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Eastern Ghouta residents 'waiting to die' as bombs fall

Kuwaiti National and Liberation Days 2018



OP-ED

By Lawrence Silverman,
US Ambassador to Kuwait

On behalf of the United States government, I congratulate the government and people of Kuwait on the 57th anniversary of independence and the 27th anniversary of liberation. The United States is honored to have built a deep-rooted relationship with Kuwait that has grown stronger from independence, through liberation, to today. This relationship benefits both our peoples.

Our peoples are safer as a result of our close cooperation on defense and security, including the joint effort to stop terrorism and terrorist financing. Last week, the United States and Kuwait co-hosted the Ministerial Meeting of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. Representatives of over 70 member nations and institutional partners came together in Kuwait City united in the determination to defeat ISIS/Daesh through a sustained, multifaceted effort. We likewise appreciate Kuwait's generous hosting of the International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq.

This past year has been a productive one for US-Kuwait relations, highlighted by the visit of His Highness the Amir at the White House and our second successful US-Kuwait Strategic Dialogue. These meetings opened new channels of cooperation on security, trade, investment and education. The United States reiterates its commitment to Kuwait's security and continues to contribute to the enhancement of the capabilities of the Kuwaiti Armed Forces to defend their country. We will share information in ways that strengthen our security. We will work to develop new avenues to increase trade and investment and consult on the best means to enhance the environment for business and investment in Kuwait.

We both benefit from what has been the most enduring of US-Kuwait ties since your independence: Education. Last November, I welcomed three generations of Kuwaiti alumni of American universities to my home to celebrate these ties and our ever-strengthening partnership. We are working to increase the already high number of Kuwaitis studying in the United States and the number of exchanges between US and Kuwaiti academic and research institutions. We are instituting new ways to prepare Kuwaiti students for academic success at top quality educational institutions. Kuwaiti students bringing back what they learned in America will help forge Kuwait's future, as they have done for decades.

Since arriving in September 2016, it has been my privilege to get to know Kuwait and its people. I have joined the conversation at diwanis, met young people planning to study in the US, and have been impressed by innovative and entrepreneurial men and women. The United States and the US Embassy in Kuwait will work with the government and with the private sector to foster entrepreneurship.

On this anniversary of your independence and liberation, we congratulate the Kuwaiti authorities and the Kuwaiti people on what Kuwait has become: a significant contributor to diplomacy and stability in a region facing great challenges, and a humanitarian leader far beyond its borders. For the next two years, Kuwait has the opportunity to exercise its diplomatic leadership as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. In the coming year, I look forward to further strengthening the relationship between the United States and Kuwait, and between the American and Kuwaiti people. "Alf mabrook" to our Kuwaiti friends.

BEIRUT: Syrian jets carried out more deadly raids on Eastern Ghouta yesterday, as Western powers and aid agencies voiced alarm over the mounting death toll and spiraling humanitarian catastrophe, while residents of the district said they were waiting their "turn to die". The regime of President Bashar Al-Assad intensified its strikes this month on the rebel enclave east of Damascus, where close to 300 civilians have been killed since Sunday. Warplanes continued to pound Eastern Ghouta towns yesterday, killing 24 civilians, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Most of them were killed when barrel bombs - crude, improvised munitions that usually cause indiscriminate damage - were dropped on the town of Kfar Batna, the Britain-based war monitor said. More than 1,400 people were wounded in three days that saw the bloodiest wave of strikes on the enclave since the start of the civil war in 2011. Medics have been overwhelmed throughout February. The five-year siege of the enclave has restricted access to medical supplies, while three clinics were hit and put out of service this week.

The hospital in the town of Arbin was hit twice on Tuesday and the Observatory said Russian warplanes had carried out that strike and others, its first on Eastern Ghouta in three months. The Kremlin yesterday denied any involvement in the strikes and rejected reports to the contrary as "groundless accusations". The hospital in Douma, the largest town in Eastern Ghouta, is still functioning but the influx of wounded is such that doctors and nurses cannot save everyone. "We received a mother yesterday who was pulled from the rubble. She was six-months pregnant and seriously wounded," said surgical nurse Maram. "We did a C-section but could not save her, nor her baby," she said.

Continued on Page 11



HAMOURIA, Syria: Syrians rescue a child following a regime air strike in this rebel-held town in the besieged Eastern Ghouta region on the outskirts of the capital Damascus yesterday. — AFP

Armed forces in show of strength with military drill

KUWAIT: Kuwait yesterday brought down the curtain on a major military exercise involving its armed forces and the US army, in an event attended and sponsored by Kuwaiti First Deputy Premier and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

The Kuwaiti army put on a show of military might in a drill christened Al-Bairaq 7, which Maj Gen Sheikh Khaled Al-Sabah described as an all-inclusive exercise that engages various components of the armed forces. He added that the purpose of such drills was to ensure complete preparedness to respond to any internal or external threats, noting that the exercise will help boost productivity and cohesion within the army.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's interior ministry said it is proud to have taken part in the drill, with its Undersecretary Lt Gen

Mahmoud Al-Dosari pointing out that such activities provide an opportunity to capitalize on core strengths. He applauded the military, police and National Guard for working like a well-oiled machine, saying the three protection bodies represent a formidable trio that keeps security intact.

The National Guard's Undersecretary Lt Gen Hashim Al-Refai said the drill allowed participants the chance to apply military concepts and principles. Refai highlighted the need to hold similar exercises on a regular basis in a bid to develop greater camaraderie among the country's military institutions. The Al-Bairaq 7 drill is a focal point of the Kuwaiti military's annual agenda, allowing the armed forces the chance to put their prowess on display and share knowhow with one another. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti armed forces take part in the Al-Bairaq 7 military drill yesterday. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh (See Page 2)

Philippine officials to visit Kuwait amid worker row

MANILA: Philippine officials are headed to Kuwait today to seek greater protection for migrant workers after a diplomatic row over the alleged mistreatment of Filipinos in the state. Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello told reporters yesterday one of his deputies would lead the delegation, which is also due to stop in Saudi Arabia and Qatar to urge reforms. Topping the list are demands that Filipino workers be allowed to keep their cellphones and passports, which can be confiscated by employers.

The trip comes after Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte last week announced a departure ban for Filipinos planning to work in Kuwait, which sparked a diplomatic flap between Manila and Kuwait. He was responding to the murder of a Filipina maid whose body was found stuffed in a freezer in Kuwait this month. Kuwait has invited Duterte for a visit but he has yet to respond.

