts of Nirav Modi and his group companies had been seized. — Reuters

IMF chief warns on rate risk from US tax reform

PARIS: IMF chief Christine Lagarde warned yesterday that economic stimulus from US tax cuts may lead to a rapid rise in interest rates which would weigh on countries with high debt levels. The International Monetary Fund was going to be "attentive" to the consequences of the reform, which notably includes a sharply lower corporate tax rate, she told French radio station France Inter. Lagarde's remarks echoed concerns in financial markets which have been in turmoil amid fears that rising US inflation will trigger faster Federal Reserve interest rate rises than had previously been expected.

Several key stock markets lost around 10 percent last week in a brutal correction that Lagarde said in the interview had been "inevitable". She said the US tax reform "will

operate like a kind of stimulus on the current economic situation" in the US which was already experiencing "strong" growth. "You have to ask yourself whether this will not result in rising wages, rising prices and therefore rising inflation and whether, consequently, there is a risk of a reaction by the monetary authorities, notably in the form of interest rates rising a little faster or a little more frequently," she said. This, in turn, would have "an impact on all of the world's economies, especially on heavily indebted economies", Lagarde said.

"We believe that we must be attentive to what is going on, especially in the United States," Lagarde said. She rejected, however, any comparison with the economic situation preceding the 2008 financial crisis. "We are not at all in a pre-major crisis situation like we were in 2008," she said.

The US Congress in December approved a tax reform package that will slash corporate tax to 21 percent from 35 percent. Last month, the IMF said the reform would probably have a positive short-term impact on the US economy, and raised its growth forecast for the world's biggest economy this year by 0.6 percentage points to 2.5 percent. — AFP

Business

Japan reappoints Kuroda as BOJ chief for another term

Reflationist academic Wakatabe appointed as deputy

TOKYO: Japan reappointed central bank chief Haruhiko Kuroda for another term on Friday, and chose an advocate of bolder monetary easing as one of his deputies in a strong signal to investors that policymakers are in no rush to turn off a sweeping stimulus program.

The selection of the new BOJ leadership comes amid heightened anxiety in Japanese and global financial markets, fueled partly by speculation over how quickly major central banks will wind down their crisis-era policies.

In a widely expected move, the government nominated Kuroda, a 73-year-old former finance ministry bureaucrat, to serve another five-year term when the current one ends in April.

That would make him the longest serving BOJ head in half a century, a sign of premier Shinzo Abe's confidence in the governor's ability to pull Japan's economy out of stagnation.

Tokyo stocks rose on relief the BOJ will maintain its huge stimulus - a cornerstone of the premier's "Abenomics" reflationist policies - even as other major central banks head towards the exit.

"In the short term, the BOJ gave the stock market relief by not derailing Kuroda's monetary policy. It sent a message to the market that the main part of Abenomics will not change," said Norihiro Fujito, senior investment strategist at Mitsubishi UFJ Morgan Stanley Securities.

However, many market watchers fear the BOJ's massive money printing project, which is about to enter its fifth year, is increasingly untenable, distorting financial markets and hurting the country's banks.

While growth in the world's third-largest economy has improved thanks largely to stronger global demand, inflation remains far short of the BOJ's 2 percent target.

Tipping the balance?

The government also nominated Masazumi Wakatabe, a 52-year-old Waseda University academic and an advocate of aggressive easing, for BOJ deputy governor.

The choice of Wakatabe could complicate Kuroda's task of engineering a slow but steady exit from the BOJ's stimulus.

All the same, it could also help the BOJ dispel market speculation it may dial back stimulus earlier than expected, and allow it to shift gear back toward more easing if continued gains in the yen threaten Japan's economic recovery, some analysts say.

"The BOJ is in no position to tighten policy anytime soon given rises in the yen. Contrary to market expectations, the next step could be ease further if yen rises persist," said Yasunari Ueno, chief market economist at Mizuho Securities. "Wakatabe will tip the board's balance towards more easing."

The other deputy governor post went to BOJ Executive Director Masayoshi Amamiya, a veteran central banker known for masterminding various monetary policy steps.

The nominations need approval by both houses of parliament, which is a near certainty as Abe's ruling coalition has a comfortable majority.

Yen complicates exit

As a former top Japanese currency diplomat, Kuroda had criticized the BOJ for not doing enough to ease the pain a strong yen was inflicting

Choice of Wakatabe could complicate Kuroda's task



TOKYO: Bank of Japan governor Haruhiko Kuroda (R) answers a question beside Japan's Finance Minister Taro Aso (behind L) while attending a financial committee meeting of the lower house of the parliament in Tokyo on Friday. Japan's government nominated Haruhiko Kuroda for a second term as central bank governor. —AFP

lawmakers' questions.

"He's very lively and energetic," said one of the people. "He seems ready to stay on."

Kuroda will face challenges different from five years ago in his second term. The yen's ascent to 15-month highs has drawn verbal intervention from the finance minister, a sign Abe's government may pile pressure on the BOJ to ramp up stimulus if yen rises persist.

And yet, the BOJ has little ammunition left. With the cost of prolonged easing rising, Kuroda's biggest task would be to engineer a smooth exit from his radical stimulus program, analysts say. While Amamiya is unlikely to rock the boat, Wakatabe may resist any

attempts to signal a future withdrawal of stimulus.

In an interview with the Nikkei last November, Wakatabe said the BOJ needs stronger measures to beat deflation and should accelerate its asset purchases.

That would require reversing a decision made in 2016 to abandon a target for asset purchases and contradict the mainstream approach of BOJ officials, who believe the bank's next move should be a withdrawal of stimulus, not an expansion. "There are two hurdles Kuroda must overcome before seeking an exit. One is a strong yen and another is Abe's pressure on the BOJ to continue easy money policy," said Ueno of Mizuho. —Reuters

Fitch raises Greece's debt rating, citing stability, growth

WASHINGTON: The Fitch ratings agency on Friday upgraded Greece's sovereign debt grade, citing budget surpluses, greater political stability and the growing economy. The agency raised the debt rating one notch to 'B' from 'B-', leaving the country in the "highly speculative" category but with a positive outlook. The decision followed a similar move last month by S&P Global Ratings, which said the long-suffering economy's improving fiscal situation was coinciding with growing employment.

Long the "sick man of Europe," Greece is expected to face smoother sailing, with Eurozone finance ministers expected to sign off on the review of its performance under as its financial aid program, which runs through August 2018. The eurozone also is expected to provide "substantial debt relief" this year, Fitch said. "The concessional nature of Greece's public debt implies that debt servicing costs are low despite the high stock of public debt," Fitch said in announcing its decision. The agency noted that Greece saw three straight quarters of GDP growth for the first time in 11 years, causing per capita incomes to rise as well, while political risks have receded. Between 2015 and 2017, the government of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras adopted painful measures under the bailout program and "we think it would be politically difficult for the same government to backtrack" once the program ends, Fitch said. Greece has also recorded rising budget surpluses and while the banking sector remains weak, banks have committed to plans to reduce their non-performing exposures by the end of next year, Fitch said. —AFP

Portugal probes Altice-Media Capital takeover

LISBON: Portugal's competition authority said Friday it would launch an "in-depth" investigation into the planned takeover by French media and telecoms firm Altice of Media Capital, the owner of the country's most watched television channel.

Netherlands-based Altice, which owns Portugal's largest telecom operator, agreed in

Ryanair cabin crew in Portugal threaten strike

LISBON: A union representing Ryanair cabin crew in Portugal threatened Friday to go on strike in March and April if talks over pay and work conditions with the Ireland-based budget airline fail to make progress.

The company's roughly 400 cabin crew in Portugal will walk off the job for up to three days during the last two weeks of March, and another three days during the first two weeks

July to buy Media Capital—the owner of the TV1 channel along with the popular IOL internet portal and several radio stations — from Spain's Prisa in a 440 million euro (\$550 million) deal. But the competition regulator AdC said it had decided to "proceed to an in-depth investigation" of the deal because "there are strong indications that... it may give rise to significant impediments to effective competition in several markets".

"The merger is also likely to have a significantly negative impact in the development of new TV contents and business models regarding the online broadcast and access to audiovisual contents," the regulator added in a statement

of April, if Ryanair does not drop its "posture of bullying", the head of cabin crew union SNPAC, Fernando Gandra, told AFP.

The "vast majority" of cabin crew contracts do not stipulate a basic salary and staff are threatened with sanctions by the company if they do not meet ambitious daily targets for in-flight sales of food, duty free items and other goods or if they take sick leave, he added. "The main job of cabin crew is to guarantee the safety of passengers and in-flight sales are an extra that should never be a reason to threaten employees with disciplinary proceedings," said Gandra.

"This is creating a terrifying atmosphere. People are afraid to get sick, they are afraid of

everything, and it makes it impossible to be productive in a company like this." Ryanair suffered a turbulent end to 2017, forced to cancel 20,000 flights through to March 2018, mainly because of botched holiday scheduling for pilots. The fiasco triggered pilots' demands for better working conditions and representation, with some departing for other carriers.

The discontent also saw Ryanair hit by the first-ever strike action by pilots in its 32-year history, with German staff staging a short stoppage ahead of Christmas resulting in delays but no cancellations. In December, Ryanair made moves to formally recognize unions. —AFP

EXCHANGE RATES						
Al-Muzaini Exchange Co.						
ASIAN COUNTRIES						
Japanese Yen	2.752	Euro	374.910			
Indian Rupees	4.695	Sterling Pound	421.960			
Pakistani Rupees	2.720	Canadian dollar	241.290			
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.946	Turkish lira	80.500			
Nepali Rupees	2.957	Swiss Franc	324.500			
Singapore Dollar	228.630	Australian Dollar	239.620			
Hongkong Dollar	38.448	US Dollar Buying	299.450			
Bangladesh Taka	3.604	GOLD				
Philippine Peso	5.842	20 Gram	260.52			
Thai Baht	9.524	10 Gram	133.18			
GCC COUNTRIES						
Saudi Riyal	80.227	5 Gram	67.43			
Qatari Riyal	82.630	Dollarco Exchange Co. Ltd				
Omani Riyal	781.315	Rate for Transfer				
Bahraini Dinar	798.860	US Dollar	299.800			
UAE Dirham	81.932	Canadian Dollar	240.760			
ARAB COUNTRIES						
Egyptian Pound - Cash	19.700	Sterling Pound	421.450			
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	16.985	Euro	374.990			
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.207	Swiss Frank	279.880			
Tunisian Dinar	126.860	Bahraini Dinar	797.280			
Jordanian Dinar	424.050	UAE Dirhams	82.025			
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	2.004	Qatari Riyals	83.255			
Syrian Lira	0.000	Saudi Riyals	80.840			
Morocco Dirham	33.406	Jordanian Dinar	424.120			
EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES						
US Dollar Transfer	300.650	Egyptian Pound	17.046			
BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL						
CURRENCY BUY SELL						
British Pound	0.416027	0.423527	Japanese Yen	3.810		
Czech Korune	0.006847	0.016147	Syrian Pound	1.585		
Danish Krone	0.046477	0.051477	Nepalese Rupees	2.936		
Euro	0.367366	0.374866	Malaysian Ringgit	77.970		
Georgian Lari	0.133683	0.133683	Chinese Yuan Renminbi	47.650		
Hungarian 0.001130	0.001320	0.001320	Thai Bhat	10.565		
Norwegian Krone	0.034815	0.040015	Turkish Lira	79.710		
Romanian Leu	0.064082	0.080932	Asia			
Russian ruble	0.005328	0.005328	Bangladesh Taka	0.003221	0.003805	
Slovakia	0.008902	0.018902	Chinese Yuan	0.046032	0.049532	
Swedish Krona	0.033926	0.038926	Hong Kong Dollar	0.036490	0.039240	
Swiss Franc	0.317555	0.328555	Indian Rupee	0.004225	0.004866	
Australasia				Indonesian Rupiah	0.000018	0.000024
Australian Dollar	0.229614	0.241614	Japanese Yen	0.002758	0.002938	
New Zealand Dollar	0.215892	0.225392	Korean Won	0.000272	0.000287	
America				Malaysian Ringgit	0.073578	0.079578
Canadian Dollar	0.234177	0.243177	Nepalese Rupee	0.002994	0.003164	
US Dollars	0.296050	0.300470	Pakistan Rupee	0.002517	0.002807	
US Dollars Mnt	0.296550	0.300470	Philippine Peso	0.005752	0.006052	
Arab				Singapore Dollar	0.224428	0.234428
Bahraini Dinar	0.789586	0.798086	Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001639	0.002229	
Egyptian Pound	0.014048	0.019766	Taiwan	0.010298	0.010478	
Iranian Riyal	0.000083	0.000084	Thai Baht	0.009250	0.009800	
Iraqi Dinar	0.000202	0.000262	America			
Jordanian Dinar	0.418722	0.427722	Australian Dollar	0.229614	0.241614	
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000	New Zealand Dollar	0.215892	0.225392	
Lebanese Pound	0.000154	0.000254	Canadian Dollar	0.234177	0.243177	
Moroccan Dirhams	0.022619	0.046619	US Dollars	0.296050	0.300470	
Omani Riyal	0.773292	0.778972	US Dollars Mnt	0.296550	0.300470	
Qatar Riyal	0.078154	0.083094	Asia			
Saudi Riyal	0.078953	0.080253	Bangladesh Taka	0.003221	0.003805	
Syrian Pound	0.001491	0.001491	Chinese Yuan	0.046032	0.049532	
Tunisian Dinar	0.122426	0.130426	Hong Kong Dollar	0.036490	0.039240	
Turkish Lira	0.074806	0.085106	Indian Rupee	0.004225	0.004866	
UAE Dirhams	0.080294	0.081994	Indonesian Rupiah	0.000018	0.000024	
Yemeni Riyal	0.000975	0.001055	Japanese Yen	0.002758	0.002938	

Business

NBK Economic Report

Oil prices drop on bearish US data, capital markets sell-off

Analysts see Brent trading below \$62/bbl this year

KUWAIT: The positive momentum that propelled oil prices to four-year highs appears to have slipped since the start of the month. A combination of bearish oil data out of the US showing crude stocks building for the second week in a row and US crude production breaking through the symbolic 10 mb/d level and contagion from sell-off in the equity, debt and broader commodity markets were the main factors.

Prices have fallen in six of the last eight trading sessions. The international crude benchmark, Brent, closed at \$65.53 per barrel (bbl) on Wednesday, moving down into negative territory on a year-to-date basis, at -2.0 percent, for the first time this year. And since hitting a four-year high of \$70.5 on 24 January, Brent has fallen by 7 percent. West Intermediate (WTI), the US crude marker, closed at \$61.76/bbl on Wednesday, falling 6.6 percent since reaching its four-year high of 66.

A tightening oil market had supported oil prices in the past few months, with global stocks drawing down and the oil futures curve firmly in backwardation. Supply and demand fundamentals have supported oil's near 70 percent rise since late June 2017. Thanks primarily to the efforts of OPEC and its ten non-OPEC partners led by Russia to rein in the supply surplus, the oil market has visibly tightened. (OPEC output rose slightly to 32.4 mb/d in December, but compliance reached a high of 128 percent.) In their efforts, the oil producers have also been aided by a price-positive melange of robust oil demand, supply outages, heightened geopolitical risk premia and, up until recently, a weaker US dollar.

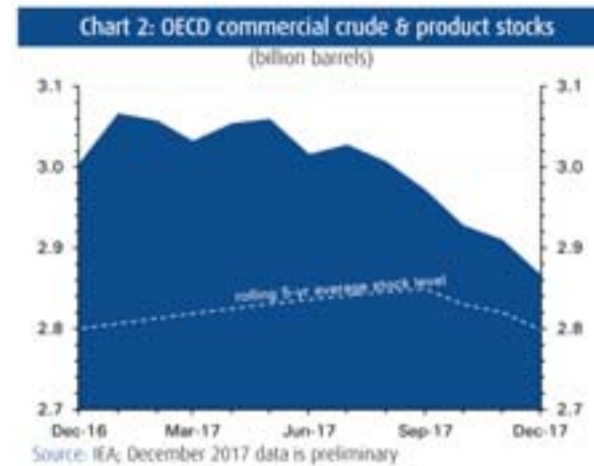
A reading of the most recent International Energy

Agency (IEA) estimate of the amount of crude and petroleum stocks in storage across the OECD, one of the key metrics by which OPEC is gauging the efficacy of its supply cuts, is certainly encouraging as far as the oil producers' group (and oil bulls) is concerned. Thanks to burgeoning demand for middle distillates such as diesel, global stocks were down for the fourth consecutive month in November, at 2.910 billion barrels, which would bring OPEC to within 65 million barrels of its target five-year average (rolling) stock level—the level at which the oil producers' group sees global inventories as having 'normalized'. Stocks had been as high as 366 million barrels over the five-year average back in July 2016. Indeed, according to the IEA, preliminary estimates of December's inventories show that they were on track to close the year down by 137 million barrels at 2.87 billion barrels.

Meanwhile, over in the futures market, a glance at the Brent forward curve shows that prices for crude deliveries all the way through to 2022, were lower than prices for nearer-term and immediate (spot) deliveries. Backwardation, as the structure is known, typically reflects strong demand and tighter supplies; the last time the trend was this pronounced was back in 2014.

Upward price forecast

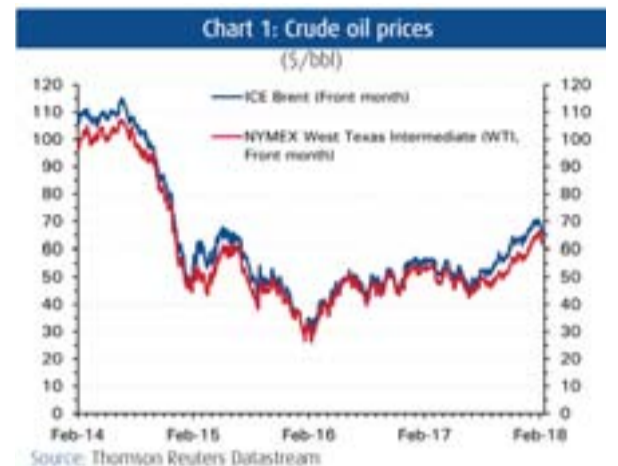
Reflecting the changing landscape, money managers amassed record bullish positions (net 'longs') in crude futures and options worth more than half a billion contracts in anticipation of firmer prices. Commodities traders and investment houses have, in turn, responded by raising their forecasts for oil this year. Noted commodities trader,



Goldman Sachs, even went as far as to predict a headline-grabbing price of \$82.5 for Brent within six months.

Consensus forecasts appear to favor prices settling at \$62 on average this year. Even though it represents a rise of 13 percent compared to last year's average of \$54.8, it is lower than the current oil price. The lower price forecast for 2018 largely reflects the markets' expectation of quite dramatic increases in US shale growth this year. These concerns have once again resurfaced with US crude production recently topping 10 mb/d, a level last witnessed in 1970.

The IEA, in its monthly oil market report, noted that surging US oil production, itself motivated by higher oil prices, will be responsible for 80 percent (1.35 mb/d) of the 1.7 mb/d in non-OPEC supply growth expected in 2018. US crude expanded by more than 1 mb/d in 2017, replacing effectively 55 percent of the crude taken off the market by OPEC and its non-OPEC partners last year. Output in Canada and Brazil is also projected to increase substantially this year.

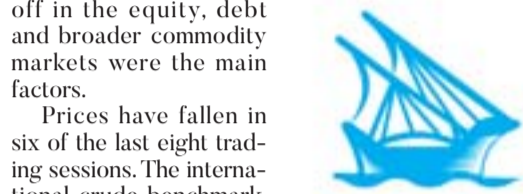


Global oil demand

World oil demand and supply are expected to track each other quite closely in 2018, rising to 99.1 mb/d on average, following demand growth of 1.3 mb/d and supply growth of 1.8 mb/d, respectively. This does assume that output by OPEC and its partners will remain constant in 2018 as per the terms of the production cut agreement.

Global oil demand has benefited from better-than-expected economic activity, some of which has been stimulated by lower oil prices. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) recently revised up its forecast of economic growth in 2018 to 3.9 percent from 3.7 percent in 2017.

With scope for further stock draws this year limited given that the market is roughly in balance, much of the attention will inevitably switch to the unfolding shale story in the US and focus on the demand side of the equation. Turbulence is certainly envisaged, especially over the next few weeks when oil enters a period of seasonally weaker demand due to refinery maintenance. Market participants should prepare for a bumpy ride.



OECD stocks down to 2.9bn barrels

VIVA successfully implements Oracle FRM Cloud

KUWAIT: VIVA, Kuwait's fastest-growing and most developed telecom operator, announced the launch of Fusion Revenue Management (FRM) system, the first cloud based application for VIVA and the first fully automated revenue management system in GCC that complies with International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS15) standard. This project has been successfully completed in cooperation with Oracle, one of the world's leading companies in this field.

On this occasion, Eng Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al-Badran, CEO at VIVA says: Since its inception, VIVA is committed, through its successful strategy, to play a key role not only on operational level but also by applying the best practices and professional standards across all VIVA sectors and departments that support VIVA's activities and plans. In addition, VIVA is fully committed to comply with all regulatory requirements and is eager to apply all the new and advanced systems in line with our principles, values and professional standards.

"This achievement reflects the great efforts made by the company's staff along with Oracle team during the last period to reach the introduction of this system, as well we always seek to concentrate our efforts to achieve the best results through integrated professional team in



timely and efficiently manner", he added.

Mohammed Bin AbdulMohsen Al-Assaf, CFO at VIVA stated: "This achievement proves effective and outstanding efforts exerted by VIVA to be a pioneer in ensuring the compliance with Accountant standards and regulatory requirements, also the optimal operational efficiency through the adoption of the best methods and modern techniques to obtain the best possible results that reflect the vision and strategy of the company."

"It is essential for the organizations to be compliant with International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) and with successful implementation of Fusion Revenue Management

(FRM). VIVA will be capable of handling the complex revenue accounting processes and systems in a very agile manner to be complied with IFRS15", he added.

Zarrar Khan, CTO at VIVA stated: "VIVA has always been pioneer amid its competitors to implement first of its kind projects within GCC. In line with our technology strategy to have efficient systems supporting the business operations, VIVA Kuwait along with Oracle has embarked on a journey towards a fully automated "Revenue Management" system. "The strategic partnership between VIVA and Oracle has always enabled both the companies to innovate and achieve the best for organization".

Bayt.com weekly report

It takes 30 seconds to judge a CV

KUWAIT: During the recruitment process, looking at CVs is a given. Often, reviewing a large number of CVs can be tiresome, especially if the precise information you are looking for in the CV is not easily spotted. Not only does this make the hiring process lengthy. It becomes even more challenging when you only have 30 seconds to spare per CV due to the huge number of applicants crowding your inbox.

To help you successfully weigh a CV in under a minute, Bayt.com, the Middle East's #1 job site, has prepared a CV-reviewing guide. Here are some quick things to look for:

•The look

A CV's layout is extremely important for employers. Looking at any document that is not properly formatted and organized can be very disorienting and a waste of their valuable time. So, from a quick glance, there should be a few essential elements that can show whether a CV deserves a full read or not. Some of these items include the applicant's career objective, experience and contact information. There are other things to look for, but if you have a hard time finding these basic sections, then you know it's time to move to the next CV in the pile.

•The objective

A candidate's career objective should be the first main section in a candidate's CV, right after their personal contact information. You can consider the career objective an introduction to your candidate, the type of experience they have, the skills they possess, and their career trajectory.

A candidate's career objective should show what they can bring to your organization, and how hard they're willing to work to reach their end goals. Furthermore, the candidate's career objective should be aligned to the requirements of your vacancy. You'll be able to quickly tell if the candidate's previous experience and future plans are truly relevant to your vacancy or not.

•The professional background

A common rule of CV writing is that all professional work experience must be stated in a reverse chronological manner, from the most recent to the oldest. The second thing to look for after the order is a detailed representation of what the candidate's job tasks were, their responsibilities, and any significant accomplishments they have accumulated.

A simple job title that's stuck next to a previous employer's name is not enough, even if it sounds fancy. Firstly, as an employer, you are most likely going to be aware of what a job description includes just by reading the job title. Secondly, you're probably not particularly interested in the generic tasks performed by your applicant. In order to find a truly qualified candidate who will go above and beyond in performing their job, you'll need to know what they performed, achieved, grew, and added to their

US home construction jumps in January, shifts to apartments

WASHINGTON: US home building surged in the first month of 2018, with a sharp rise in construction of apartments and as rebuilding continued in the storm-damaged South, according to government data released Friday.

The jump brought the pace of housing construction to a 15-month high, while new building permits, a sign of supply in the pipeline, hit a pre-housing-crisis record, according to the Commerce Department data. Total housing starts rose 9.7 percent in January to an annual rate of 1.3 million units, the highest level since October 2016 and the largest increase in 13 months, the report said.

That surpassed analyst forecasts, which had called for 1.2 million units. The increase was driven by a 19.7 percent surge in apartment construction, while single-family homes started rose just 3.7 percent from December.

"The underlying story here is that housing construction is grinding slowly higher, and likely will continue to do so through mid-year, at least," Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics said in a research note. "Higher mortgage rates are likely to become a problem later in the year."

Lawrence Yun, chief economist of the National Association of Realtors, cheered the data, since the increase in available housing will help hold down home prices and rent.

In addition, "This boost in housing

supply not only helps the economy, but may also help the Federal Reserve temper the pace of future short-term rate hikes," Yun said, since rising housing costs can drive inflation. "Simply put, more housing supply means a lower inflation rate, and potentially a slower pace of interest rate increases by the Fed."

However, he noted that housing inventory is currently near historic lows. The construction figures are subject to a high degree of uncertainty and most fell within broad margins of error. Officials caution that a trend may take as many as six months to appear.

Data on permits for projects in the works, which are more reliable, showed a 7.4 percent rise to 1.4 million units, the highest since June 2007. This was largely due to a sudden 25.4 percent spike in permits for multi-unit dwellings. Permits in the single family home segment, in contrast, fell 1.7 percent. Analysts say rising costs and scarce labor have slowed construction, leaving builders struggling to meet strong demand in the current economic recovery, causing prices to increase. Construction in the fire-damaged West rose 10.7 percent, and increased 9.3 percent in the South, which was battered by back-to-back hurricanes in August and September. Building in the Northeast, also mainly of apartments, jumped 45.5 percent but construction slowed 10.2 percent in the Midwest. —AFP

Japan, short of workers, eyes hiking pension age beyond 70

TOKYO: Japan has okayed plans to let people choose to start drawing their state pensions beyond the age of 70 as it grapples with severe labor shortages, ballooning welfare costs and a shrivelling tax base stemming from its greying population. The government said on Friday it would look to cement the proposals through legal changes after April 2020, adding that it would look at raising in stages the mandatory retirement age for some 3.4 million civil servants to 65 from the current 60.

Japanese people can currently choose to start receiving their pensions at any point between the ages of 60 and 70, with bigger monthly payments offered to those who do so after their 65th birthdays.

The policies may offer clues to how countries from Germany and Italy to China and South Korea could deal with the challenges sparked by their own ageing societies, from a lack of workers to spiralling welfare spending. Japan has the world's highest life expectancy, while the number of births last year fell to their lowest since records began over a century ago. Its population will shrink to 88 million from the current 127 million in the next four decades, the government estimates.

The grim demographics, coupled with a reluctance to loosen tight immigration rules, have led to the worst labor shortages since the early 1970s. The squeeze stifles the potency of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's economic policies, the International Monetary Fund has said.

Abe has pushed for more elderly people to remain in work and stay active in later life, as part of his "work style" reforms aimed at revving up economic growth and productivity. The government said on Friday it would also support companies that raise their mandatory retirement age. Most Japanese companies require full-time employees to retire at 60. — Reuters

previous company beyond the minimum requirements. Look for keywords that match your core skills and qualifications, look for numbers and quantitative values, and look for indications of growth.

Remember that, later on, you'll need to verify some of the details such as the dates of employment, specific job titles, and names of previous employers. This can be done during the initial screening phases, such as the phone interview.

•The skills

Let's assume that you're hiring a graphic designer. In their career objective, they've stated that they have experience in designing social media visuals, fancy PDFs, and brilliant presentations. They also stated that they're currently looking to work in a dynamic environment that will help them become even more creative and add value to the organization.

In their work experience, you can see that they've worked in marketing agencies and production houses. But, so far, you still have no indication of their technical skills. The vacant position requires someone who is knowledgeable in Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign. Competency in these programs should be found under a candidate's technical skills, so that you truly gauge what they're capable.

The next order of business is soft skills. While many CVs neglect adding technical skills, the majority of CVs you read will have a long list of soft skills with the exact same wording: Excellent communication skills, a team player and, works well under stress.

While wording alone is no reason to doubt an applicant's skills, you should still be cautious with this section. If after reading through their career objective, their work experience, and their job tasks, you don't feel like they've had the experience to develop and apply the skills they claim to have, then you're probably right to have reasonable doubts.

•The educational repertoire

To some employers, educational background may not be as important as work experience. But, for others, and especially for entry-level jobs, the vacancy at hand may require knowledge that's only acquired through learning. And, just like work experience is stated from most recent to oldest, the same should ideally apply to education.

You might not always find a GPA or overall average, so what you should look for instead are academic accomplishments, including merits, certificates, and awards. This information will give you an idea of how motivated and hardworking your candidate was during their learning phase of life, and how well they'll perform if they were hired.

Another aspect to consider is learning outside the formal education. Looking at extra courses, internships, workshops, and such can signify that the candidate is truly interested in growing and developing as a professional.

Because 30 seconds is all you've got, you should increase the efficiency of your background hiring work as much as possible, expedite writing job descriptions, increase the effectiveness of your job postings, and streamline your CV scanning and search efforts so you can focus on selecting the best candidate quickly.

BAYAN WEEKLY MARKET REPORT

Boursa Kuwait equities rally on renewed buying interest

Indices pare losses recorded last week

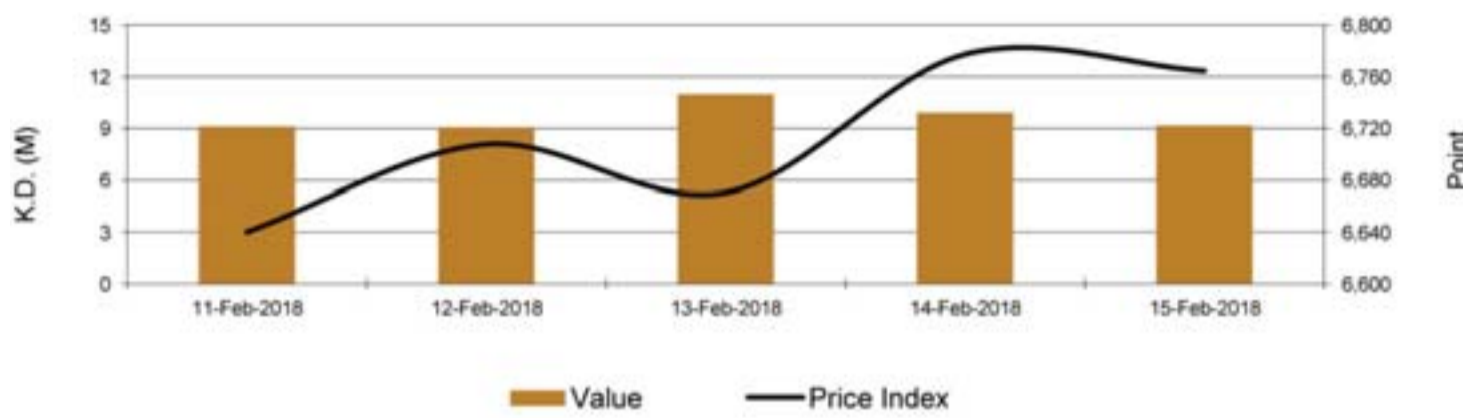
KUWAIT: Boursa Kuwait ended last week in the green zone. The Price Index closed at 6,764.28 points, up by 1.65 percent from the week before closing, the Weighted Index increased by 0.09 percent after closing at 410.66 points, whereas the KXS-15 Index closed at 946.48 points up by 0.43 percent. Furthermore, last week's average daily turnover decreased by 29.23 percent, compared to the preceding week, reaching KD 9.64 million, whereas trading volume average was 62.44 million shares, recording a decrease of 33.94 percent.

Boursa Kuwait indices were able to record mixed gains by the end of the week to compensate a part of its losses recorded in the previous period. The Boursa witnessed such performance in light of the purchasing trend that included many listed stocks especially the small-cap ones, amid optimism of some traders in the listed companies' results for 2017, especially after finishing the Banks' from disclosing its annual results, which were mostly positive.

Also, despite the gains recorded by the Boursa during the last week, its market capitalization declined by 1.04 percent compared to its level in a week earlier, where delisting of Nafais Holding Company during the last week contributed to the decline, where its market

cap of KD 316.28 million was deducted from the total market cap of the Boursa, to reach by the end of the week KD 27.26 billion, compared to KD 27.54 billion in a week earlier. The market gains contracted since the beginning of year 2018 reaching KD 316 million, with a growth of 1.17 percent only compared to its value at the last day of the previous year, where it reached then KD 26.94 billion. (Note: The market cap of the listed companies in the

Last Five Days Activity



recording 5.56 percent annual gain compared to its closing in 2017, while the Weighted Index increased by 2.30 percent, and the KXS-15 recorded 3.46 percent growth.