"We are going to Kuwait tomorrow, Saudi Arabia and then on to Qatar to ensure that our overseas Filipino workers have sufficient protection," said Labor Undersecretary Ciriaco Lagunzad, who will helm the delegation. He said Duterte had ordered the team to ensure that the passports of Filipino workers are deposited with the Philippine embassy. Duterte also wanted Filipinos to have access to cell-phones so they can call for help in case of abuse, Lagunzad said.

Another team of labor officials said yesterday they would conduct negotiations with Kuwait next week on a deal to protect Filipino workers. "Hopefully we can finalize the memorandum of agreement and by first or second week of March, we will have the signing by the Kuwaiti and Philippine governments," said Claro Arellano, another labor undersecretary. — AFP

Kuwait's first film on invasion to make debut

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti cinemas today will launch public screenings of "Swarm of Doves", the Gulf state's first feature-length film about the 1990 invasion of the state by Saddam Hussein's Iraq. The film is "inspired by true events" that occurred during the seven-month occupation, producer Sheikhha Intisar Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah told AFP during a screening for the press. "These are stories of people who defended Kuwait at that time," Sheikhha Intisar said. She said "the aim of the film is not to create any grudge but to highlight the brotherhood, tolerance and unity Kuwaitis experienced during the invasion".

The film, directed by Ramadan Khasrouh and on the festival circuit since 2017, highlights moments of humanity that transcended the conflict between Iraq and its neighbor. In one scene, an Iraqi soldier is ordered by his commander to kill a Kuwaiti, but he refuses after remembering words from his father during childhood about the bonds between the Kuwaiti and Iraqi peoples.



The official poster of the Kuwaiti film "Swarm of Doves".

Another scene shows a Kuwaiti resistance fighter who forgives an Iraqi soldier during an armed confrontation, prompting the soldier to offer the man an escape from the army siege around his house. "The film does not bear any ill will to the Iraqi people," actor Daoud Hussein told AFP. "The director and screenwriter made sure this film doesn't put salt on the wound," said Hussein, who plays the film's protagonist resisting the invasion. — AFP

Army, National Guard pardon penalized servicemen ahead of National holidays



KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and top army and national guard staff attend the closing of the 'Al-Bairaq 7' military drill yesterday. —Photos by Fouad Al-Shalikh

KUWAIT: Kuwait Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Mohammad Al-Khuder has pardoned servicemen sanctioned for disciplinary offenses in a gesture of goodwill to mark the country's forthcoming Independence Day and Liberation Day, the Defense Ministry announced yesterday.

The decision was made as per instructions from First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah to allow the soldiers

the chance to celebrate the National Days with their families, the ministry's directorate of moral guidance and public relations said in a press statement. Furthermore, Sheikh Nasser Al-Sabah congratulated the military personnel on the national holidays, praying to Allah Almighty to bring back such joyous occasions with grace and blessings on everyone.

He also prayed to Allah Almighty to perpetuate safety, security, and prosperity on the country under the



wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Supreme Commander of the Kuwaiti Armed Forces, and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's National Guard also announced that it has pardoned officers held for disciplinary offenses in a gesture of goodwill to mark the

National holidays. The decision was made as per instructions from the chief of the National Guard His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah and his deputy Sheikh Mishal Al-Sabah, to allow the soldiers the chance to celebrate the joyous occasion with their families, read a statement by the military force. Kuwait is celebrating its 57th Independence Day, 27th Liberation Day and the 12th anniversary of His Highness the Amir's ascendancy. — KUNA



Interior Ministry announces arrival of H225 helicopters

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior announced yesterday the arrival of two H225 helicopters from France after a five-day journey. Undersecretary Lieutenant General Mahmoud Al-Dousri attended the reception ceremony for the Kuwaiti-piloted aircrafts at Kuwait international airport, the ministry's public relations department said.

The Interior Ministry official affirmed that acquitting the H225 helicopters was part of the ministry's plans to continue the development of security services in Kuwait. The H225, previously known as Eurocopter EC225 Super Puma, is a long-range passenger helicopter, which is being used by various security entities and rescue teams around the globe.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Interior announced yesterday winning the 'outstanding achievement for the best electronic passport for 2018' prize during its participation in the annual international convention, The High Security Printing Europe, Middle East and Europe Conference, held in Poland between February 19-21. The Ministry's General Department of Public Relations and Security Media quoted the Assistant Undersecretary of Citizenship and Passports Affairs, Major General Sheikh Mazen Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah, as saying that Kuwait's winning of this prize is a source of pride for each citizen.

Kuwait has offered a worksheet including a description of the new electronic passport project, which is of high modern technology and meets international security standards, he said. The evaluation committee at the conference announced offering this prize to Kuwait after studying all the aspects of this national giant security project. The conference witnessed the participation of many governments, major companies, security documents factories and international banks. The evaluation committee had offered the prize in 2017 for Finland, while the prize was shared by both Ireland and Spain in 2016. — KUNA



Man hands over drunk brother to police

KUWAIT: A citizen handed his brother to police after he went on a drunken rampage. The citizen, who took his brother to Jahra police station, said he often returns home drunk, attacks his family members and destroys furniture. He was charged with drunkenness and causing damage.

Jleeb fight

Five citizens engaged in a fight in Jleeb Al-Shuyukh due to previous disputes between them. Three of those involved ganged up against the other two. Passersby called police, and all were controlled and taken to hospital. They later exchanged charges at the police station. Investigations are underway.

Cross-dresser arrested

A cross-dresser was arrested in Hawally. The suspect, a Kuwaiti male in his 20s, was found in an abnormal condition, while wearing women's clothes and makeup. He also

had a substance that police subject to be drugs.

Bootlegger caught

An Indian was found selling liquor out of his sponsor's house in Sabahiya. The citizen noticed a lot of movement by his Indian driver, besides cars of strangers coming to the house. The driver sometimes left with them, and every time he asked, the answer was "sadeeq" (friend), so the citizen called the police. Officers entered the Indian's room and were surprised to find a carton of liquor bottles. The Indian was arrested as he was found selling liquor without the knowledge of his sponsor. Legal action is being taken against him.