Sectors' Indices

Eight of Boursa Kuwait's sectors ended last week in the red zone, four recorded increases. The Health Care sector headed the losers list as its index declined by 9.95 percent to end the week's activity at 1,396.54 points. The Industrial sector was second on the losers' list, which index declined by 2.22 percent, closing at 1,803.58 points, followed by the Consumer Services sector, as its index closed at 868.23 points at a loss of 1.71 percent. The Basic Materials sector was the least declining as its index closed at 1,317.16 points with a 0.10 percent decrease.

On the other hand, last week's highest gainer was the Real estate sector, achieving 10.89 percent growth rate as its index closed at 1,196.58 points. Whereas, in the second place, the Technology sector's index closed at 527.27 points recording 3.88 percent increase. The Oil & Gas sector came in third as its index achieved 0.66 percent growth, ending the week at 972.77 points.

Sectors' Activity

The Banks sector dominated a total trade volume of around 112.71 million shares changing hands during last week, representing 36.10 percent of the total market trading volume. The Financial Services sector was second in terms of trading volume as the sector's traded shares were 27.29 percent of last week's total trading volume, with a total of around 85.20 million shares.

On the other hand, the Banks sector's stocks were the highest traded in terms of value; with a turnover of around K.D 24.13 million or 50.08 percent of last week's total market trading value. The Financial Services sector took the second place as the sector's last week turnover was approx. KD 8.09 million representing 16.79 percent of the total market trading value. —Prepared by: Studies & Research Department - Bayan Investment Co.

Small caps make solid gains

however, the market indices met in the green closing area for the first time in the week, in light of the purchasing activity that targeted the small-cap stocks, especially in the last moments of the session, which was reflected on the Price Index's performance in particular, that clearly jumped and ended the session's trading at its highest level in about five months. On the end of week session, the market returned to fluctuate once again, whereas the Price Index decreased as a result to the return

of the quick profit collection operations to be in control over some small-cap stocks, which lightened the Index's weekly gains, while the Weighted and KXS-15 indices continued its increase, which enabled it to transfer to the green zone on the weekly level. For the annual performance, the Price Index ended last week

MARKET ACTIVITY			
	Last Week	Previous Week	Change (%)
Volume	312,216,345	472,636,624	-33.94%
Value (K.D)	48,183,524	68,082,423	-29.23%
Deals	2,047	18,528	-88.95%

MARKET CAPITALISATION (K.D.)			
	Last Week	Previous Week	Weekly Ch. %
	27,255,456,146	27,542,092,527	-1.04%
			Annual Ch. %
			1.17%

STOCKS' ACTIVITY				
Total Listed Stocks	Traded Stocks	Up	Down	No Change
176	162	55	81	40

TOP GAINERS				
Company	Last Week Closing	Previous Week Closing	Ch. (Fils)	Ch. %
REAM	1,572.00	1,000.00	572.0	57.20%
SANAM	33.00	28.00	5.0	17.86%
ABAR	82.00	70.00	12.0	17.14%
CABLETV	20.00	18.00	2.0	11.11%
CBK	440.00	400.00	40.0	10.00%

TOP LOSERS				
Company	Last Week Closing	Previous Week Closing	Ch. (Fils)	Ch. %
YIACO	127.00	192.00	-65.0	-33.85%
KHOT	197.00	246.00	-49.0	-19.92%
NCCI	72.00	89.00	-17.0	-19.10%
PTHMR	46.20	53.50	-7.3	-13.64%
MENA	31.50	36.30	-4.8	-13.22%

MOVES BY VOLUME				
Company	Last Week Closing	Previous Week Closing	Total Volume (Stock)	To Market (%)
WARBABANK	232.00	226.00	39,284,668	12.58%
PTHMR	46.20	53.50	27,470,463	8.80%
ALIMTIAZ	144.00	152.00	18,300,318	5.86%
KINV	142.00	130.00	15,926,616	5.10%
MAZAYA	110.00	107.00	14,110,905	4.52%

MOVES BY VALUE				
Company	Last Week Closing	Previous Week Closing	Total Value (K.D)	To Market (%)
NBK	760.00	751.00	5,504,595	11.42%
KFIN	592.00	594.00	4,683,269	9.72%
BOUBAYAN	480.00	471.00	4,051,220	8.41%
ZAIN	453.00	463.00	3,108,702	6.45%
PTHMR	46.20	53.50	2,757,242	5.72%

SECTORS TRADING ACTIVITY				
Sector	Volume	To Market %	Value	To Market %
OIL & GAS	2,004,777	0.64%	163,285	0.34%
BASIC MATERIALS	3,011,094	0.96%	1,320,791	2.74%
INDUSTRIALS	27,360,422	8.76%	4,807,929	9.98%
CONSUMER GOODS	1,370,716	0.44%	373,351	0.77%
HEALTH CARE	536,700	0.17%	71,087	0.15%
CONSUMER SERVICES	4,568,126	1.46%	1,230,156	2.55%
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	11,080,944	3.55%	3,325,502	6.90%
BANKS	112,706,379	36.10%	24,131,234	50.08%
INSURANCE	104,890	0.03%	9,848	0.02%
REAL ESTATE	60,978,298	19.53%	4,354,280	9.04%
FINANCIAL SERVICES	85,197,581	27.29%	8,092,071	16.79%
TECHNOLOGY	3,296,418	1.06%	303,991	0.63%

SECTORS INDICES PERFORMANCE				
Sector	Last Week Closing	Previous Week Closing	Weekly Ch. %	Annual Ch. %
OIL & GAS	972.77	966.43	0.66%	0.95%
BASIC MATERIALS	1,317.16	1,318.53	-0.10%	5.00%
INDUSTRIALS	1,803.58	1,844.62	-2.22%	-1.95%
CONSUMER GOODS	814.53	826.99	-1.51%	-0.96%
HEALTH CARE	1,396.54	1,550.87	-9.95%	-7.55%
CONSUMER SERVICES	868.23	883.32	-1.71%	-3.65%
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	543.18	547.75	-0.83%	-2.72%
BANKS	952.26	950.42	0.19%	4.34%
INSURANCE	1,022.24	1,038.85	-1.60%	-7.58%
REAL ESTATE	1,196.58	1,079.04	10.89%	28.24%
FINANCIAL SERVICES	628.43	631.58	-0.50%	1.54%
TECHNOLOGY	527.27	507.60	3.88%	10.18%

Regular Market is calculated based on the average number of outstanding stocks as per the latest available official financial statements. Boursa Kuwait is currently witnessing a general state of watch by the traders, waiting for the listed companies' results for year 2017, especially that most of the listed companies did not disclose its results yet, despite that half of the legal disclosure period have passed, and will end by the end of March 2018. In addition, the number of the listed companies that disclosed its financial results for 2017 reached by the end of last week 50 company, with around KD 1.39 billion in net profits, and with a growth of 12.28 percent compared to the same companies' results for year 2016, where it reached around KD 1.24 billion.

Moreover, the Boursa initiated its first session of the week recording a noticeable drop for its three indices, affected by the profit collection operations executed on many traded stocks during the session, and headed by the leading stocks that witnessed strong increases since the beginning of the year, which negatively reflected on the performance of the Weighted and KXS-15 indices in particular, the indices that measure the performance of such stocks. The Boursa witnessed on the second session a fluctuation to its three indices, where the Price Index was able to realize good gains and was able to end the session in the green zone, to compensate all its losses recorded earlier in the week, supported by the random purchasing operations witnessed in the last minutes of the session and concentrated on a limited number of small-cap stocks, while the Weighted and KXS-15 indices continued its decline affected by the profit collection operations executed on some heavy stocks.

Furthermore, the Boursa continued its fluctuation in the mid-week session with changing positions, whereas the Weighted and KXS-15 indices were able to redirect to the green zone with relatively good gains, to compensate some of its losses recorded in the previous two sessions, while the Price Index ended the session in the red zone, affected by the quick profit collection operations that included some small-cap stocks. On Wednesday's session

S&P 500 caps off strongest week in five years

NEW YORK: The S&P 500 rose marginally on Friday to mark its biggest weekly increase in five years, although earlier gains evaporated after the indictment of Russians for meddling in the 2016 presidential election sent investors into defensive mode before a long weekend.

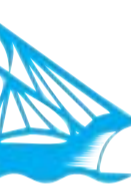
A market correction sparked by inflation concerns earlier in February raised fears that a nine-year bull market had ended, but data on consumer prices and retail sales this week left investors less worried, returning the stock market to its upward trajectory.

The office of US Special Counsel Robert Mueller charged 13 Russian nationals and three Russian companies accused of interfering with US elections in an effort to support then-candidate Donald Trump. The S&P 500 had been up over half a percent but lost nearly all of that after the announcement of the indictments.

"The market was looking for an excuse to roll over and Russia headlines would do it. You've had such a rally for the week, and people have been looking for an excuse to take profits heading into the weekend," said Dennis Dick, a proprietary trader at Bright Trading LLC in Las Vegas.

Investors snapped up shares of Johnson & Johnson, Abbvie and Pfizer, all up more than 1.4 percent and supporting the S&P 500 more than any other stocks.

A strong fourth-quarter reporting season and deep corporate tax cuts introduced this year have led analysts to increase their estimates for 2018 S&P 500 earnings growth to



19 percent from 12 percent in early January. "The fundamental story has not changed," said Ben Phillips, Chief Investment Officer of EventShares. "We really have not seen the tax reform start flowing through yet into company earnings. We think it's going to cause a second wave of earnings optimism."

The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 0.08 percent to end at 25,219.38 points, while the S&P 500 gained 0.04 percent to 2,732.22. The Nasdaq Composite dropped 0.23 percent to 7,239.47. The Dow rose 4.25 percent for the week, its strongest weekly gain since November 2016. The Nasdaq rose 5.31 percent for the week, its best week since December 2011. The S&P 500's 4.3 percent gain for the week was its biggest weekly advance since January 2013. But it remains down nearly 5 percent from its record high on Jan. 26.

US stock markets will remain closed on Monday for the Presidents Day holiday. They are unlikely to return to the unusually calm conditions seen last year, even though equities have already recovered more than half the ground lost in the recent sell-off and traders



NEW YORK: A trader works on the floor at the closing bell of the Dow Industrial Average at the New York Stock Exchange in New York. — AP

have rapidly dialed down fear. Economic data out on Friday painted a rosy picture. Homebuilding increased to more than a one-year high in January, boosted by strong increases in the construction of single- and multi-family housing units. A different report showed import prices jumped last month. The CBOE volatility index, known as Wall Street's fear gauge, edged up to 19.4 but remained way off the 50-point level it hit during the peak of the sell-off.

Coca-Cola rose 0.45 percent after the company reported better-than-expected profit and sales as it sold more teas, coffees and vitamin water. Among the big decliners was Kraft Heinz, which dropped 2.63 percent after quarterly profit and sales missed analysts' estimates.

Advancing issues outnumbered declining ones on the NYSE by a 1.43-to-1 ratio; on Nasdaq, a 1.34-to-1 ratio favored advancers. Volume on US exchanges was 7.1 billion shares, below the 8.5 billion average for the full session over the last 20 trading days. — Reuters



Business

Kinshasa joins flydubai's growing network in Africa

Dubai-based carrier to start operating daily flights to the Congolese capital

KUWAIT: Dubai-based flydubai has announced the start of flights to Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) from 15 April. The daily flights will operate with an enroute stop in nearby Entebbe and will also be available for booking through the Emirates codeshare agreement.

flydubai becomes the first UAE carrier to operate flights to N'djili Airport (also known as Kinshasa International Airport) and provide links from the UAE and the region to a new gateway in Central Africa.

Commenting on the launch, Ghaith Al-Ghaith, Chief Executive Officer of flydubai, said: "Africa is fast emerging as one of the most important markets for the United Arab Emirates and we have seen the trade relationship going from strength to strength in recent years. With the proximity to the continent and rising demand to more direct links to Africa, we see this new service to Kinshasa playing an instrumental role in further supporting the growing trade and tourism flows in the coming years."

Kinshasa is one of the largest cities in Africa and a busy hub providing extensive connections to cities across the African continent and intercontinental services to Europe. The country is known for its vast natural resource wealth: it is the world's largest producer of cobalt and a major producer of copper and diamonds.

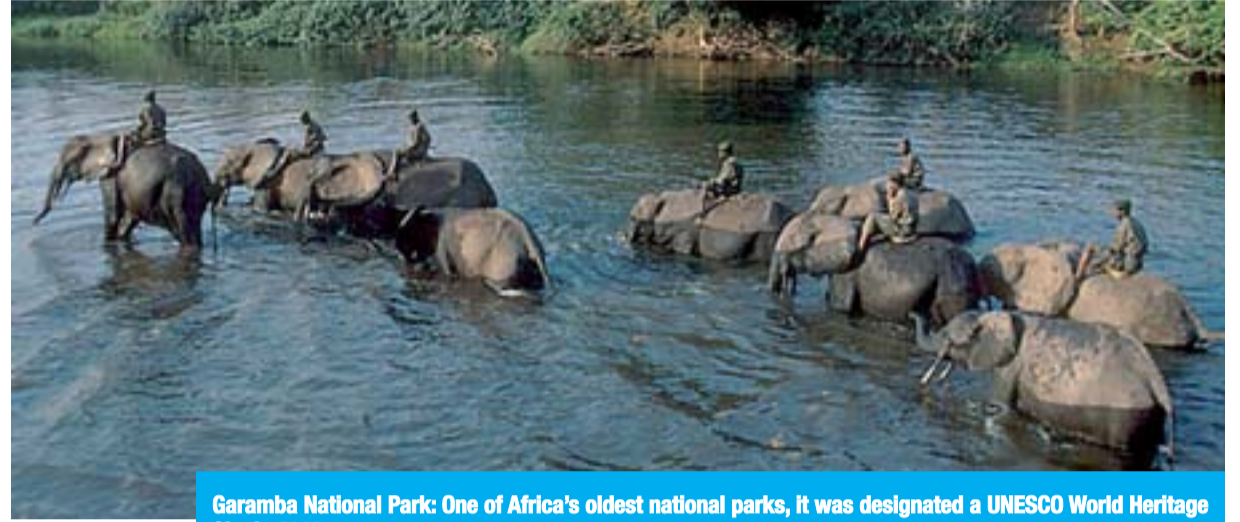
"The number of African companies registered with Dubai Chamber exceeded 12,000 in 2017, which demonstrates the increased cooperation and opportunity between both sides," said Sudhir Sreedharan, Senior Vice President, Commercial Operations (GCC, Subcontinent and Africa).

"We are looking forward to operating this route and exploring more opportunities to expand our network in Africa in the near future, while offering passengers a reliable and unrivalled onboard service whether they are travelling in Business or Economy Class," he added.

Passengers travelling to and from Kinshasa will have the option of a Business Class experience, benefitting from priority check-in service, comfortable spacious seats and a range of dining options.



Sudhir P Sreedharan



Garamba National Park: One of Africa's oldest national parks, it was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1980.

Passengers travelling in Economy Class will have access comfortable seating and a convenient way to travel.

Since the start of its operations in 2009, flydubai

has built up a comprehensive network in Africa with flights to Addis Ababa, Alexandria, Asmara, Djibouti, Entebbe, Hargeisa, Juba, Khartoum and Port Sudan, as well as Dar es Salaam, Kilimanjaro and Zanzibar.

Jazeera Airways offers travelers Hala February 'Fantastic Friday' deal

KUWAIT: Jazeera Airways, Kuwait's leading air carrier operating regionally and internationally, announces its new 'Fantastic Friday' weekly offer in celebration of Kuwait's Independence and Liberation Days. The one-time deal hopes to reward its customers with low-cost fares to popular destinations and accommodate changing travel trends.

For all those travelling from Kuwait, the special offer takes place every Friday, providing unmissable opportunities to book discounted tickets to select places. The Hala February offer is exclusively open on Friday, 16 February, valid from 12:01 am until 11:59 pm. This week's destinations from Kuwait include Beirut and Amman - KD 29 each, one way and Baku for KD 37 one way, enabling travel from February 16 until April 30, 2018.

Travelers are encouraged to avail of the exclusive 'Fantastic Friday' deal today by simply booking tickets through jazeeraairways.com or via the Jazeera app or call on 177.

On this occasion, Jazeera Airways wishes the people of Kuwait Happy 57th Independence and 27th Liberation Days!

Established in 2005, Jazeera Airways is a Kuwait Stock Exchange-listed company serving popular destinations in the Middle East and Eurasia. The airline operates a fleet of Airbus A320 aircrafts with two class



cabins comprising a Business Class and an Economy Class. Business Class travelers get both an upgraded experience and exclusivity, starting with exclusive check-in lines, business lounge access, up to 60 kilograms in free baggage allowance, and an exclusive on-board cabin. The airline's Economy Class offers travelers free baggage allowance of 40 kilograms and free on-board meals with a changing menu every month. Jazeera Airways launched its new brand identity through its logo and website on July 30, 2017 as it reaches an important milestone.

26 new winners added to Al-Hassad Islamic account

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank conducted its Al-Hassad Islamic account weekly draw, Kuwait's leading sharia-compliant rewards program that offers a broad range of prizes to the largest number of winners on February 14, 2018. The account provides 26 weekly prizes with KD 25,000 as a grand prize and 25 other prizes valued at KD 1,000 each. AUB also offers four quarterly prizes that are valued at KD 250,000 to each winner allowing them to achieve their dreams of travelling, studying abroad, or owning their dream home or car.

On this occasion Ahli United Bank announced, "With this draw, we are adding 26 new winners and prizes to the Al Hassad Islamic account whereby, the total number of winners annually will include more than 1300.

The weekly grand prize winner of KD 25,000 Jehad Falah Alazmi.

25 other winners won prizes of KD 1,000 and are as follows: Ibrahim Saleh Qablan Alhayan, Nayef Radhi Al Mutarai, Yousef Abdulrahman AlKandari, Baqer Said Alhusaini, Nasser Mohd Al Sayer,



Shaikhah Abdulaziz Al-Muzaini, Hamad M I Almufarrej, Fawaz Abdel Abdulrazzaq Almulla, Kholod Razaq Khabit, Ebrahim Hasan Alhay, Mohammad Matar AlShammari, Zad Malek Azzam, Tayobah A Madi, Yousef Ahmad AlMailam, Hussain Bankoda Mohamad, Khaled Abdullatef Al Duwaisan, Makki Ali Al Zinji, Hessa Rashid Khalifa, Hameeda Hameed Alhalwachi, John Baptista Menezes, Saeed Shabat Saeed Alhamzi, Mariam Mohammed Ghanim Al-Thawadi, Ali Moh'd Ali Ridha Hameedi, Mohd Baqer Ghuloom and Hameed Mansoor Mutaileq.

Al-Hassad Islamic account's customers in Kuwait and Bahrain are eligible to participate in the draw in line with the program's terms and conditions. Ahli United Bank added, "There are increased opportunities that await our current customers and those who are interested in opening an Al-Hassad Islamic account to benefit from the wide range of prizes and opportunities offered this year."

Individual customers can open their accounts with a minimum deposit of KD 100, qualifying them to enter the draw.

Chevrolet Silverado: Kuwait's best-selling pick-up truck in its class for third year in-a-row

KUWAIT: Chevrolet Alghanim has added a new achievement to its track record of successes by maintaining their position as the best-selling pick-up truck in Kuwait for the third year in-a-row. The milestone triumph was not achieved easily in a highly competitive market in which other renowned American brands race to grab a majority share of the increased high demand on pick-up trucks in Kuwait. However, the Chevrolet Silverado proved itself once again to be the most popular, reliable and trusted among this segment of cars and in specific among the youth who enjoy the Silverado's driving experience which reflect their dynamic and modern lifestyle in addition to its mighty power that is complemented by a fierce empowering design, latest technologies, entertainment options and many others that greatly heighten its popularity on the road.

Globally, the Silverado earned the JD Power Award as the top-rated truck in terms of dependability and initial quality. The Award is rewarded by the JD Power Ratings, a global benchmark for assessing the quality of vehicles in which global car brands aim to achieve high ratings thanks to JD Power's role in confirming real and genuine quality in cars.

Bringing the globally-award Silverado to Kuwait, Chevrolet Alghanim is proud to offer the pick-up of choice to its customers, giving them a unique experience of its grand size, reliability and rich heritage in the realm of pick-up trucks. With its powerful performance, fuel efficiency and technological sophistication, the Chevrolet Silverado comes in a variety of models and features that are developed by the Silverado's steel frame, a factor that augments drivers' sense of reliability, endurance and strength on the road. Anyone who is a fan of an empowering and exhilarating drive is welcome to visit the nearest Chevrolet Alghanim showroom and test-drive the Silverado.

The New Silverado

The new Silverado is designed in consistency to the legacy of Chevrolet pick-up trucks as it encapsulates astounding power, modernized features and other elements that position it as the best and ultimate pick-up truck in comparison to previous models.

The Silverado comes in three different Eco-Tec3 engines of V-6 or V-8, in addition to a sturdier and comfortably spacious cabin. The Silverado is also equipped with innovative features such as improved driving options including command and control, inventive solutions for the trunk's storage space as well as the specified weight of the trailer which is at 4,264 kilograms.

The new Silverado is available in different models to suit the individual lifestyle of drivers, including business people, who usually opt for the Work Truck (WT) for light excursions, and those who prefer a more luxurious drive with the Silverado High Country.

Powertrains

The EcoTec3 lineup for the 2018 Silverado comes with a 4.3L V-6, 5.3L V-8 or 6.2L V-8 engine, all matched with the proven and efficient six-speed or new eight-speed automatic transmissions (Standard on the LTZ model). The 4.3L V-6 engine is SAE-certified at 285 horsepower and 413 Nm of torque, while the 5.3L V-8 is certified at 355 horsepower and 519 Nm of torque, and the 6.2L V-8 at 420 horsepower and 624 Nm of torque.



All three EcoTec3 engines feature direct fuel injection, Active Fuel Management (cylinder deactivation) and variable valve timing, a combination not found in competitive trucks. The engines also use a compact overhead-valve design and weight-saving components such as aluminum blocks and cylinder heads, to reduce mass, for additional energy savings. All three engines also provide the proven power, torque and dependability of a large-displacement engine, seamlessly switching to four-cylinder mode to save fuel during light-load driving. The 5.3L V-8 has fuel economy of up to 10.2 L/100km highway (2WD models), the best of any V-8 pickup.

Functional, aerodynamic exterior

Silverado's exterior design blends strong with the Chevy truck heritage delivering a refined and modern aesthetic. A twin-port grille, full-width bumper and dual power dome hood create a strong presence, which is carried through in sculpted body sides and fender flares.

The Silverado design is about much more than just looks, however. The front end is engineered to improve air flow for more efficient engine cooling, while the roof and tailgate spoiler were shaped in the wind tunnel to smooth airflow over the truck for reduced drag. Inlaid doors, which fit into recesses in the bodyside, reduce wind noise for a quieter cab.

Interiors tailored to truck customers

The interiors of the new Silverado reflect the same focus on form and function. The upright instrument panel, six-gauge instrument cluster and multiple storage options are tailored specifically to the needs of truck customers. Controls are functional, logically placed and easy to operate with work gloves on. Rear doors on crew cabs are larger, for easier entry and exit, and rear doors on double cab models are now hinged at the front for easier access, especially in tight spots.

Chevy MyLink for powerful, intuitive connectivity

All Silverado Work Truck Models feature a 4.2-inch diagonal color display radio or optional 7-inch diagonal color touch radio with AM/FM Stereo, a USB port and auxiliary jack for MP3 devices.

Chevrolet MyLink radio with new 7-inch diagonal touch-screen, standard on the LS model, includes AM/FM stereo with seek-and-scan and digital clock, USB ports, auxiliary jack, and Bluetooth streaming audio for music and most phones. The 8-inch high-definition color touch screen radio, standard on LT models, enables users to scroll or drag through menus. LTZ and High Country models receive an 8-inch high-definition touch screen with embedded navigation. Silverado also features four selectable themes for the display screen and drive information center, which tailor the look of the displays to the taste of the customer.

Gulf Bank welcomes Fayeza Ahmad Jasem Al-Khamis



KUWAIT: Gulf Bank was pleased to welcome Fayeza Ahmad Jasem Al-Khamis, the lucky winner of its Kuwait's largest salary cash prize of KD 250,000. Fayeza has received her cash prize upon visiting the bank's Surra branch on Tuesday, 13 February 2018, where members of senior management greeted her.

Gulf Bank's salary account draw was held in an exciting event at The Scientific Center, Kuwait's premier science and educational organization on Thursday 8 February 2018, winner's name was also announced live on 88.8 FM Kuwait Pulse radio station. Gulf Bank's salary account is tailored for Kuwaiti customers, and allows them to benefit from many unique offers by transferring their salaries to Gulf Bank, including the opportunity to either receive a KD 100 cash gift upon transferring their salaries to Gulf Bank or an interest free loan. Customers must have a minimum salary of KD 500 and are fully eligible for the offer following their first salary transfer to Gulf Bank.

Additionally, customers can also enjoy a one year free of charge Visa or MasterCard credit card, as well as a chance to apply for loan up to KD 70,000 payable over 15 years, or a consumer loan

up to KD 15,000, plus an automatic membership in the best and fastest rewards program in Kuwait with Gulf Bank Credit Cards. Gulf Bank customers will also get the best services and facilities when financing their vehicle through Gulf Bank representatives who are available in all major car showrooms.

In addition to these exciting benefits, all existing and new customers who transfer their salaries to Gulf Bank are automatically enrolled into quarterly and annual salary account draws. Existing customers will get one chance while new customers will get three chances to win valuable cash prizes, including three quarterly prizes of KD 25,000, and the annual draw for Kuwait's largest salary prize of KD 250,000. Customers also can take part in Al-Danah quarterly and yearly draws by opening Al-Danah account to get the chance to become the next Al-Danah millionaire.

Salary campaign's 2018 draw dates include three quarterly draws to be held on 9 April, 9 July and 8 October 2018, respectively, and prizes value will be KD 25,000 each. The Annual draw for the grand prize of KD 250,000, will be held on 7 February 2019.

Technology

Belgian court orders Facebook to stop tracking web users

'Facebook must also destroy all personal data obtained illegally'

BRUSSELS: A Belgian court on Friday ordered Facebook to stop tracking internet users in Belgium who have no accounts with the social network, or face fines of 250,000 euros a day. The California-based firm vowed to appeal the ruling amid increased efforts in Europe to boost privacy protections in a digital economy dominated by US giants. Facebook must "stop following and recording internet use by people surfing in Belgium, until it complies with Belgian privacy laws", the Brussels court said.

It based its verdict on a probe by Belgium's privacy watchdog into Facebook's use of pixels and cookies, tracking devices that follow a user's internet activity. The court warned Facebook it could face fines of 250,000 euros per day or a maximum of 100 million euros (\$125 million) if it failed to heed the ruling. "Facebook must also destroy all personal data obtained illegally," the court ordered. Finally, it said, the social network must publish the complete 84-page verdict on its own website and excerpts in Belgium's Dutch-language and French-language newspapers.



Does not properly inform people

welcomed the court verdict. "This is a big win for internet users who don't want tech companies to monitor every step they make online," BEUC spokesman Johannes Kleis said in a statement. "What Facebook is doing is against Europe's data protection laws and should be stopped throughout the EU," Kleis added.

'Intend to appeal'

"We are disappointed with today's verdict and intend to appeal," Facebook said in a statement. "Over recent years we have worked hard to help people understand how we use cookies to keep Facebook secure and show them relevant content," it added. "We've built teams of people who focus on the protec-

50.1 percent of Fuji Xerox, compared with 49.9 percent for current Xerox shareholders, who also would receive a special cash dividend of \$2.5 billion. The Xerox board pushed for this deal even though, Deason said, it is not in the interest of the company or its shareholders. The 77-year-old billionaire also said Xerox made a secret deal in 2001, allowing Fujifilm to exit the Fuji Xerox joint venture if Xerox were taken over by any investor other than the Japanese firm.

Deason argues this clause prevented the Xerox board from seeking another buyer and this in turn harmed the company's shareholders. Xerox said the suit was groundless. "After having considered all strategic alternatives available to the company, Xerox's Board of Directors remains steadfast in its belief that the combination with Fuji Xerox is the best path to create value for the company and its shareholders," the company said in a statement. "It is unfortunate that Mr Deason is seeking to interfere with Xerox shareholders' right to decide and is relying on meritless legal claims. Xerox has fully disclosed the joint venture agreements, and the company will respond to Mr. Deason's legal claims through the appropriate legal channels in due course." — AFP

Major Xerox investor sues to block takeover by Fujifilm

NEW YORK: One of Xerox's biggest shareholders filed suit to challenge the US photocopier and printer maker's planned takeover by Japanese technology firm Fujifilm. Darwin Deason who along with Carl Icahn controls 15.2 percent of Xerox shares, filed suit against Xerox and Fujifilm on Tuesday, alleging fraud. Xerox said the allegations are "without merit" and that it will "vigorously defend itself." Under the planned deal, Xerox would be absorbed by an existing joint venture known as Fuji Xerox, falling under the control of Fujifilm, which until now held a 75 percent stake in the joint venture.

After the transaction is completed, Fujifilm would hold



TOKYO: In this file photo taken on January 14, 2016, a Fujifilm employee shows with the company's X-Pro2 premium mirrorless digital camera during the Fujifilm X Series fifth anniversary event. — AFP

Astronauts end spacewalk to fix robotic arm

WASHINGTON: A Japanese and an American astronaut floated for hours outside the International Space Station Friday on a spacewalk to repair the orbiting outpost's robotic arm and move some equipment into storage. The spacewalk, broadcast live on NASA TV, was the first for Japanese Aerospace Agency (JAXA) astronaut Norishige Kanai, and the fourth for his US counterpart Mark Vande Hei.

"You have been doing a great job today," a ground controller told Kanai before he returned to an airlock after more than five hours in the vacuum of space. His US colleague remained outside the space station for several minutes to finish some other tasks, but a NASA commentator said both astronauts "have completed all of their primary tasks," ahead of schedule. The astronauts were about 250 miles above Africa as the spacewalk neared its conclusion. The outing began at 1200 GMT when the duo switched their spacesuits to battery power before venturing into space. Kanai, 41, is a medical doctor and diver who goes by the nickname "Neemo."

The Tokyo-born lieutenant in the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force became an astronaut in 2009. He also spent 13 days in the Aquarius underwater lab off the coast of Florida as part of NASA's Extreme Environment Mission Operations (NEEMO) crew in 2015. Kanai is the fourth Japanese astronaut to walk in space. The goal of the spacewalk was to move some components related to the space station's Canadian-built robotic arm, known as Canadarm2, an aging but crucial piece of equipment which has undergone a series of repairs in recent months.

The robotic arm is used to move astronauts and heavy equipment around outside the research laboratory. The astronauts had to move a spare hand piece, called the Latching End Effector (LEE), from a storage spot outside the ISS into the Quest airlock so it can be returned to Earth on a future cargo mission for refurbishment and eventual re-launch.

"This LEE was replaced during an Expedition 53 spacewalk in October 2017," NASA said in a statement. "They also will move an aging, but functional, LEE that was detached from the arm during a January 23 spacewalk and move it from its temporary storage outside the airlock to a long-term storage location." That device will be kept at the station as a spare. Friday's spacewalk was the 208th in support of space station assembly and maintenance, and the third this year. — AFP



This file photo taken on November 20, 2017 shows logos of US online social media and social networking service Facebook. — AFP

tion of privacy—from engineers to designers—and tools that give people choice and control," it said.

It said the cookies and pixels it uses are "industry standard technologies," allowing hundreds of thousands of businesses to grow and reach customers across the bloc. Facebook, it said, requires any business using its technologies to give "clear notice to end-users". People, it added, also have the right not to have data collected on sites and apps off Facebook being used for ads. Facebook said it was making preparations

for the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) — a new EU law designed to protect privacy online—to come into force on May 25.

"We'll comply with this new law, just as we've complied with existing data protection law in Europe," Facebook said. A consumer rights organization said Monday that a German court had found Facebook is breaching data protection rules with privacy settings that over-share by default and by requiring users to give real names. — AFP

US, Dutch officers swoop on dark web drug buyers

DRIEBERGEN: US and Dutch officers knocked on doors across the two countries this week in a massive combined operation to track down those buying illicit drugs on the dark web, officials said Thursday. Operation "Decrypt" in the United States and "Mirum" in the Netherlands saw agents including from the Drug Enforcement Agency, visiting almost 100 addresses in so-called "knock-and-talk" actions in the two countries.

The operations are the first follow-ups since authorities last year shut down the massive illicit Hansa Market on the dark web, seen as one of the most sophisticated actions against internet criminality to date. Together with AlphaBay—which was also closed down—the underground websites included tens of thousands of sellers of deadly drugs like fentanyl and other illicit goods, which served more than 200,000 customers worldwide. But unknown to users, Dutch police secretly took over Hansa Market's administration before taking down the site, allowing officials to gather a wealth of intelligence on the buyers of illicit drugs.

Dutch police visited 37 addresses over the past two days to inform suspected buyers about the dangers of their actions "and to show that they are not as anonymous as they thought," officials said in a statement Thursday. At least one 25-year-old man was arrested in the small central town of Wilp for ordering 150 ecstasy pills on the dark web, police said, adding that prosecutors were mulling further charges. Buyers were mainly targeted for procuring drugs such as cocaine, ecstasy, LSD and hashish, Dutch police said.