Under the influence

Ahmadi police arrested a citizen who left his car ahead of a checkpoint and ran away on foot, before being found under the influence of drugs with four rolls of heroin. Police found he is wanted for entering a house with the intention of theft. He was sent along with the drugs to the Drugs Control General Department.

Sheep stolen

Thieves stole 26 sheep from the farm of a citizen in Rahaya desert after threatening the shepherd with a knife. The sponsor accused the shepherd of collusion with the thieves and demanded he be questioned.

—Translated by Kuwait Times from Al-Rai

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Amir patronizes, attends Quran competition ceremony

225 winners selected out of 1,729 who reached the final round



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and top state officials attend the ceremony to honor winners of Kuwait's 21st Quran Recitation and Memorization Grand Competition. — Amiri Diwan photos



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

KUWAIT: Under the patronage and attendance of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the ceremony to honor winners of Kuwait's 21st Quran Recitation and Memorization Grand Competition was held at Bayan Palace yesterday. Upon arrival, His Highness the Amir was received by Minister of Justice and Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Dr Fahad Al-Afasi.

The ceremony was attended by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, President of the Supreme Judicial Council, President of the Constitutional Court and Head of the Cassation Court Justice Yousef Jassim Al-Mutawa'a, Deputy National Assembly Speaker Essa Al-Kandari and senior state officials. In

his speech at the ceremony, Minister Al-Afasi thanked His Highness the Amir for patronizing Kuwait's 21st Quran Memorization and Recitation Grand Competition. He noted that the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs aims to allow all categories of society to take part in the competition. He added that the ministry had established a committee to cover participants from the UK and Ireland, as well as allowing special needs people, elderly, residents at social care homes and others to take part in the event.

The number of contestants who reached the final round was 1,729, he said, adding that the winners were 225 male and females. The ceremony also involved showing a documentary movie on the competition, followed by His Highness presenting winners with awards. His Highness was also presented with a memorial shield in appreciation of his efforts. —KUNA



Children take 'selfies' with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah during the ceremony.

Crown Prince grateful for 'versary gestures

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah expressed appreciation yesterday for the kind gestures made by nationals and residents on the 12th anniversary of him taking oath as Crown Prince. He also prayed to the Almighty to bless our homeland with lasting prosperity, stability and security under the wise ruling of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Meanwhile, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah sent a cable of congratulations to His Highness the Crown on the 12th anniversary of him

assuming his post. In the cable, Sheikh Nasser congratulated His Highness on behalf of the Defense Ministry personnel, and wishing him everlasting wellbeing and wished Kuwaiti people more progress and welfare under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir.

Also, Deputy Chairman of Kuwait Audit Bureau Adel Al-Sarawi expressed pride and gratitude of Bureau employees to His Highness the Crown Prince, who seeks to achieve prosperity for Kuwait and its people.

Many successes and achievements by His Highness in various locations and positions embody the process of giving, wisdom and experience, Sarawi said in a press statement on the 12th anniversary of Sheikh Nawaf taking oath as Crown Prince. He expressed his hope that His Highness Sheikh Nawaf would be the example to followed by all the governmental bodies covered by the Audit Bureau.

The praise of His Highness for the State Audit Bureau's monitoring role and efforts exerted by all the staffs will be the motivation for more faithful work in line with the aspirations for a bright and promising future for the State of Kuwait, Sarawi said. — KUNA

Info Minister examines National celebrations plans

KUWAIT: Minister of Information Mohammad Al-Jabri yesterday examined plans for the National days' celebrations in a meeting with ministry officials. The minister said his department would spare no effort to ensure that the national celebrations appear in the best manifestations possible, with national cadres working round the clock.

The ministry is planning celebratory activities depicting the popular heritage at Sabah Al-Ahmad Heritage Village, Al-Mubarakia Market, the entertainment park Yom Al-Bahar and the towers area. The radio and television will broadcast live some of these celebrations. The minister on the occasions expressed congratulations to Their Highnesses the Amir and the Crown Prince and the

Kuwaiti people.

Meanwhile, Kuwaiti embassies and diplomatic missions abroad held celebrations late Tuesday to commemorate Kuwait's 57th National Day 27th Liberation Anniversary. During the celebrations, Kuwaiti Ambassadors to the UAE, Bahrain, Tunisia, Sweden, and Germany - Salah Al-Buajjan, Sheikh Azzam Al-Sabah, Ali Al-Dafiri, Nabeel Al-Rashed, and Bader Al-Isa respectively - all delivered speeches congratulating His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and the Kuwaiti people on the advent of the national occasions, expressing wishes for further welfare and development to the State of Kuwait. The Ambassadors thanked their respective host nations for their sincere wishes for Kuwait, affirming that they would do all they can to further develop bilateral relations. Senior officials attending the various events - such as Bahrain Royal Advisor Nabeel Al-Hamar, Tunisian Finance Minister Redha Shalloom, and others - congratulated the Kuwaiti leadership and people on the advent of National days, wishing further progress and development to Kuwait. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of Information Mohammad Al-Jabri chairs a meeting to examine plans for the National days' celebrations. — KUNA

Kuwait Times

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Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Construction workers assemble steel meshes at the site of a tower under construction in the downtown district of Kuwait City yesterday. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Tourism, recreation, hospitality, travel sectors capable of reducing deficit: Leaders Group

Monthly report on recent developments in Kuwait's tourism sector

KUWAIT: Leaders Group Company for Consulting and Development, the representative of the World Tourism Organization (WTO) in Kuwait, issued its monthly report on recent developments in the tourism sector in Kuwait. Leaders Group General Manager Nabila Al-Anjari, stressed that innovative and unconventional economic policies can add new resources to states such as Kuwait only if governments utilize various sectors, resources and potentials wisely.

This month's report stresses that tourism, recreation, hospitality and travel sectors are capable of reducing deficits as well as enhancing development during times of international or regional recession. The report also said that despite the crises the world has been witnessing,

namely regional tensions, wars and terrorist attacks, 2017 reports on tourism showed highly positive results. It added that according to international reports, tourism in the Middle East rose by five percent compared to the previous year, while in North Africa it grew by 13 percent in the same period.

Global reports show highly positive results

The report highlighted that crises might pave the way for creative ideas and new investments in tourism and other relevant sectors as they might affect domestic and international touristic destinations. The report added that this applies even to natural disaster-stricken countries to which special types of tourists flock, such as the case of flood-stricken Thailand, Shanghai and Tokyo.