At the same time, US authorities including the DEA, the FBI and others said they visited addresses in the United States. Ahead of the operation, Kevin Scully, Europe's regional director of the US Drug Enforcement Agency, told AFP that "we'll be knocking on people's doors and talking with them, letting them know that what they are doing is wrong." — AFP

Tech startup gives tools to report supply chain slavery

LONDON: Giving staff the tools to report workplace abuses, including forced labor, should improve data for brands that are striving to ensure their products are slavery-free, a tech startup said. From texts and calls to messaging apps and social media, technology could encourage workers to share issues anonymously. That would give companies a better understanding of the risk of slavery in their global supply chains, said Antoine Heuty, chief executive of Uula, a software and analytics platform.

"Our platform can help build trust and enable workers to connect with companies in real-time, anywhere, any time and in any language," Heuty told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. With modern slavery increasingly making global headlines, companies are under growing pressure from governments and consumers to disclose what actions they are taking to ensure their operations and products are not tainted by forced labor. "By combining workers' responses with other data, we can help companies in the fight against

Social media giants not complying with consumer rules: EU

BRUSSELS: The European Commission said Thursday that US social media giants have made an effort to comply with EU consumer protection rules, but that Facebook and Twitter have not made all the required changes. "While Google's latest proposals appear to be in line with the requests made by consumer authorities, Facebook and, more significantly, Twitter, have only partially addressed important issues about their liability and about how users are informed of possible content removal or contract termination," the Commission, the EU's executive arm, said in a statement.

The three major internet companies had published on Thursday the changes they are making to comply with the demands of European regulators, which must be implemented in all languages by spring. Some of those changes include having the right to withdraw from an online purchase, being able to lodge complaints in Europe rather than in California where the companies are based, and the platforms being responsible towards EU consumers in the same way as offline services.

"I am pleased that the enforcement of EU rules to protect consumers by national authorities is bearing fruit, as some companies are now making their platforms safer for consumers; however, it is unacceptable that this is still not complete and it is taking so much time," said Vera Jourova, European Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality. The European Union's demands to the US internet giants were made in November 2016 following numerous complaints by consumers in Europe about being hit with fraud and scams when using their websites. There were also concerns by consumer protection authorities about requesting the removal of illegal content. — AFP



slavery, by understanding their employees," said Heuty, whose social enterprise is one of a rising number of businesses seeking to tackle societal issues. While major companies from sportswear giant Adidas to budget fashion chain Primark have set up whistleblower hotlines for workers in recent years, Uula aims to go further, Heuty said. The platform will merge feedback from workers with other data, such as satellite imagery of palm oil plantations and building regulations for garment factories, to give companies real-time insight into risks in their supply chains, he said.

Uula also hopes its software could in the future be used to build industry benchmarks, allowing companies and suppliers to compare working conditions and regulations against their peers. "We want to motivate a race to the top," Heuty said. While technology can play an important role in protecting vulnerable workers and preventing abuses, it should not be seen as a "silver bullet", said the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI). "Some software platforms may well improve traceability and transparency, and be a useful mechanism to flag risk," said Cindy Berman, head of modern slavery strategy at ETI, a group of trade unions, firms and charities promoting workers' rights. "But resolving workplace grievances or rights violations cannot lie with technology." About 25 million people globally were estimated to be trapped in forced labor in 2016, according to the International Labor Organization (ILO) and rights group Walk Free Foundation. — Reuters

Health

Italy's country doctor makes his house calls on horseback

'Every week, I ride 80 to 100 kilometers on horseback'

VERDUNO: Through vineyards stretching as far as the eye can see and shrouded in fog, the thud of hooves pounding the loose earth grows louder. A man on horseback gallops into view. It could be a scene from a 19th century literary classic, but in the hills of Italy's northern Piedmont region Roberto Anfosso is just commuting to work. For the last 10 years, the slight 63-year-old doctor, with white hair, glasses and a neat moustache, has been making his house calls to patients on horseback.

The rural region of Verduno, known for its wine and hazelnuts, has an ageing population. "This is one of the pockets of Italy with the longest life expectancy. The patients I visit are at least 70 years old. The oldest was 104," he says, patting Ambra's sleek brown coat. Anfosso says that horseback is his preferred mode of transport for routine, non-urgent visits, such as monitoring diabetes and checking blood pressure. He pulls his stethoscope and blood pressure monitor from one of Ambra's saddlebags and approaches his patient's house, his four-year old filly ambling by his side.

"Every week, I ride 80 to 100 kilometers on horseback. In the first three years, I made 1,000 visits, I've stopped counting," says the doctor, who, when not cantering to tend to the elderly, also works in now more conventional surgeries.

A special relationship

Anfosso undertakes his journeys all year round, over the lush green hills during the summer months and through the snow during the icy winters. "The views are incredible, we are blessed here," he says. The grandson of a cavalry officer, Anfosso started riding at the age of 14, when his asthma forced him to give up football. But his first patient visit on horseback came years later, by chance.

While mapping out a route for an afternoon ride, he received a call to attend to a patient and decided to

combine his passion with his calling. "When I arrived, the patient looked at me strangely, he was so surprised, he didn't let me in at first," he recalls. But Anfosso believes his unusual mode of transport has a positive impact on his relationship with patients. "When a doctor arrives on horseback, the patient feels that he has more time to devote to them. It creates a special, very human, less institutional relationship," he says.

A cure for monotony

He has also noticed that, for some patients, the horse provides a welcome tonic to relieve day-to-day monotony. "Elderly people often fixate on what is wrong with them and talk about it constantly. The horse distracts them from their current situation. If a visit lasts 20 minutes they spend 10 talking about the horse, their memories..."

Undertakes his journeys all year round

perks of not having come by car. Showing his whip with its silver horse design tip, he recalls that he saw it in the window of a Parisian sex shop next to the Moulin Rouge during a trip with his wife and friends, and ventured inside to buy it. The galloping doctor is now well-known across the area. He says that often during his visits, whose cost is covered on the national health service, he receives, "a call from the farm next door who has seen the horse pass by and asks me to come over."

"Sometimes I've only scheduled one visit but I make 10." Ignazio Fortino, 70, one of his patients and friends, says the doctor is "always there when you need him". "We're used to seeing him on horseback. For us there's nothing strange about it. It creates a beautiful relationship and gives the feeling that he is not in a hurry and can take better care of us." — AFP



LA MORRO: Italian Doctor Roberto Anfosso poses with his horse "Ambra" near a secular cedar tree in the countryside of La Morra, northwestern Italy.



LA MORRO: Roberto Anfosso (L) visits his 98-year-old patient Luigina Sobrero (C).— AFP photos



LA MORRO: Italian Doctor Roberto Anfosso rides his horse "Ambra" during a working day.

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- AV connection for dialysis



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What's On



A special ceremony was recently held at the Crown Plaza to celebrate the twelfth anniversary of HH the Amir's ascension to power. The ceremony also made special mention of some of martyrs whose families were honored.



NBK organizes events for kids at NBK's Specialty Hospital

Continuing its monthly activities at the Children's Specialty Hospital and the Stem Cell Therapy Unit, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) carried out engineering activities for kids and Red Riding Hood Play to support children while they get their treatment. The engineering event was organized in collaboration with "Engineering with Kids"

where the children had the opportunity to practice science, technology, engineering, and math in a fun and challenging way through activities and games. Also, the children enjoyed watching their favorite play and had the chance to participate in an interactive scenario at the end with the characters. The two events aimed at inspiring the children to build on their natural curiosity by teaching different knowledge concepts through hands-on learning. The two initiatives come as part of a fun activity program that extends all year long and includes a library, a reading corner, storytelling sessions, activities for the medical staff such as the "nurse of the month", interactive expression day, fun events and a movie night activity that are organized occasionally. The fun activity program is a part of

NBK's social responsibility towards children and keenness to support them while they get their treatment. NBK has provided a display screen, entertainment facilities, variety of different and various books and other supplies for children to enjoy the whole program. NBK's initiative reflects the bank's high sense of duty and responsibility towards the community and helping those in need. It is a well rooted tradition that has been carried out by NBK each year in its efforts to continuously have an active role in Kuwait's society. It's worth mentioning that NBK's Stem Cell Therapy Unit is the first children's bone marrow transplant center in Kuwait. The new center is the largest corporate social responsibility donation in Kuwait and will expand the hospital's ability to treat children with cancer and blood diseases.

Burgan Bank sponsors project for Special Needs' exhibition

Burgan Bank, a dedicated contributor to societal needs, is pleased to announce its participation in the upcoming Kuwaiti Project for Special Needs Exhibition. Visitors will learn how Burgan Bank promotes social inclusion through its comprehensive financial offerings. The exhibition will be held on 22 February 2018 at the Coral Ballroom 'Al Marjan' at the Sheraton Hotel in Kuwait City.



Established under the patronage of Al-Sheikha Sheikha Al Abdullah Al Sabah, the exhibition will highlight the measures taken to honor and uphold the rights of the special needs' segment in Kuwait. Working in line with the government's mission to serve their everyday requirements and in full compliance with the banking guidelines set by the Central Bank of Kuwait last year, Burgan Bank had appointed six fully-equipped branches across all governorates to enable physically disabled, visually

impaired and seniors' access to various banking solutions. All the six branches are managed by well-trained staff who have been taught to communicate via sign language with those who suffer from sensory disabilities - hearing and speech impairment. Demonstrating its pledge to delivering evolutionary business solutions, Burgan Bank had taken the lead in 2017 and launched the first-ever text-to-speech technological solution "ReadSpeaker" integrated on its website to better serve customers with vision-impairment and need for audio interactivity. As a progressive financial institution with a firm customer-centric approach, Burgan Bank will continue to facilitate a seamless banking experience for its special needs customers. The bank is guided by its long standing principle of placing people at the heart of its business as it accommodates the interests of the community within which it operates.



PBL symposium at ACK

The Center for Project Based Learning at the Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) is organizing its third annual "Project Based Learning (PBL) Symposium" under the theme "PBL - Motivation and Creativity in the Classroom" on Thursday, March 22nd, 2018. Supported by Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) and set to be held at ACK's campus in West Mishref, the symposium will bring together educators of various fields to

share expectations, learning techniques and experiences that influence and shape the learning process of the next generation of professionals. With keynote speeches from Prof Alex Stojcevski, Dean of the School of Software & Electrical Engineering at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne, Australia, and Prof Xiangyun Du, Professor at Aalborg University UNESCO Center for Problem and Project Based Learning, Denmark and two internationally recognized experts for Project Based Learning will share their insights. The symposium will also serve as a platform for professional development of educators involved in tertiary level education, while providing networking and knowledge-sharing opportunities between the panel of speakers and symposium attendees.



Hard sandstone is slowly removed from around the fossil



The National Council For culture Arts and Letters (NCCAL) recently organized a lecture titled 'Ancient Monumental Inscriptions on Kuwaiti Soil', which was presented by Dr Sultan Mutiaq Al-Deweesh. The lecture focused on monumental forms of inscriptions found on the west coasts of the Arabian Gulf, including Subbiya and other parts of the Arabian Peninsula.



The Pakistani community in Kuwait celebrated the Basant festival in Kabb over the weekend. Organized by JAG organization, the event included a funfair, music, games and food and handicraft stalls. Many families participated and enjoyed flying kites along with other activities.

TV



01:35 The Legend Of Zorro
03:50 Rumble
05:25 The Last Witch Hunter
07:15 The Legend Of Zorro



00:50 Lone Star Law
01:45 Going Ape
02:13 Going Ape
02:40 Going Ape
03:08 Going Ape



00:45 Liar
01:35 Casuality
02:25 Eastenders
03:00 Doctors



00:00 Homicide Hunter
01:00 Homicide Hunter
02:00 Psychic Kids
03:00 The Haunting Of...



00:05 Nightcap
00:30 Steve Rannazzisi: Breaking Dad
01:20 Josh Widdicombe: And Another Thing...

18:35 Lip Sync Battle
19:00 Lip Sync Battle
19:25 Impractical Jokers
19:50 Real Husbands Of Hollywood



00:30 Ultimate Survival
01:20 How We Invented The World
02:10 How We Invented The World
03:00 How We Invented The World



00:50 Kindred Spirits
01:45 A Haunting
02:40 A Crime To Remember
03:35 Deadline: Crime With Tamron Hall



00:10 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
00:35 Binny And The Ghost
01:00 Hank Zipzer
01:25 Alex & Co.

21:45 Austin & Ally
22:10 Austin & Ally
22:35 Girl Meets World
23:00 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug



00:00 PJ Masks
00:30 Vampirina
01:00 Vampirina
01:30 Art Attack
01:55 Henry Hugglemonster



00:15 Railroad Australia
01:05 Abandoned Engineering
01:50 Yukon Men
02:40 Dirty Jobs



06:00 Milo Murphy's Law
06:10 Pheas & Ferb
06:25 Milo Murphy's Law
06:35 Pheas & Ferb



00:00 The Platinum Life
00:55 The Platinum Life
01:50 E! News
02:50 Botched

04:35 Botched
05:30 Celebrity Style Story
06:00 Botched
06:55 Botched
07:50 Botched



00:15 Coronation Street
00:35 Coronation Street
01:00 Don't Tell The Bride
01:30 Coronation Street



00:00 Decoding The Past
01:00 The Lost Evidence
02:00 The Lost Evidence
03:00 Decoding The Past

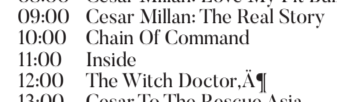


00:25 American Pickers
01:10 Dark Files
02:50 Hunting Hitler
03:40 Pawn Stars



00:15 John Torode's Malaysian Adventure
00:45 David Rocco's Dolce Vita
01:10 Lee Chan's World Food Tour

18:10 Charlie Luxton's Homes By The Med
19:05 Valentine Warner Eats Scandinavia
19:30 Valentine Warner Eats Scandinavia



00:10 Filthy Riches
01:00 Yukon Gold
02:00 Wicked Tuna: North vs South
03:00 Fish Tank Kings



00:20 Gardeners Of Eden
01:10 Zlambezi
02:00 Little Monkey House
02:50 Savage Kingdom: Uprising



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

00:20 Olaf's Frozen Adventure
00:50 Monte Carlo
02:40 A Little Game
04:15 Zootropolis



00:16 Kid-E-Cats
00:22 Shimmer And Shine
00:44 Sunny Day
01:06 Max & Ruby

Machines
07:23 Paw Patrol
07:37 Dora The Explorer
08:00 Nella The Princess Knight
08:12 Kid-E-Cats



00:15 The Drew Carey Show
00:40 The Drew Carey Show
01:05 The Middle
01:30 The Middle



00:20 Olaf's Frozen Adventure
00:50 Monte Carlo
02:40 A Little Game
04:15 Zootropolis



01:20 Without A Paddle: Nature's Calling
02:55 The House Bunny
04:40 The Family Fang

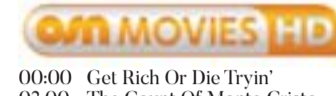


01:30 A Dangerous Woman
03:15 Jappeloup
05:25 Spare Parts



00:40 Back To The Sea
00:25 Operation Arctic
04:05 Elias And The Royal Yacht

05:30 Phantom Boy
07:05 The Secret Of Kells
08:35 Krazy Planet
09:55 Legend Of The Sea



00:00 Get Rich Or Die Tryin'
02:00 The Count Of Monte Cristo
04:15 Steve Jobs



00:40 Nextworld
01:30 Nextworld
02:20 Nextworld
03:10 Nextworld



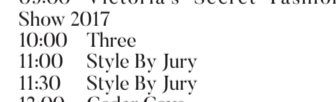
01:05 Jigar Kaleja
03:00 Jigar Kaleja
03:55 Koffee With Karan
05:00 Koffee With Karan