The report noted that the Indonesian island of Bali,



Nabila Al-Anjari

where over 300,000 people were injured and 5,000 killed during the 2004 tsunami, was one of the most natural disaster-stricken touristic destinations in the world. It added that the island soon recovered and is still one of the most heavily visited destinations.

Moreover, the report said tourism revenues rose in Turkey during 2017 despite the tension and offensives taking place along its borders with Syria and Iraq, and despite the state of emergency the country has been experiencing since the 2016 coup attempt and European accusations that basic rights and freedom levels are deteriorating there.

The same applies to the Arab world that had been witnessing various terrorist, political, military and economic

problems for a few years now, the report stressed. It elaborated that both Tunisia and Lebanon have been showing positive tourism-related indications. "Lebanon earned around \$7 billion from tourism in 2015 despite its political problems, the two-year presidential vacuum, war on terror and the impact of the Syrian crisis."

The report also said that WTO and the Syrian ministry of tourism launched a special campaign in January focusing on resuming tourism to Syria under the title 'Syria Now', announcing that three of the main Syrian destinations are ready to receive tourists.

Finally, the report underlined that tourism can help boost oil-dependent economies, such as the case of Kuwait, and protect them from the instability of international oil prices that have been affecting them since 2015. The report also stressed that tourism in Kuwait is no longer a fragile sector, that touristic investments have become less risky, that it is qualified to occupy a leading position in international touristic destinations and that it can still accommodate more touristic facilities that would turn it into a special touristic country.

KIB sponsors 3rd CSR Conference and Exhibition

KUWAIT: For the second consecutive year, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) sponsored the 3rd Kuwait CSR Conference and Exhibition. The conference was attended by and held under the patronage of the Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Khaled Al-Roudhan, and the Minister of Social Affairs and Labor and Minister of State for Economic Affairs Hind Al-Sabeeh, at Jumeirah Messilah Beach Hotel and Spa.

KIB's sponsorship of this conference came as part of its leading social responsibility program, which aims at supporting and sponsoring diverse community-based activities. This particular event featured successful public-private cooperation in the context of humanitarian activities and community service.

On this occasion, Manager of the Corporate Communications Unit at KIB, Nawaf Najia, congratulated the government and the people of Kuwait on the occasion of National Day celebrations. He also wished for the nation's continued safety and security under the Amir's wise leadership and guidance. Najia added: "KIB is one of the most prominent banking institutions that believe that social responsibility is a core component of its business strategy. Through our leading position in the banking sector, we strive to provide social benefits that positively affect all members of the local community. We would also like to assure everyone that this journey of giving will not stop, as we will continue to strive each and every single day to fulfill our duty towards our community, by spearheading impactful, constructive and



KUWAIT: Manager of the Corporate Communications Unit Nawaf Najia (right) receives KIB's award.

all-encompassing social programs and community initiatives." Moreover, Najia noted that this conference acted as an excellent opportunity to promote a culture of social responsibility and also encouraged both public and private sectors to share their expertise in this area. Additionally, the conference paved the way for direct engagement between civil society and charitable organizations.

It is worth noting that KIB strongly believes in the importance of its social responsibility program, which aims at supporting various activities and initiatives that improve the quality of life for all citizens and promote social development. In addition to providing banking services and products, the Bank's role extends to supporting a number of community-based initiatives, thereby reinforcing its prominent role as one of the most influential and active financial institutions in the community.

Kuwait CSR conference underway

KUWAIT: Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become a strategic choice that successful companies invest to maximize profits, a senior Ministry of Commerce and Industry official told a major CSR event yesterday. Undersecretary Khalid Al-Fadhel made the statement to the opening of the 3rd Kuwait CSR Conference and Exhibition on behalf of Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Al-Roudhan.

The ministry encourages companies that adopt active CSR programs that leave such obvious and sustainable effect on the society, he noted. The Kuwaiti firms with international brands have played a significant role to offer humanitarian services to the society, which brought them fame and good reputation, the minister said.

Yet, he referred to a host of businesses that need to "promote their perception of the CSR," he stressed. The business sector

needs to assume its responsibilities toward the society, broadening its role from mainly making profits to serving all the social classes, he said.

Meanwhile, head of the organizer committee Jamal Omran said the conference is held for the third year in a row for disseminating CSR culture and exchanging expertise among the public and the private sectors and the government. It also explains the criteria of applying CSR and seeks to enhance communication between the civil society and the social and philanthropic sector as well, Omran added.

The event serves as a platform for local and international CSR professionals to discuss how organizations use CSR to integrate economic, environmental and social objectives with their operations and growth.

Expert and speakers provide an in-depth analysis of contemporary CSR issues, trends, challenges, standards and strategies. It also offers the most current developments and best practices in CSR and sustainability, with practical tools, resources, and examples that companies can utilize to transform their own organizations. A specialized exhibition is held as part of the two-day event for the institutions interested in CSR values and importance for achieving sustainable development. —KUNA

Local

Foreign Minister receives UN Peace Coordinator for Mideast

Kuwait urges further efforts to honor Iraq's invasion-related commitments

NEW YORK: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process in New York Nikolay Mladenov. The meeting, which took place late Tuesday, is part of Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled's visit to New York to chair UN Security Council meetings, as part of Kuwait's chairmanship of the council in February.

During the meeting, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled stressed on the importance of international cooperation to resume the Mideast peace process, which will have an impact on international peace and security. He also affirmed Kuwait's support to all measures taken by Palestine to become an independent state.

The meeting was attended by Assistant Foreign Minister for Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister's Office Ambassador Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah, Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Mansour Al-Otaibi, assistant foreign minister for international organizations affairs Minister Plenipotentiary Nasser Al-Hayyen and senior officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled took part in a reception hosted by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas at the UN headquarters on Tuesday. The ceremony followed a UN Security Council debate on the situation in the Middle East where President Abbas

delivered a speech.

Renews commitment

Ambassador Otaibi on Tuesday reaffirmed that his country spared no effort to solve Palestine question that constitutes the central issue of all Arabs and Muslims. Before taking up its non-permanent seat at UN Security Council earlier this year, the State of Kuwait considered support to Palestine question a main pillar in its foreign policy. Ambassador Otaibi, the UNSC Chair for February, noted at a UNSC meeting on the situation in the Middle East.