01:00 Tadpole
02:45 Terminus
03:15 Christmas Truce
05:30 Malena



00:00 Devious Maids
02:00 Mistresses
03:00 Victoria's Secret Fashion Show 2017

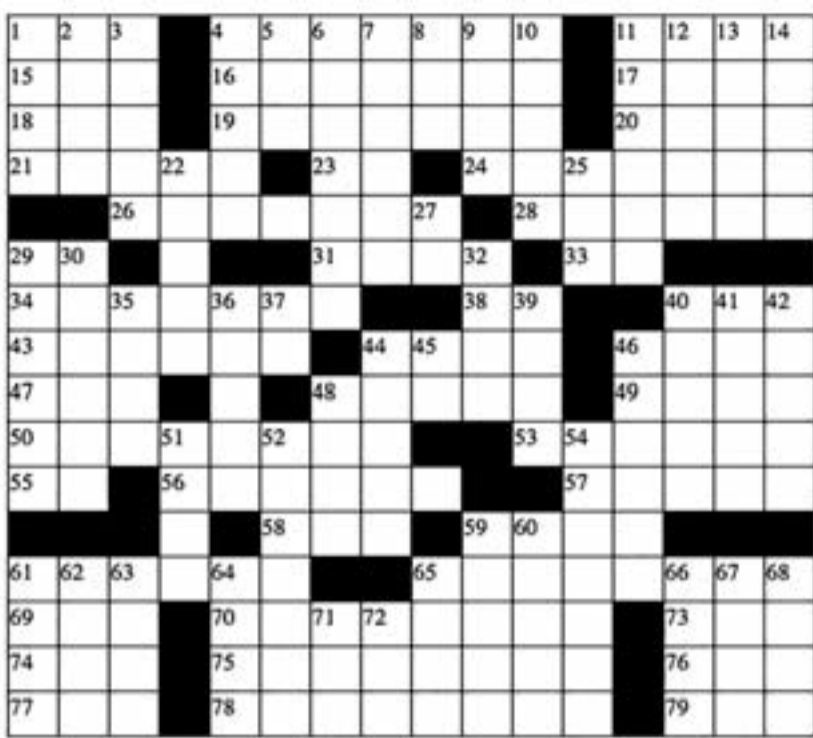


00:20 Ambulance
01:05 An Hour To Save Your Life
01:50 Katie Price: My Crazy Life



01:30 A Dangerous Woman
03:15 Jappeloup
05:25 Spare Parts
07:20 Antwone Fisher

CROSSWORD 1838



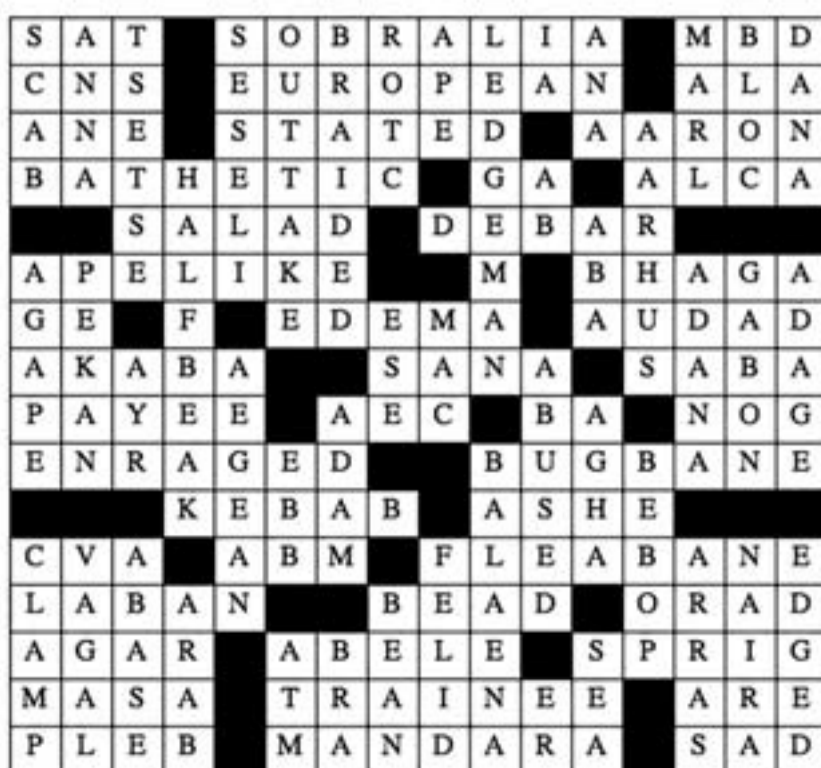
ACROSS

- 1. An awkward stupid person.
4. Loose-fitting nightclothes worn for sleeping or lounging.
11. Tall palm tree bearing coconuts as fruits.
15. 100 pyas equal 1 kyat.
16. A state in the southeastern United States on the Gulf of Mexico.
17. The biblical name for ancient Syria.
18. The sense organ for hearing and equilibrium.
19. Small South American marmoset with silky fur and long nonprehensile tail.
20. Fully developed or matured and ready to be eaten or used.
21. Largest crested screamer.
23. A bachelor's degree in science.
24. A city and port in northern Jutland.
26. Having a flat circular shape.
28. Lack of normal muscular tension or tonus.
29. A soft silver-white ductile metallic element (liquid at normal temperatures).
31. Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
33. A hard brittle gray polyvalent metallic element that resembles iron but is not magnetic.
34. Illusory auditory perception of strange nonverbal sounds.
38. An associate degree in nursing.
43. Relating to or near the radius.
47. Fermented alcoholic beverage similar to but heavier than beer.
49. (Greek mythology) The Titaness who was mother of Helios and Selene and Eos in ancient mythology.
50. Broadly or extravagantly humorous.
53. Someone who operates an aircraft.
55. A trivalent metallic element of the rare earth group.
56. A port city in southwestern Iran.
57. In such a manner as could not be otherwise.
58. A unit of absorbed ionizing radiation equal to 100 ergs per gram of irradiated material.
61. Aristocratic Italian family of powerful merchants and bankers who ruled Florence in the 15th century.
69. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
70. A large estate in Spanish-speaking countries.
73. A column of light (as from a beacon).
74. A vest pocket to hold a pocket watch.
75. Norwegian explorer who was the first to traverse the Northwest Passage and in 1911 the first to reach the South Pole (1872-1928).
76. Counting the number of white and red blood cells and the number of platelets in 1 cubic millimeter of blood.
77. (Irish) Mother of the ancient Irish gods.
78. A river in northeastern Brazil that flows generally northward to the Atlantic Ocean.
79. Black-and-white short-necked web-footed diving bird of northern seas.

DOWN

- 1. An organization of countries formed in 1961 to agree on a common policy for the sale of petroleum.
2. An Indian nursemaid who looks after children.
3. The capacitance of a capacitor that has an equal and opposite charge of 1 coulomb on each plate and a voltage difference of 1 volt between the plates.
4. Reddish long-tailed monkey of west Africa.
5. A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organism.
6. Tropical tree of the East Indies cultivated for its edible fruit.
7. Of or relating to abasia (inability to walk).
8. The month following February and preceding April.
9. Type genus of the Amidiidae.
10. The capital and largest city of Yemen.
11. An abundant nonmetallic tetravalent element occurring in three allotropic forms.
12. (Greek mythology) A giant Boeotian hunter who pursued the Pleiades and was eventually slain by Artemis.
13. An island (part of Campania) in the Bay of Naples in southern Italy.
14. The ending of a series or sequence.
22. Cuban timber tree with hard wood very resistant to moisture.
25. Your general store of remembered information.
27. An official prosecutor for a judicial district.
30. Of or relating to a directionless magnitude.
32. A very young child (birth to 1 year) who has not yet begun to walk or talk.
35. A European river.
36. Formerly a term of respect for important white Europeans in colonial India.
37. A metric unit of volume equal to one thousandth of a liter.
39. A quantity of no importance.
40. German mystic and theosophist who founded modern theosophy.
41. Appeal or request earnestly.
42. How a result is obtained or an end is achieved.
44. Food mixtures either arranged on a plate or tossed and served with a moist dressing.
45. A highly unstable radioactive element (the heaviest of the halogen series).
46. A thoroughfare (usually including sidewalks) that is lined with buildings.
48. An informal term for a father.
51. City in southwestern Colombia in a rich agricultural area.
52. Type genus of the Cariamidae comprising only the crested caracara.
54. A state in midwestern United States.
59. A member of a nomadic people of the northern Ural mountains.
60. A unit of dry measure used in Egypt.
62. Very dark black.
63. A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
64. A boy or man.
65. English monk and scholar (672-735).
66. Predatory black-and-white toothed whale with large dorsal fin.
67. (Babylonian) God of wisdom and agriculture and patron of scribes and schools.
68. Flemish painter who was a founder of the Flemish school of painting and to have pioneered modern techniques of oil painting (1390-1441).
71. Of inferior or mixed breed.
72. A hotel providing overnight lodging for travelers.

Friday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Aries, you find you're dealing with matters of the spirit: dejavu, intuition and other such aspects but you can't explain them. It's as though you know what coworkers, family and friends are thinking and it turns out what you suspect is true!



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Taurus, your mind is on big things such as eternity and life in general: remembering small details such as leaving something out of the fridge or paying a phone bill could slip your mind if you're not careful!



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Gemini, intuitive vibrations stay with you throughout the day as you putter around the house or workplace. Your mind is preoccupied with the unknown mysteries of life and death. Cosmic information is an interest you enjoy.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Cancer, your gift of knowing is strong and at its height of intensity! The stars are aligned for ethereal energy and confirmation of what some call hunches or gut feelings.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Leo, when hunches are confirmed over and over again, you have got no choice but to recognize this substantial spiritual gift: speaking of this to people who understand is helpful.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Virgo, your savvy business skills kick in when you discover a new situation for a potential financial investment. You're able to use foresight to create a plan that works for all concerned parties.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Libra, intuition is so strong and demanding! That you could be irritated and cross. Pay attention to your knowing but strive to keep it in its place.



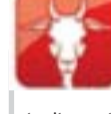
Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Scorpio, you're hands-on and full throttle when tackling domestic chores. You actually enjoy cleaning out and giving away to those less fortunate.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Sagittarius, your intuitive side is fully awakened when someone from your past reaches out to you. This person made your parting ugly, so carefully consider this before reconnecting.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Capricorn, the energy of prosperity surrounds and supports you. The new cycle you've entered creates an atmosphere of abundance and opportunity; it's up to you to accept these.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

Aquarius, the mysteries of life take prominence in your thoughts and attention. A period of great spiritual evolution is at hand according to the new cycle you have entered.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

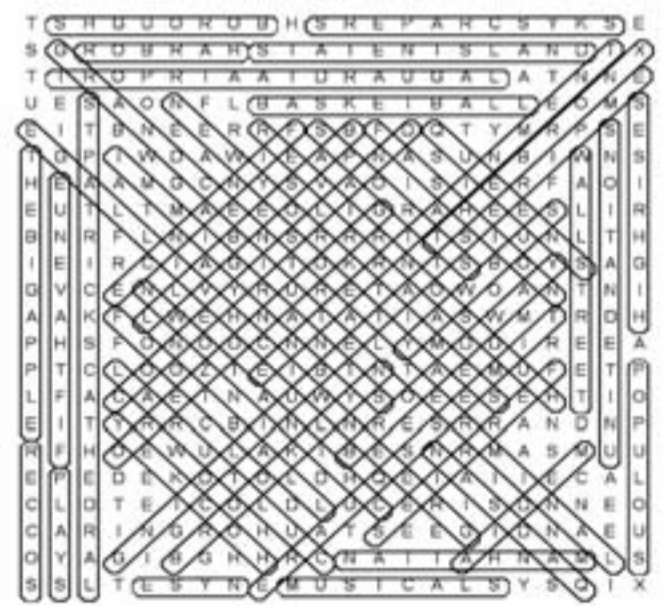
Pisces, the heavens create an energy that focuses on your appearance as well as your health. Your beauty and intellect shine as the work week finally comes to a very successful end.

Wordsearch Puzzle

New York City 2



New York City 1



- BASEBALL, BASKETBALL, BOROUGHS, BROADWAY, BROOKLYN, CHINATOWN, CONEY ISLAND, CULTURAL, EMPIRE STATE BUILDING, ENTERTAINMENT, FASHION, FERRIS, FIFTH AVENUE, FOOTBALL, GRAND CENTRAL, TERMINAL, GREENWICH VILLAGE, GROUND ZERO, HARBOR, HIGHRISES, HOCKEY, HUDSON RIVER, IMMIGRANTS, LAGUARDIA AIRPORT, MANHATTAN, MEDIA, MUSICALS, NASDAQ, NEW YORK, TIMES, TIMES SQUARE, UNITE, UNITED NATIONS, PLAYS, POPULOUS, QUEENS, SKYSCRAPERS, SOCCER, SPORTS, STATEN ISLAND, ST PATRICKS CATHEDRAL, SUBWAY, THE BIG APPLE, THE BRONX, TIMES SQUARE, UNITE, UNITED NATIONS, WALL STREET.

The hidden message is: THE STATUE OF LIBERTY WAS A GIFT FROM FRANCE AND WAS DEDICATED IN EIGHTEEN-EIGHTY-SIX

Daily SuDoku



Friday's Solution



African audiences celebrate 'Black Panther' release

The release this week of Marvel Studios' latest superhero outing, "Black Panther", has triggered the enthusiasm of African movie fans and a sense of pride that Hollywood has finally plugged a gap. With an almost entirely black cast and a young African-American director, Ryan Coogler, the film has already won rave reviews for its stereotype-busting portrayal of Africa.

“ This is beyond a movie. This is huge ”

After all the hype, select audiences in African countries have got a sneak preview of the new blockbuster-and many agree it's an important moment in popular culture. "As I was watching the movie with friends, I remember we all felt part of history. This is beyond a movie. This is huge," said Brian Barasa, a 29-year-old Kenyan who says he has loved comic books for as long as he can remember. Set in the fictional African country of Wakanda, the film's focus on black protagonists, stories and culture sets it clearly apart from other superhero movies.

But hero T'Challa, the king of Wakanda played by Chadwick Boseman, is not the first black superhero to hit the big screen. Barasa, who co-founded the Nairobi Comic Convention in 2014,

points out that was "Blade"-a vampire with human traits portrayed by actor Wesley Snipes in the trilogy between 1998 and 2004. "But Blade was American," said Barasa. "In a conversation I had recently, somebody pointed out, 'Blade had to walk in order for Black Panther to run,'" he noted.

Cultural impact

So far "Black Panther" has generated an enthusiastic response from communities in Kenya and Nigeria that are often stereotypically represented on screen. Superhero fans also appear to appreciate the film's visual qualities, the reproduction of costumes from the original comic and the characters' accents.

"Usually in Hollywood, you're just African. They will use a Nigerian actor with a Nigerian accent to play a Kenyan character or vice versa," said Sope Aluko, one of five Nigerians in the film, at the Lagos premiere in Nigeria this week. "We knew that we had a responsibility towards Africa and the black community in general while shooting this movie," she added. "But I didn't expect anything like this, all this enthusiasm coming from the black community." Commercially, the film looks set to break some box office records.

But for some, the potential cultural impact could be its most important achievement. "It's a very important statement to the world that Marvel Studio can have a movie entirely based on African characters," said Kenyan actor Moses Oduu at the African premiere in Kisumu, a town in the west of the country. "That is so nice, it's going to turn away some of the stereotypes we have on Africans."

Afro-future

In the film, Wakanda has skillfully exploited its mineral wealth to become the most developed



Actor Chadwick Boseman arrives for the MARVEL Black Panther fashion week celebration "Welcome to Wakanda" at Industria in New York. — AFP photos



Actress Lupita Nyong'o arrives for the MARVEL Black Panther fashion week.



Actor Michael B. Jordan arrives for the MARVEL Black Panther fashion week.

and technologically advanced country in the world—a complete reverse of the run-of-mill portrayal of African nations as backward, poverty-stricken and disease-ridden. Yet, at the same time, Wakanda is also anchored in African values of community and spirit.

"I like the Afro-future description of the continent and the mix of modern and tradition. They show regular Africans working with technology," said Chiko Esire, 32, in Lagos. Others took pride in the purely commercial aspect of "Black Panther", which has already beaten "The Hunger Games" and "Beauty and the Beast" in pre-sales in the United States. "I'm not a movie fanatic, I only watch maybe three or four

movies a year," said 27-year-old James Odede, who runs an IT firm.

"But I am excited about this one because it tries to illustrate that a movie that is predominantly black-cast can still sell and do well." Kenya film-maker Jinna Mutune, 29, believes the film has achieved its aim of showing African culture in a positive light but that more black-focused movies need to be produced. "(It) is definitely filling a huge gap," she said, but added: "We need more and more and more 'Black Panthers'." —AFP

France agog as stars war over rocker Johnny Hallyday's will

France has been transfixed this week by the no-holds-barred battle over the legacy of its biggest rock star, Johnny Hallyday, with his pop star friends and one of his ex-wives being drawn into the fray. Tensions between the feuding members of the country's first family of showbiz have blown up into full-scale war, with Hallyday's biological children challenging his "rewritten" will, in which he left everything to his fourth wife Laetitia, 32 years his junior.

The fractured family was able to maintain a unified front for the funeral of the "French Elvis" in December, when hundreds of thousands of his fans thronged the centre of Paris for a "national popular tribute". But that uneasy truce exploded when details of the rocker's will became known on Monday. Not only was his daughter, actress Laura Smet, "stupefied and hurt" that she and her half-brother David Hallyday had been left nothing, with everything going to Laetitia and eventually the two Vietnamese girls she and Hallyday adopted.



This file photo shows former wife of French singer Johnny Hallyday, French singer Sylvie Vartan in Paris. — AFP

But she also seemed to confirm long-running rumours that Laetitia was jealous of Smet's relationship with her father, who died at the age of 74 after a battle with lung cancer, and prevented him from seeing her. Smet said that the woman the press had once dubbed Hallyday's "Iron Lady" had kept her from Hallyday's deathbed. "All those times when we had to hide to see and call each other," Smet wrote in an emotional open letter to her father, which she released through AFP. "It is still killing me not to have been able to say goodbye to you, Papa—do you know that at least?" she added.