He affirmed that Kuwait's principled stance stemmed from strong belief in the right of brotherly people of Palestine to establish an independent state with east Jerusalem as its capital as per the provisions of the relevant UNSC resolutions. The Israeli violations of the rights of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories continued unabated in contravention to the international humanitarian law and the UNSC resolutions, he pointed out. Also addressing the meeting were Mladenov, President Abbas and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

Ambassador Otaibi welcomed the participation of the UN Secretary-General and Palestinian President in the UNSC debate of the Palestinian question, which remained a common concern for the international community for more than five decades. He said President Abbas's presence provides "an invaluable

chance" for getting a first-hand account of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and an insight into what the international community needs to do vis-a-vis the situation in the Middle East, the implementation of the UN Charter and the Palestinian people's self-determination. He blamed Israel, the occupying power, for planting obstacles before the Middle East peace process, urging the UNSC member states to work for implementing the relevant resolutions pursuant to Article 25 of the UN Charter.

"The failure of the international community to find a fair, comprehensive and permanent solution to the Middle East provided ground for the emergence of new crises in the region, including extremism and terrorism," Ambassador Otaibi said. He cited as an example the violence that broke out following the US decision to recognize Jerusalem as capital of Israel. "We call on the US administration, out of belief in its role in the peace process, to work with the international community for forcing Israel into implementing the resolutions of the international legitimacy and ending the occupation of the Palestinian and other Arab territories," he stressed.

Ambassador Otaibi also called for halting the illegitimate Jewish settlement activities in the occupied territories pursuant to the UNSC resolution 2334 and resisting any attempts to change the legal, historical or demographical status quo in the occupied territories, particularly the holy city of Jerusalem.

Separately, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled chaired the UN Security Council's session on Iraq, as part of Kuwait's chairmanship of the council in February. During the meeting late Tuesday, the participants hailed Kuwait's hosting of the Kuwait International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq (KICRI) last week, co-chaired by Kuwait, Iraq, the UN and the EU. They also applauded the results of the event, where about \$30 billion were collected as loans, grants and investments to support Iraq.

In his speech at the session, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled expressed his deep appreciation of the UN's efforts to support Iraq, as the country is facing many challenges after its liberation from the control of the so-called Islamic State (IS). Speaking on the recent conference, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled noted that Kuwait has pledged \$1 billion as loans for Iraq, and another \$1 billion to invest in several projects in the country. Kuwait had also previously provided over \$200 million as aid for the worsening humanitarian conditions in Iraq, due to the control of IS in different parts of the country in 2016, he added.

Meanwhile, the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister called for further efforts to honor Iraq's invasion-related commitments to Kuwait, including the POWs and missing Kuwaitis and other nationalities' file and the lost possessions of Kuwait including national treasures, in accordance with the UN's article number 2107/2013. —KUNA

Palestinian embassy thanks Kuwait

KUWAIT: Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait Rami Tahboub released the following statement, expressing gratitude to the state of Kuwait for showing support to the Palestinian cause during their chairmanship of the United Nations Security Council:



Rami Tahboub

"Following the speech of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas at the UN Security Council on Tuesday and his presentation of a new peace plan to the international community that was welcomed by the majority of council members, it is my honor to thank the State of Kuwait, the Arab representative at the security council and its chair for this month, for inviting Abbas to deliver this historic speech. This would not have been possible if it was not for the presence of Kuwait as chair of the UN Security Council.

"I would also like to thank Kuwait's Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah for being on President Abbas' side all day on Tuesday, which reasserts Kuwait's stand and unlimited support towards Palestine and Palestinians' rights.

"This honorable and unprecedented position confirms the stand of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Arab diplomacy's chief and the wise man of the Arab nation, beside the Palestinian leadership, headed by President Abbas, and carries a clear message that Kuwait was and still is standing side by side with the Palestinian people until they receive their legitimate rights of self-determination and declaring the Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital."

200 MW of power from Kuwait to Basra

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Iraq's ministry of electricity yesterday announced building transmission towers for 50 km between Kuwait and Iraq to provide the Iraqi city of Basra with over 200 megawatts of electricity. The ministry's official spokesperson Musab Al-Modarres told Iraq News Agency that the new towers will join service soon. Notably, Kuwait's Ministry of Electricity and Water had announced in December 2017 that an agreement was made with Iraq to form a joint technical team to study linking Iraq's power grid to the unified Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) grid. In a statement he made last year, former minister Essam Al-Marzouq predicted that Kuwait's power production will reach 39,000 megawatts by 2035 and pointed out that Kuwait is considering exporting power to Iraq.

New projects

Ministry of Public Works' (MPW) Undersecretary Awatif Al-Ghunaim said several projects will be concluded and handed over this year, including the new education and awqaf ministries' buildings. Ghunaim added that MPW launched its 2035 strategy two days earlier, which includes all projects underway and future ones that will help achieve the sought development.



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Trump backs ban on 'bump stocks'

Bahraini activist jailed for 'insulting' tweets

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MARIB: Yemeni children, formerly Houthi fighters, are pictured outside a rehabilitation centre at a school in the town of Marib. — AFP

As Yemen falls apart, boomtown rises

Marib is now Yemen's most thriving city

MARIB: The clang of jackhammers and excavators fills the streets of Marib, an oil-rich Yemeni boomtown once accustomed to the sounds of war, now a rare oasis of stability in a country torn by strife. Yemen is convulsed by the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with rampant disease, famine and a ruinous conflict pitting the Saudi-backed government of President Abdrabbo Mansour Hadi against Iran-aligned Houthi rebels.

But the fall of Yemen has coincided with the rise of Marib, once seen as an Al-Qaeda bastion, which has been spared much of the misery owing to its oil and gas reserves, proximity to Saudi Arabia and rare tribal cohesion that has helped repel Houthi incursions. "We have managed to push the war far away from Marib," said provincial governor Sultan Al-Arada. "Marib is untouchable," he said. Marib is now Yemen's most thriving city, thanks in part to an influx of hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people, among them entrepreneurs, doctors and a monied class that is driving up investments and real estate prices.

Hundreds of new businesses have come up, from eateries to water bottling plants, and construction sites are everywhere. Marib offers another novelty to legions of

employed youth in a country with chronic joblessness-salaries. "The spectacular rise of Marib has come not despite the conflict, but because of it," Farea Al-Muslimi, a Yemen expert at Chatham House think tank said. "Marib has gained from the chaos surrounding it." A weakened central government-exiled in the southern port city of Aden, where southern separatists have opened a new front in the conflict-has strengthened local governance, giving Marib more autonomy to chart its future. Its university is expanding and businessmen who once fled the war are slowly returning.