In-laws and outlaws

The revelations raised questions about the hold Laetitia and her father-disgraced nightclub owner Andre Boudou seemed to have over Hallyday, whose fortune has been estimated at between 50 and 100 million euros. Laetitia met the star when she was 20 and he was 52 in her father's

Miami nightclub. Boudou—who French judges sentenced to six months in jail for tax and social security fraud in 2007 — was instrumental in persuading Hallyday to leave Universal Music in 2004, a move that cost the singer much of his back catalogue.

A Paris nightclub they had opened together folded the same year. Boudou's mother Elyette, 82 — nicknamed "Granny Rock"—heads the three companies which control Hallyday's royalties, and she also co-owns the Paris mansion in which the star died, which he had signed over to his wife four years ago. Hard-living Hallyday was notorious for his cavalier attitude to both money and taxes.

He was often spectacularly open-handed with his friends, offering one an Andy Warhol painting he had admired, and flying others across the world to parties in his homes in Los Angeles, the Swiss ski resort of Gstaad and his Caribbean bolthole of Saint Barts.

Power behind the throne

Laetitia, 42, was credited with bringing order to his household. So much so that in 2009, after he almost died on the operating table after a routine operation, Hallyday was forced to publicly deny that she was the real power behind the throne. As the years rolled by the couple spent more and more time in California, where their adopted children went to school. Unlike France, inheritance laws there also allow children to be disinherited. A fact that became shockingly apparent this week to the many Hallyday fans who railed against Laetitia on social media.

The singer's best friend, fellow French rock legend Eddy Mitchell, joined them Friday by telling AFP: "I don't understand how anyone could disinherit their children. As Laura's godfather, of course I support her." His intervention came after the leak of documents showing Hallyday made monthly payments to Laura and her half-brother, mostly to pay mortgages. Then Elyette Boudou told French television that she "didn't think much of Laura and David, they have already had their part (of Hallyday's wealth)."

But his first wife, 1960s pop star Sylvie Vartan, shot back within hours, telling AFP that she was "dismayed by the false information which is being purposely circulated" to undermine her son. She said it was her part of the marital home which she asked Hallyday to give to David as part of their divorce settlement in 1980. Vartan said she was "horrified" that her son "had been deprived of the artistic heritage of his father, which I cannot tolerate, and that is why I have broken my silence." —AFP

NY CITY BALLET ABUSE CLAIMS 'NOT CORROBORATED'

A two-month investigation has been unable to corroborate allegations of harassment and abuse that led to the retirement earlier this year of long-time New York City Ballet head, Peter Martins. The 71-year-old was reportedly accused by two dozen dancers of verbal and physical abuse as well as using his power to extort sexual favors. He denied any such misconduct. The nature of many of the allegations has not been made public.

But despite the outcome of the investigation, The New York Times reported that the ballet company and the School of American Ballet have unveiled new policies to make dancers "feel safe, respected and able to voice their opinions and concerns freely." Neither the company nor the school immediately responded to AFP requests to comment. The investigation was initiated by both institutions but conducted by outside counsel.

"I have just learned that the New York City Ballet and the School of American Ballet have concluded their extensive investigation of allegations of harassment and violent conduct made against me," Martins said in a statement sent to AFP on Friday by his lawyer. "I am gratified for the conclusions reached in the investigation,"

he said.

"I retired to allow those glorious institutions to move past the turmoil that resulted from these charges. It is my hope that, with the investigation concluded, they can refocus, without distraction, on their roles." The Times, which first reported that the investigation had not corroborated the allegations, quoted two former dancers as denouncing the findings. Some current and former board members have remained loyal to Martins, the newspaper said. The Dane was first accused in an anonymous letter.

A group of dancers later came forward to the Times with further allegations dating back to 1983. A former principal dancer, Martins coled the company in 1983 and became sole ballet master-in-chief in 1989. He resigned on January 1, as a sexual harassment watershed in the United States claimed the careers of a litany of powerful men, prompted by revelations—now leveled by more than 100 women—against disgraced Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein. New York City Ballet has yet to name a permanent successor to Martins.—AFP



In this file photo, actress-director Jennifer Aniston and actor-director Justin Theroux attend the 64th Annual Directors Guild of America Awards cocktail reception held at the Grand Ballroom at Hollywood & Highland in Hollywood, California. — AFP

Jennifer Aniston and Justin Theroux split

Jennifer Aniston and Justin Theroux are separating after two years of marriage, they said in a statement on Thursday. The pair, who shared a mansion in the upscale Bel Air neighborhood of Los Angeles, met on the set of the 2008 film "Tropic Thunder" in Hawaii, and started dating in 2011. "In an effort to reduce any further speculation, we have decided to announce our separation," the former couple said in the statement released by Aniston's publicist Stephen Huvane.

"This decision was mutual and lovingly made at the end of last year. We are two best friends who have decided to part ways as a couple, but look forward to continuing our cherished friendship." The statement said the couple would have kept the arrangement private, but wanted to make sure people heard the truth, "given that the gossip industry cannot resist an opportunity to speculate and invent." —AFP

Stars of feminist Western say movies ready for new gender roles

Hollywood stars Robert Pattinson and Mia Wasikowska said the current reckoning with power abuses in the entertainment industry has opened a door to new movies that subvert traditional gender roles, as they presented the feminist Western "Damsel" Friday at the Berlin film festival. Pattinson, the "Twilight" heartthrob turned independent film actor, said the #MeToo movement against sexual misconduct felt like a watershed moment both on and off screen.



British actor Robert Pattinson and Australian actress of Polish origin Mia Wasikowska pose on the red carpet upon arrival for the premiere of the feminist western "Damsel" during the 68th Berlinale film festival in Berlin. — AFP

"I think if you feel that you've been wronged and you feel like you've been bullied into silence, it's one of the most awful feelings in the world," he told reporters after the screening of "Damsel" in competition at the 11-day event. "It's kind of amazing when any kind of dam breaks and people feel like they've got the numbers to say 'you'll be safe to say whatever's happened to you'." A lot of these kind of conversations kind of mirror what we're trying to say on the screen.

'Not how love works'

Pattinson plays Samuel, a dim-witted cowboy in the Old West who is searching for his old flame Penelope (Wasikowska), his purported fiancée who he says has been kidnapped by an old rival. Samuel hires a pastor he hopes will marry them and the pair set off on horseback to track down his heart's desire.

But as they come upon the prairie homestead where she is supposedly being held captive, Samuel instead finds a scene of domestic bliss with Penelope, far from being a damsel in distress, happily married to the other man. Samuel, first seen as a hopeless romantic and dashing saviour, is exposed as something of a bumbling stalker, while a furious, rifle-toting Penelope accuses him of destroying "the first time I've ever been happy".

"I guess with Samuel, he just has a kind of extremely skewed idea of consent. He's just completely delusional about it—obviously it's pushed to a massive extreme," he said. "When

someone has said no to you and because you think 'I'm in love with you, the only thing that matters is the fact that I love you so all of my behaviour has to be excused'. It's like 'no, that's not how love works, that's not how reality works'."

Projection of man's desires

The Polish-Australian Wasikowska, who also divides her time between big Hollywood productions such as "Alice in Wonderland", television series like "In Therapy" and smaller budget movies, said her character represented a new take on the old-fashioned Western heroine. "I just really like that we were led to believe a certain thing of this character and then halfway through the film it gets flipped on its head and all the expectations we have of this woman are very much a projection of the man's desires," she said.

"I think it's part of a growing kind of consciousness of changing the way that women are seen. The more you see empowered female characters that have a really strong voice or who know who they are or are challenging expectations that are deeply ingrained in culture, the better it is." Wasikowska said she thought her character meshed with the current zeitgeist, in which seismic shifts in sex and power dynamics are becoming palpable. "I think it's amazing—I've been in Australia for most of the last year and watching it from afar," she said. —AFP



A girl touches a lantern attached to a tree to celebrate the Lunar New Year, marking the Year of the Dog, at the Ditan park in Beijing. — AFP photos



Dancers with traditional Peking Opera costume waits to perform at a fair to celebrate the Lunar New Year.

ALL QUIET AS BEIJING MUZZLES YEAR OF THE DOG CELEBRATIONS

Beijing began the Year of the Dog Friday with eerily silent streets, as the usual thunderous bursts of firecrackers and fireworks were silenced by a strict ban that sacrifices tradition in the name of an anti-pollution campaign. Overnight, police patrolled deserted neighborhoods in the Chinese capital—normally abuzz with excitement as the country welcomes the arrival of the Lunar New Year. “I never imagined it would be this quiet! It’s usually packed,” said a Beijing resident surnamed Wang who had been out in the city centre following a traditional New Year’s Eve family dinner.

A migrant worker from neighboring Hebei province surnamed Zhu said that without the firecrackers, “the magic of the New Year is gone”. The low-key celebrations were in stark contrast to previous years, when the streets were crammed with Beijingers setting off firecrackers and the sky was lit by near-constant firework displays, unleashing a deafening thunder until dawn. But the tradition, conceived as a way to ward off evil spirits, has this year been targeted by authorities anxious to lower winter pollution levels.

Some 440 Chinese cities have banned the use of firecrackers and fireworks—which are also set off during weddings or when moving house—since last year. Beijing introduced a ban in December. “Like all Beijingers, I have been lighting firecrackers since I was a child. But times have changed (...) air quality is what matters most to people now,” said a man who gave his surname as Zhang.

The government has launched a huge campaign to reduce pollution during the winter, ordering polluting factories to leave Beijing and its surroundings, and designating “no-coal zones” where more than three million homes have abruptly switched to gas or electric heating. In 2017, the level of PM2.5 particles—which penetrate deep into the lungs—in Beijing over the New Year was 26 times higher than the level recommended by the World Health Organization. But on Friday the sky was a brilliant blue. “It (the ban) is a good thing, given the disastrous state of the environment,” said Xi, a young student, before adding: “Even if it deprives us of a little pleasure.”

Peace and quiet

Safety is another reason behind the ban. Every year there are numerous accidents caused by pyrotechnics, many of which are of poor quality in China. Dong Weiwei, a resident who had volunteered to patrol his street, stood ready to alert police should he see anyone flouting the new regulations. “In the past I have seen people wounded, an eight-year-old child whose finger was blown off by a firecracker explosion,” he said.

In southwestern Yunnan province, a fireworks explosion killed four people and injured five others Thursday night, state media said. The ban has made some happy, including Zhu Ye, an elderly Beijinger who took advantage of the peace and quiet to take her dog Xiao Mi for a nighttime walk. “I no longer liked it at my age... with the fireworks and firecrackers everywhere, we didn’t dare to go out,” she said. “But this year, there are not many people in the streets and I am finally able to walk my dog.”

Ahead of New Year celebrations, hundreds of millions of Chinese travel back to their home towns, often on

crowded trains, making it in the world’s largest annual human migration. Meanwhile in Hong Kong a spectacular fireworks display scheduled to mark Lunar New Year was cancelled as the city mourns victims of a deadly bus crash. A speeding double-decker overturned in northern Hong Kong on Saturday evening, killing 19 and leaving more than 60 injured, some critically.

Chief Executive Carrie Lam said residents were grieving and wanted “to express their somber mood”. In Shanghai thousands flocked to temples to pray for good fortune. While in Nepal, exiled Tibetans living in Kathmandu carried images of their spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, as the community—estimated to number in their thousands—gathered to celebrate Lhosar, the Tibetan Lunar New Year, with traditional music and food.—AFP



A dragon dance is performed during a cultural festival to mark the first day of the Lunar New Year in Chinatown neighborhood in Manhattan in New York City.



Dancers perform during a cultural festival to mark the first day of the Lunar New Year in Chinatown neighborhood in Manhattan in New York City.

Russian Buddhists mark Lunar New Year with prayers and dumplings

Russian Buddhists in the Siberian region of Buryatia near the Mongolian border on Friday kicked off celebrations for the Lunar New Year that will last almost a month. At the Atsagatsky datsan, or temple, 50 kilometers outside the regional capital of Ulan-Ude, believers came to pray and hear astrological predictions for the next year. “The poor will get poorer, the rich will get richer, the summer and autumn will be rainy, but in general it will be a good year,” the temple’s lama Tarba Dorzhiyev, 61, told them.

Believers also celebrated with festive food including traditional buuzi, a type of large steamed dumpling filled with meat. “The gods offer us another year of life and they wish for us to be happy,” said 57-year-old Svetlana Tsybikzhapova, one of those busily preparing the dish. Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday released a message of congratulations to Buddhists, saying that “it’s important that Russia’s Buddhist community carefully preserves the priceless moral and spiritual heritage of its ancestors, their original principles and customs.”

Russia, where the majority of the population describe themselves as Orthodox Christian, has around 900,000 Buddhists living in Siberia, near the border with Mongolia and around Lake Baikal, as well as further west in the region of Kalmykia on the Caspian Sea. Buddhists, like other religious groups, suffered persecution from the Soviet authorities, but the post-Soviet years have seen a revival, with teachers of Tibetan Buddhism from other countries playing a major role.—AFP



Performers take part in a street parade to mark the first day of the Lunar New Year celebrations for the Year of the Dog in Hong Kong.





Kenia Vazquez, left, and Paul Carro pose in one of the movements in the dance they perform.



Cecilia Mendez, left, and Marco Flores pose in their 'Catrines' costumes.



Mayra Cruz, right, and Noe Vazquez pose in their 'Catrines' costumes.

A lawless Mexican region's explosively colorful carnival

As two armored military vehicles patrol the streets of Tlaxcala, workers unload a pick-up truck full of enormous traditional masks for this lawless Mexican region's explosively colorful carnival. Tlaxcala, which sits a two-hour drive east of Mexico City, is in the middle of a region that has become one of the Mexican authorities' biggest security headaches, controlled by criminal gangs that thrive on sex trafficking and stealing gasoline.

But it is also home to a thrillingly photogenic carnival, where revelers famously sport towering traditional head-dresses as they party through the night. "The carnival was introduced by the Spanish in the 17th century," said the head of cultural programs at Tlaxcala town hall, Dario Lemus

Tlapale. "But the authorities back then insisted we couldn't make fun of public figures." Blending indigenous Mexican and Spanish traditions, the carnival evolved into an event where mocking the European colonizers was elevated to an art form. With its feather-topped masks that reach several meters tall, sumptuous hand-embroidered cloths decorated with small skulls, European-style costumes and elegant parasols, the carnival is a celebration of the cultural collisions that have shaped the region. "The costumes represent a fusion of European and pre-Hispanic cultures. The top part of every costume is inherited from pre-Hispanic culture, and the bottom part from European culture," Tlapale said.

The masks mostly sport beards resembling those of Spanish conquistador Hernan Cortes. Others have a pencil-thin English-style mustache. "That was introduced to mock the English, who arrived later to install the railroad here," said Tlapale. There are 15 different types of costume in all. Carnival participants, who dance in pairs before the crowd, often completely redo their outfits each year. "I'm very proud to wear this costume," said Arturo, 23, a civil engineer.

But "it's very physical. These outfits can weigh 25 to 30 kilos (55 to 65 pounds)," Arturo said it takes "enthusiasm and will" to be a carnival dancer, since costumes can cost between \$3,000 and \$5,000. "I make my own every year," said Melani Mitchel, a 15-year-old dancer. "I make three models, one for each of my appearances."

Hotbed of crime

Away from the festivities though, a more sordid reality rules in the region. In the nearby town of Tenancingo, girls the same age as Melani are forced into prostitution by gangs that specialize in sex trafficking. The ones who manage to escape often tell similar stories. "She meets a young man and falls in love. They get married, she has a child and then he forces her into prostitution by threatening to beat the baby," said a local woman, who asked that her name not be used for fear of reprisals.

Tenancingo's sex trafficking gangs have been known to



German Carrillo poses in his 'Charro' costume.

send their victims as far away as the United States and even New Zealand, according to investigators.

Then there is the "red triangle," near the town of Tepeaca, where two criminal gangs with ties to drug cartels are thriving on the business of stealing fuel from state oil company Pemex's pipelines. Puncturing the pipelines is a



Melanie Perez, left, and Arturo Beristain pose in their costumes for the carnival in Tlaxcala, Mexico. — AFP photos

risky but lucrative affair: "picadores," or pipeline-tappers, make an estimated \$10,000 a month. Holding the siphon in broad daylight through black-market dealers and sometimes even regular gas stations. Pemex estimated last year it had lost some \$2.4 billion to fuel thieves since 2010. A local culture celebrating the exploits of the "huachicoleros" has sprung up, with songs and even a saint dedicated to them—the latter represented with a plastic jug and tube in his hands. But that is one culture that has not been incorporated into the Tlaxcala carnival.—AFP



Vanessa Calderon, left, and Bladimir Mejia pose in their costumes.