That includes Obaid Zubaiyen, head of a family-run trade and construction enterprise with interests across the Gulf, who fled Yemen in 2011 amid increasing turmoil.

"The family is back because Marib means opportunity," said Misbah Ohag, a group manager, showing AFP a blueprint of a planned multi-million dollar project of villas, apartments and malls. Governor Arada plans an international airport and aims to make Marib, home to temple ruins from the ancient Sabaeen kingdom, a magnet for tourists—a plan hampered by the wrenching conflict.

'Dead and limbless'
But some scars of the war rumbling on outside Marib are still visible inside the province. At a rehab centre for child soldiers, drawings sketched by the young survivors are telling. One showed a grenade, a tank, a helicopter gunship and crimson splashes of blood. "They blew up my school," read the caption. Houthi rebels have planted thousands of landmines

“ We have managed to push the war far away from Marib ”

around Marib and mangled carcasses of cars litter its mountainous border. "So many dead and limbless people," said Mohammed Abdo Al-Qubati, head of Marib general hospital, home to Yemen's only functional prosthetic limbs centre in government territory. "It's like we are wait-

ing for the remaining people to die."

Marib, with an original population of around 350,000, is sinking under the weight of what officials say are 1.5 million displaced people from across Yemen, putting a strain on resources. In a decrepit camp on its outskirts, dozens of people from a tribe called Jaham tugged at the sleeves of Saudi aid officials, imploring them for more relief supplies. "This is the kind of life you wish upon your enemy. We used to live in palaces, now we live in tents," said a tribesman from nearby Sirwah district, which was overrun by the Houthis. "No, no," interjected another tribesman. "This is not even a tent: this is wood covered with a flimsy blanket."

'Tragedy'

Houthi rebels besieged Marib for months in 2015 after they captured the capital Sanaa, but they were pushed back in fierce clashes with local tribesmen aided by the Saudi-led coalition. Arada, one of the region's most influential tribal leaders, rallied together fellow elders to pledge loyalty to the Hadi government—even those who traditionally supported the Houthis. The US, behind regular drone strikes in the territory to combat Al-Qaeda,

has imposed sanctions on Arada's brother, accusing him of supporting the group, a charge the governor vehemently denies.

Marib faces the constant threat of Houthi rockets, hundreds of which have been fired towards the city. A missile strike killed six children last year during Eid festivities, Arada said. Yemen is a chessboard of proxy warfare between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Paying a heavy price for the conflict are thousands of divided families in Yemen, split between Houthi and government territory. "We go through checkpoint, checkpoint, checkpoint," said Amina Al-Ayashi, 55, describing a circuitous route to Sanaa, where her son journalist Taufiq is in a Houthi jail as the rebels crack down on the media.

"It feels like a whole lifetime. They (rebels) humiliatingly search us. We bring clothes, bread, vegetables. They refuse..." she trailed off. Morsal Haidara, an English professor at Marib University—which restarted in 2016 after being shut down during months of fighting—draws parallels to Shakespeare's Hamlet, comparing the rebels to the character King Claudius who seized the throne by poisoning his own brother. "What's happening in Yemen is a tragedy," he said. — AFP

Influential US evangelist Billy Graham dies at 99

WASHINGTON: Reverend Billy Graham, the influential Southern preacher who became a spiritual advisor to several US presidents and millions of Americans via their television sets, died yesterday. He was 99. The one-time backwoods minister who eventually became the world's foremost Christian evangelist, spread a message of spiritual redemption at tent and stadium revival meetings, in a career that spanned decades.

"The GREAT Billy Graham is dead," President Donald Trump tweeted in tribute. "There was nobody like him! He will be missed by Christians and all religions. A very special man." The Southern Baptist preacher was close to the family of President George W. Bush, who once said that a private meeting with Graham in 1985 helped him quit drinking. More recently he was portrayed in the Netflix drama series "The Crown" as giving counsel to the young Queen Elizabeth II as she confronted the burdens of rule.

"Billy Graham is the closest thing to a national pope that we shall ever see," journalist Garry Wills once wrote in The Washington Post. His death was confirmed by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, the religious organization headed by his son. Graham was a pioneer of "televangelism" to convert souls to Christianity as television got off the ground in the 1950s.

Born on Nov 7, 1918, he was raised as one of four children on a dairy farm in Charlotte, North Carolina. Graham had a spiritual awakening in 1934 that changed the course of his life. He subsequently attended the Florida Bible Institute, now Trinity College of Florida, and was ordained as a Baptist minister in 1939. In 1950, he founded the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) in Minneapolis, Minnesota and launched a weekly "Hour of Decision" radio program.



KANSAS CITY, Missouri: In this file photo taken on Oct 7, 2004 Billy Graham speaks to the crowd on a rainy night at Arrowhead Stadium. — AFP

Adviser to US presidents

His ministry led him to preach the gospel around the country - and the world. Over the course of his career, he was consulted by presidents Dwight Eisenhower and John F Kennedy. For a time he was Richard Nixon's chaplain and golf partner. President George H W Bush invited him to pray at the White House in 1991 for guidance through the first long day of the Gulf War. But of all the US leaders - almost all of whom have described themselves as practicing Christians - Graham found only Jimmy Carter to match him in dedication to his faith.

"Carter alone among the presidents... taught the Bible throughout his life, wrote books of religious meditations, and needed no help with Scripture or its challenges," wrote authors Nancy Gibbs and Michael Duffy in a Graham biography, "The Preacher and the Presidents" published in Aug 2007. Graham also has been credited with helping hasten the end of segregation in his native south by refusing to preach to segregated audiences after 1953. — AFP

More female infants die in India; parents neglect healthcare

MUMBAI: Parents are less likely to seek treatment for a sick baby girl than a boy in India, where more female infants die within the first month of being born, the United Nations said. More babies die in India than any other country, with 600,000 deaths recorded annually, or one quarter of the global total, according to a report released on Tuesday by the UN children's agency UNICEF. Girls outnumber boys in this death toll, UNICEF said, citing Indian government data. More girls die in the under-five age group as well, a category that recorded a nearly 65 percent drop in mortality rates between 1990 and 2015.

"Girls have the advantage of being biologically stronger, yet sadly they are

extremely vulnerable socially," said Yasmin Ali Haque, UNICEF India representative, in an e-mailed statement. "The discrimination begins even before they are born," she added. India offers free care to newborns in more than 700 state-run hospitals that are dedicated to treating babies. But nearly 60 percent of the infants admitted to these facilities were boys, according to data collected in 2017 by UNICEF. "This indicates the social barriers girls face. They have lesser value in the society," said Gagan Gupta, a health specialist with UNICEF.

Parents avoid taking their daughters for treatment, because they don't want to leave work and lose wages, or pay expenses to travel to hospitals, Gupta told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. Many parents prefer sons in India, because social norms bar women from performing some religious rituals and inheriting property, even though such discrimination is illegal. Daughters are also often seen as a burden, as families have to pay dowries when they marry. A preference for sons encourages sex-selective abortions, which has led to skewed sex ratios. There are an estimated 63 million "missing" women in India. — Reuters

International

More than 90 Nigeria schoolgirls missing after Boko Haram attack

Nigerian police, state officials deny any girls abducted

BAUCHI: More than 90 Nigerian schoolgirls are feared missing after Islamist insurgent group Boko Haram attacked a village in the northeastern state of Yobe, two sources said yesterday. Their disappearance, if confirmed, would be one of the largest since Boko Haram abducted more than 270 schoolgirls from the town of Chibok in 2014. That case drew global attention to the nine-year insurgency, which has sparked what the United Nations has called one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

A roll-call at the girls' school on Tuesday showed that 91 students were absent, said the two people with direct knowledge of the matter. "I saw girls crying and wailing in three Tata vehicles and they were crying for help," said a witness from the nearby village of Gumsa who was reportedly forced to show the insurgents the way out of the area and then released. Reuters was unable to verify the witness's account that Boko Haram had abducted girls in the attack on Dapchi on Monday evening. Nigerian police and the regional education ministry denied any abductions had taken place, but parents and other witnesses also told Reuters some girls were still missing.

The two sources, several parents and other local witnesses who spoke to Reuters did so on condition of anonymity because they had been warned by Nigerian security and government officials not to disclose the disappearance. Seven parents told Reuters their daughters were among the missing. "I hope my daughter is not one of those abducted as we learned that over ninety of them were not seen after going through their register book," one parent said.

Shots fired at school

The Boko Haram militants arrived in Dapchi on Monday evening in trucks, some mounted with heavy guns and painted in military camouflage, witnesses said. The insurgents went directly to the school, shooting sporadically, sending students and teachers fleeing, the witnesses said, adding that some people had returned to Dapchi after spending the night hiding in the bush.

Nigerian security forces have begun a search and rescue mission, two people said. Yobe state Police Commissioner Sumonu Abdulmaliki on Tuesday told reporters Boko Haram had not abducted any girls in Dapchi. "They fired shots and left the town toward Gaidam... in the night, where they abducted three people," he said. The state ministry of education also said there had been no established case of abduction, but shut the Dapchi school for a week to allow students to be reunited with their families.

More than 20,000 people have been killed and two million forced to flee their homes in the northeast of Africa's most populous nation since Boko Haram began its insurgency in 2009. Of around 270 girls originally abducted from their school in Chibok in April 2014, about 60 escaped soon afterwards and others have since been released after mediation. Around 100 are still believed to be in captivity. Last month, the group released a video purporting to show some of the Chibok girls still in its custody, saying they do not wish to return home. Aid groups say Boko Haram has kidnapped thousands more adults and children, many of whose cases are neglected.—Reuters



GBAJIMBA, Nigeria: People walk at the internally displaced people camp occupied largely by women and children affected by herders and farmer's violent clashes from Logo and Guma communities at Gbajimba IDPs camp on the outskirts of Makurdi, capital of Benue State in northcentral Nigeria. —AFP

Netanyahu's closest confidant agrees to testify against him

JERUSALEM: One of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's closest confidants has agreed to testify against him in a graft probe in a fresh blow to his long tenure in power, Israeli media reported yesterday. Two new corruption investigations announced this week, hot on the heels of a police recommendation that Netanyahu face charges in two other cases, have fuelled growing speculation he could be forced to step down or call an early election.

Shlomo Filber, a Netanyahu ally for more than 20 years and a former communications ministry director

general, is expected to agree to turn state witness in exchange for avoiding jail, Israeli media reported. Police did not confirm any deal. Filber was arrested on Sunday in relation to allegations Shaul Elovitch, the controlling shareholder of Israeli telecommunications giant Bezeq, gave Netanyahu positive coverage on his Walla! news site in exchange for policies benefiting the business. Filber is suspected of mediating between Netanyahu and Elovitch and promoting regulatory changes worth millions to Bezeq.

The prime minister himself has not been named as a suspect in the investigation. In another case announced this week, two Netanyahu allies are alleged to have offered a judge promotion in exchange for dropping a case against the premier's wife. The two men have been identified as Nir Hefetz and Eli Kamir, both former media advisers for the Netanyahu family. Their alleged offer was to Hila Gerstel, a judge involved in a graft probe into Sara Netanyahu over alleged misuse of public funds.—AFP

Qatar, Chad restore ties

DOHA: Qatar and Chad are to restore diplomatic relations, severed in August soon after the start of a Saudi-led boycott of the emirate, Doha's foreign ministry said yesterday. Lolwah Al-Khater, Qatar's foreign ministry spokeswoman said on social media that both countries would return their ambassadors with immediate effect.

"Moments ago MOU (memorandum of understanding) was signed between Qatar and Chad: Diplomatic relations to be resumed with immediate exchange of ambassadors," she tweeted. Al-Khater added that the agreement was "a

victory for both countries". Chad closed Qatar's embassy in N'Djamena in late August, accusing Doha of seeking to destabilize the landlocked African semi-desert country. Within days, Qatar retaliated by closing Chad's embassy in Doha and ordering all staff to leave the country.