HOW FASHION, SHOES AND ACCESSORIES ENABLE THE DISABLED

Fashion photographer Jerris Madison thought his titanium rod leg spelled the end of his glamour days when doctors amputated his leg four years ago in a battle with bone cancer. But in 2016 designers Alleles, a small Canadian company, spotted a photo of him wearing his prosthetic on Instagram and sent him their latest product for him to try out: one of their dazzling, colorful array of prosthetic covers.

"When I opened the box, I felt like it was Christmas," 45-year-old, Los Angeles-based Madison said. "Having that leg cover really boosted my self-esteem," he said. Walking around in just a bare titanium rod used to make him feel self-conscious. "People would stare

Alleles, which start at \$375, the exhibition shows Nike "FlyEase" sneakers, first made for a student with cerebral palsy, with a wraparound zipper and adjustable strap to make getting them on and off easier. There is also a walking stick, made in the color of your choice, which can be propped up easily against a wall without falling over, on sale for around \$100.

For everyone

A hearing aid looks like a giant earring. A bracelet connected to a smart-phone GPS app which guides the blind and tracks obstacles above the knee. Another item is a jacket, included in a new clothing line for disabled children carried by Target, that comes apart at both sides making for easy wear. The key to success for lots of these products, says Caroline Baumann, director of the museum, is that they are so practical.

When Target designers conceived of the jacket "they were thinking about the child on the autism spectrum that might have difficulty putting on their jacket, but what they are finding is that people of all abilities are buying that jacket," she said. "I would love that jacket for my three-year-old because it's a fight every morning to put him in his parka," Baumann laughed.

Keith Kirkland, a former designer at Calvin Klein who co-conceived the vibrating GPS "Wayband" bracelet, agrees. If the bracelet was

tested on the blind, the idea in launching it for sale later this year, is that "anyone" can pick it up "to figure out which way to go." More cross-board appeal also means products can be more affordable. "A lot of times the reason the product is so expensive is because you have to amortize that cost over a much smaller market," Kirkland said.

Breaking down stigma

Designers are also eyeing an aging population, which brings their own disabilities, as another source for market expansion. "One out of three people from the age of 62 has some kind of visual impairment and that aging population is supposed to double by 2060," says Kirkland. Matt Kroeker, whose small Canadian firm Top & Derby created the non-falling walking stick, says the idea is to create products that aren't simply practical but which people enjoy using.

"It's just like glasses who were utilitarian until the late '40s and became more fashionable after that," said the entrepreneur, who has also designed a range of compression socks in more exciting colors than the usual black and brown. But if these products are sexy, few are widely available in retail outlets.

Most are sold solely online. "The biggest barrier right now is people want to buy these products but the companies responsible for distributing or selling to the end user are very



A MagnaReady magnetic shirt is displayed.

and know I was an amputee. Now, they look at me as a walking piece of art." Madison isn't the only person with a disability who has seen their daily life improve thanks to a growing market of products designed to make things easier, but also look chic and stylish at the same time.

From now until September an exhibition at the Cooper Hewitt design museum in New York is showcasing some of these new products, from the low- to the high-tech. "In the last few years there has been a proliferation of new design, very functional and esthetically desirable products for people with all sort of disabilities," says Cara McCarty, curator of the exhibition.

Besides the tattooed-style covers made by



Bedazzled and Bejeweled Earring Aids, making a fashion statement, are displayed.



A group of prosthetic leg covers are displayed.

apprehensive," Kroeker explained.

"There is a mentality that people don't really care about well-designed, thoughtfully-designed home healthcare products and we are trying to change that," he said.

Madison also hopes to help change attitudes by giving his prosthetic leg cover its own Instagram account.

"It is about breaking down that stigma, so you are no longer hiding a hearing aid or hiding a prosthetic leg. You are saying 'I am more able with this tool that has been designed so well, and I am not embarrassed about it'," says Baumann. — AFP



A of Men's Zoom Soldier IX FlyEase is displayed.



A Joy for All Companion Pet, Dog and a Simple Music Player are displayed as part of the Access+Ability exhibit at the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum in New York. — AFP photos

Ugly Models, an agency of extraordinary 'characters'

Long necks, large chins, flapping ears, crooked noses: welcome to Ugly Models, a London modeling agency of a different stripe, where imperfections are celebrated. Fashion Week opens in the British capital Friday, and among the legions of models strutting down the catwalk, several will come from Ugly. They make eye-catching additions to the perfectly honed or androgynous models that typically feature at fashion's annual showcase in London.



Model Chris Manns poses during a casting at the UGLY model agency in London. — AFP photos

day, Ugly was organizing a casting to complete its catalogue and those in attendance were atypical models. Among them were some tough-looking guys. Chris, for example, a former soldier with arms as thick as logs, posed shirtless with a 50-year-old brunette in a two-piece suit.

Kris Chesney, an ex-rugby player with Toulon and Saracens, is a man mountain at nearly two meters tall and weighing 135 kilograms. With his shaved head, tattooed arms, rugged face, and body bearing the marks of countless scrums, he is perhaps an unlikely male model. "It's a new journey, something interesting, like a challenge," he said. Others are on more of a personal mission.

Sheerah Ravindren, a petite 22-year-old model just 1.61 meters tall, comes from Sri



Model Chloe Akan



Model Laura Poole

“From fat, thin, to large to small

“It's celebrating diversity really and it's bringing a bit more light to fashion instead of just using the bog-standard models,” agency owner Marc French said. He describes it as a “character” model agency—“from fat, thin, to large to small: you name it, we've got it”. He cited the example of French actor Gerard Depardieu. “I mean look at him: he's so full of character and charisma. “He becomes sexy because he's so cool and he's so different.”

Imperfection is beauty
Founded a half century ago, Ugly occupies trendy open-plan space in west London featuring a baroque sofa, brushed aluminum computers and walls studded with photos of models. A portrait of late rock superstar David Bowie adorns the wall, alongside the quote “Imperfection is beauty, madness is genius,” which reads like a company motto.

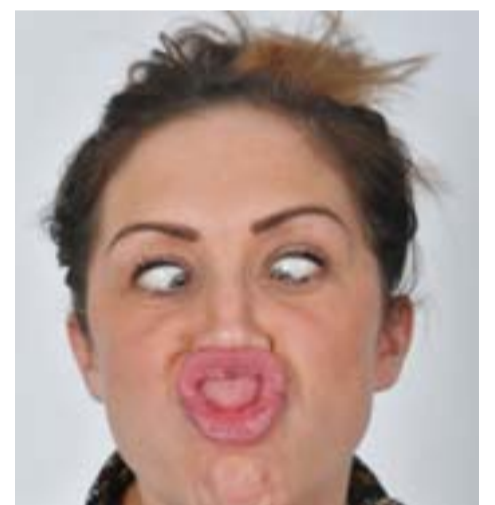
Like any such agency, it manages the careers of its models, putting them in touch with employers of all stripes, from Burberry to Mercedes to Jack Daniel's. On a recent week-



Model Mathieu Blanc



Chairman of Ugly/Rage Models, Marc French interviews a potential model.



Model Claire Spedding

Lanka and proclaims herself a “militant immigrant model”. Sporting a bare belly between baggy jeans and black top, she has a right nostril piercing and plenty of positive attitude. “I'm a woman of color. Growing up, I've never seen people that look like me in media, in fashion.” Frances, a disabled model who gets around using a pair of eye-catching futuristic crutches, revealed proudly that her disability “didn't stop me from doing what I want”.

‘Not here to exploit’
For French, “what makes a good ugly model is someone who is comfortable in his own skin”. “We don't want retouching, we don't want people to change the way they look. “If someone comes to us a certain way, we'd never say it'd

be better if he was smaller. “It's really important. There's so much pressure on young kids,” he said. The agency is also eager to counter any perception that it cynically exploits its models for their peculiarities.

“Sometimes we've had companies ring up and said: we want a small person that will kick themselves in the head. Woo... like no-that's wrong,” said Lulu Palmer, a booker who is head of new faces. “We're not here to exploit people, to take the mickey out of people.”

Always on the lookout for new talent, the team admitted the company name can elicit less than enthusiastic responses from would-be models. But, said French, “the minute they understand what Ugly is all about then they want to be a model.”—AFP



Model Thomas Kerbie

Fashion photographer Demarchelier accused of harassment

The Boston Globe published a bombshell expose on Friday accusing more than two dozen professionals in the fashion industry, among them legendary photographer Patrick Demarchelier, of sexual misconduct. The paper's Spotlight team, which in 2002 unveiled widespread sexual abuse by Catholic priests in Boston, said more than 50 models had detailed alleged misconduct they had experienced, from touching to assault.

Collectively, they made credible claims against at least 25 photographers, agents, stylists, casting directors and other industry professionals, the Globe reported. They include Demarchelier, fellow photographer Greg Kadel, who has worked for Victoria's Secret and Vogue, and stylist Karl Templer, who has worked with Coach, Zara, and Tommy Hilffiger. The Globe said all of those accused had denied the allegations against them.

Nevertheless, glossy magazine empire Conde Nast, whose company includes Vogue, had said it has stopped working for now with Demarchelier and Kadel. The Globe said one of Demarchelier's former assistants complained about relentless sexual demands, to which she eventually submitted, fearing that she would otherwise endanger her position.

Six other women accused the now 74-year-old Frenchman of unwanted advances, including thrusting a model's hands onto her genitals and grabbing another model's breasts, the Globe said. Demarchelier did not immediately respond to an AFP request to comment. He was quoted by the Globe as saying the



Photographer Patrick Demarchelier attends the 'Patrick Demarchelier' special exhibition preview to celebrate NYFW: The Shows for Spring 2016 at Christie's in New York City. — AFP

complaints against him were untrue. “People lie and they tell stories,” he said.

The sexual harassment watershed engulfing the United States has already rocked the fashion industry, with allegations of misconduct seeing photographers Terry Richardson, Mario Testino and Bruce Weber barred from collaborating with Conde Nast.

The magazine empire has issued a new “Code of Conduct” to include bans on alcohol on sets and the use of models under the age of 18 without a chaperone present. Nudity or “sexually suggestive” poses are to be agreed on beforehand. The Globe said some models wanted to expose serial predators while others wanted new legal protections and radical reform in an industry they say left them feeling exploited.—AFP

CHRISTOPHER BAILEY BIDS FAREWELL TO BURBERRY IN LONDON

Christopher Bailey unveils his final collection for Burberry at London Fashion Week starting on Friday—a turning point for the British luxury brand which gained a global reputation under the designer's tenure. Burberry's star-studded show on Saturday will be one of the most high-profile events at Fashion Week, which runs from Friday to Tuesday. After 17 years, Bailey will say farewell with a final overhaul of the fashion house's signature beige, black and red check pattern. Drawing inspiration from the internationally recognized gay pride flag, a new rainbow check will feature heavily in London as the 46-year-old Bailey dedicates Saturday's show to gay rights campaigns and models.

“There has never been a more important time to say that in our diversity lies our strength, and our creativity,” said Bailey, who was the first openly gay head of a company on London's benchmark FTSE 100 index when he was named chief executive in 2014. The appointment saw him replace Angela Ahrendts, who moved to Apple, and came a decade after Bailey joined Burberry as creative director.

He has since propelled Burberry into the 21st century, incorporating new technologies such as social media into his shows. Twice named Designer of the Year at the British Fashion Awards, he has also combined men's and women's collections and adopted the “see now, buy now” model becoming popular among high-end fashion brands. He has also attracted some of the world's most famous muses, including Kate Moss, Emma Watson and Cara Delevingne.

An ‘incredible’ designer

His last catwalk for Burberry will be a testament to years spent experimenting with different color palettes and materials, during which he reinvented Burberry's signature trench coat with a touch of lace.

“Under his watch, a company formerly known as little more than an unexciting British producer of raincoats and checked scarves has exploded into the vast empire it is today,” said British Vogue.

The designer, who trained at London's prestigious Royal College of Art, was described as “incredible” and “super smart” by Caroline Rush, chief executive of the British Fashion Council. “Christopher has played a significant role in the British fashion industry, putting innovation at the heart of Burberry and ensuring that it is an exciting, relevant, forward-thinking global fashion brand,” she said in a statement to AFP.

But Bailey's appointment as chief executive at age 42 raised some eyebrows because of his lack of experience running a company of such stature. He held on to the dual role for just three years, until Marco Gobetti, former chief executive of French luxury brand Celine, was brought in to take over the business side. Bailey will formally step down from his two roles on March 31 but will work with Burberry on the transition until the end of this year.

A replacement to fill the creative post held by Bailey, who previously worked for Donna Karan and Gucci, is yet to be announced. Rumors on the fashion circuit put British designer Phoebe Philo, who recently left Celine, in pole position.



Young British talent

The broader London Fashion Week, organized by the British Fashion Council, will see some 80 shows across the city as designers parade their 2018/19 autumn-winter women's wear collections. Saturday's Burberry show will undoubtedly be closely watched, while the same day sees British heavyweight Jonathan Anderson showcase his latest collection.

Also artistic director of luxury leather brand Loewe, the designer will be unveiling pieces from his own J. W. Anderson label. He will also be reducing the number of shows from four to two, which J. W. Anderson said will help “reduce the traditional gap between the catwalk shows and the pieces being available for sale”. Such an approach is being followed in the wider fashion world, as brands adjust their business models to fit new consumer trends.

Other highlights of the London fashion bonanza include the Sunday show of Delpozo, a Spanish brand which has transferred from New York Fashion Week with the promise of refined elegance. Post-modern champion Christopher Kane is one of a number of young British talents whose designs will hit the catwalk, as well as David Koma, known for his geometric pieces, and provocateur Gareth Pugh.—AFP

Lifestyle

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2018



People pose for photos in front of an art installation at Gyeongpo beach in Gangneung, during the Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympic Games. — AFP

From Maoist symbol to hipster accessory: Nepali shoes get revamp



This picture shows employees working at a factory of Nepali shoe brand Goldstar in Kathmandu. — AFP photos



Long maligned as the footwear of choice for Nepal's Maoist guerillas, Goldstar sneakers are undergoing a revival in the Himalayan nation-fast becoming a must-have hipster accessory. The humble \$8 trainers were worn by insurgents during Nepal's decade-long civil war, when just being seen wearing a pair was enough to wind up in prison accused to being part of the rebel force. Today that stigma is fading as fashion conscious Nepalis, proud to support locally made products, flock to the brand—Goldstars saw a 30 percent jump in sales in 2017 according to company figures.

"Wearing a Goldstar now is like being a part of a movement. And everybody seems keen on being a part of it," says Kathmandu-based singer Samridhi Rai, who regularly posts about her ever-growing collection to her large social media following. Many of this new generation of consumers came of age after the conflict ended in 2006 with more than 17,000 dead and thousands more missing. Then, Goldstars were

best known for cladding the feet of Maoist militiamen who waged a brutal insurgency against the state from their rural strongholds. The rebels earned a reputation for nimbly evading government forces, darting around the hills in military fatigues—and their distinctive sneakers.

"Goldstar shoes, the shoes of combatants. Always one step ahead," local punk band, The Kathmandu Killers sing in a recently released track that taps into the enduring legacy of the brand from that era. The army eventually changed tactics, opting to starve the rebels out by imposing a blockade that deprived Maoist strongholds of both food and footwear. "They were trying to stop the lifeline, like food, but at the same time they were stopping the shoes as well," Amir Rana, managing director of Goldstar's parent company Universal Group, said.

#MadeinNepal

As the bitter conflict dragged on, the trainers became so synonymous with the Maoists



This picture shows Amir Rana, managing director of Nepali shoe brand Goldstar, posing above the factory floor during an interview in Kathmandu.

that anyone wearing a pair was suspected to be a militant. "The security forces profiled them. If a guy was wearing Goldstar shoes and had a backpack, he was Maoist," Rana adds. The war ended with a peace deal in 2006 that brought

the rebels into the folds of government, with Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal becoming Nepal's first post-war prime minister. But the scars linger and two commissions set up to investigate abuses on both sides have failed to

bring key perpetrators to account, with many still occupying top positions in the government and military. But many buying Goldstars today do not attach these storied shoes to the horrors of the past. If anything, the brand, founded by Rana's father in 1990, has benefited from its humble roots as a family business as national pride has surged in recent years.

Sandwiched between two Asian superpowers vying for economic and diplomatic influence, Nepal is flooded with products from both. "Most of the goods that we get are either made in India or made in China," muses Shreyans Tamang, a young Kathmandu resident who was sat on a sun-soaked step drinking tea with friends—a pair of Goldstars on his feet. "I think that's also why I like Goldstars because they are made in Nepal," he adds.

A popular #MadeinNepal movement has also put a premium on homegrown products and helped local businesses reach young buyers through social media where their goods can acquire a new appeal. Rai, the singer, said Goldstars meant much more than wearing "a funky pair of shoes". She says: "It was also about making a statement: that I support Nepali makes, the Nepali industry and that I embody the spirit of being a Nepali." — AFP