With the nine-month-old boycott that began last June, Qatar has found itself isolated by its former closest allies and neighbors in the Gulf, Saudi Arabia and other countries including the United Arab Emirates cut all ties with Qatar, claiming it supported terrorism and was seeking better ties with Riyadh's great regional rival Iran. Qatar denies the accusations and says the dispute is an attack on its sovereignty. Chad was among a small group of African countries, also including Mauritania and Senegal, that recalled their ambassadors from Doha at the beginning of the crisis. Qatar has accused the Saudi-led bloc of putting pressure on African states to take sides in the row.—AFP

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International

Hard Brexit faction in UK party demands clean break from EU

Juncker's 'monster' moves to top EU job

LONDON: More than 60 Conservative lawmakers have written to Prime Minister Theresa May demanding a quick, clean break from the EU, adding pressure on her to take a "hard Brexit" stance ahead of a meeting to decide Britain's negotiating position. May, whose government and party is divided over Brexit, has just eight months to strike a withdrawal deal with the European Union, but insists Britain will leave at 2300 GMT on March 29, 2019. The group of 62 lawmakers in her party demanded a tougher approach in a number of areas, including Britain's right to move away from EU rules after leaving, and the terms of any transition period.

"Your government must have the ability to change British laws and rules once we leave, rather than being a 'rule-taker,'" the letter, whose signatories include former party leader Iain Duncan Smith and ex-development secretary Priti Patel, said. The EU has repeatedly asked May to clarify how she sees Britain's future relationship with the bloc but the weakened prime minister, who lost her parliamentary majority in an ill-judged snap election, has been wary of setting out too many details as her party is so divided on the issue.

May will host senior ministers at her country residence Chequers on Thursday to try to broker an agreement between the factions. She is then expected to set out her plans in a speech in the next few weeks, before formal trade talks begin in March. In the letter, the lawmakers say they will only support a transition period - favored by proponents of a "softer" Brexit, during which Britain would stay within many existing EU

structures - if all the details are fully negotiated by March next year.

Britain must be able to change its laws without authorization from Brussels from the moment it formally leaves the EU, they say. On Tuesday, Britain's chief Brexit negotiator, David Davis, said he aimed for a system of "mutual recognition" where both sides agree common regulatory outcomes, such as consumer protection or financial stability, but are able to pursue their own policies to reach those goals. EU leaders have warned Britain cannot have both freedom from the bloc's regulations and frictionless trade.



Weakened PM has to balance factions inside her party

Juncker's 'monster'

Meanwhile, the powerful chief of staff to Jean-Claude Juncker, Martin Selmayr, will take a top post in the European Commission in a move which means he can stay on after his boss steps down next year, sources said yesterday. The German-affectionately nicknamed the "Monster" by Juncker himself and less affectionately dubbed the "Rasputin of Brussels" by the British press will become secretary general of the commission, the EU's executive arm, a European source told AFP.

Selmayr, 47, a lawyer by trade, is already well known as gatekeeper and enforcer to Juncker but has also been involved in controversies including over leaks about Brexit negotiations. Juncker's term of office is due to end in 2019 but the new post means Selmayr will be able to stay on in the commission after that. Spaniard Clara Martinez will become Juncker's new chief of staff, the source said. Selmayr will replace Alexander Italianer, a Dutch civil servant, who has been



LONDON: Britain's Prime Minister Theresa May (left) greets Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Mark Rutte outside No 10 Downing street, in central London yesterday. — AFP

secretary general of the commission since 2015. It is the top civil servant post in the commission.

Despite a reputation as a shadowy power-broker, Selmayr has often been outspoken on social media in defense of his Luxembourgish boss. He was the first to break news of a deal between British Prime Minister Theresa May and Juncker in the first phase of Brexit talks in December, when he tweeted a pic-

ture of white smoke—a reference to choosing a new pope. In October he publicly denied leaking details to a German newspaper that reported May had pleaded with Juncker for help in unblocking stalled negotiations. "I deny that 1/we leaked this; 2/Juncker ever said this; 3/we are punitive on Brexit," wrote Selmayr. "It's an attempt to frame EU side and to undermine." — Agencies

News in brief

Six killed in S Africa

PORT ELIZABETH: An armed gang stormed into a rural police station in South Africa yesterday and stole firearms in an attack that left five officers and a soldier dead, police said. The robbers entered the police station in the southern village of Engcobo shortly after midnight, opening fire on the officers and seizing two others, who were later shot and killed, police spokesman Vish Naidoo said. "During the early hours of this morning six people were killed when robbers attacked Engcobo police station," Naidoo said. "Five of the six were on-duty police officers. Three police officers were killed at the police station when robbers attacked the station and randomly opened fire on the members." — AFP

Fisherman eaten by croc

MANILA: A crab fisherman has been killed and half-eaten by a huge saltwater crocodile, the latest in a growing number of attacks on a remote Philippine island, police said yesterday. The family and neighbors of Rebente Ladja, 37, launched a search after he failed to return home Monday from setting crab traps at a mangrove forest on the coast of Balabac, off the country's main southwestern island of Palawan. "They found his mangled remains at the swamp that night, with a huge crocodile beside it. The crocodile had consumed the upper half of his body," Balabac police officer Allan Vic Macasil told AFP by telephone. He said it was the fifth crocodile attack in Balabac in less than six years. — AFP

2 Turkish soldiers killed

ANKARA: Two Turkish soldiers were killed yesterday in an attack by Kurdish militants in rural southeastern Turkey close to the border with Iraq, the army said. Another soldier was wounded after a handmade bomb was detonated by the "separatist terrorist organization"—Turkey's official term for the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) - in the province of Hakkari, the military said in a statement. The PKK has waged a three-decade insurgency against the Turkish state and is classed as a terror group by Ankara and its Western allies. Fighting between the Turkish security forces and the PKK has intensified since a two-year ceasefire collapsed in 2015. The — AFP

Church fraud case

SINGAPORE: A Singaporean man convicted over a high-profile fraud case at a megachurch was caught yesterday trying to flee in a boat before he was due to start his sentence, police said. In a case that gripped the city-state with a heady mix of religion, showbiz and fraud, six leaders from City Harvest Church were convicted in 2015 of pilfering tens of millions of dollars from the place of worship to promote the pop career of the pastor's wife. Among them was investment manager Chew Eng Han, who was sentenced to three years and four months but had his imprisonment delayed by a series of appeals. After losing his final challenge, the 57-year-old was allowed to remain out of prison on bail until after the Lunar New Year holiday, and was meant to start serving his sentence on February 22. — AFP

Trump backs ban on 'bump stocks'

WASHINGTON: Faced with an outpouring of grief and anger over a deadly school shooting in Florida, US President Donald Trump yesterday threw his support behind moves to ban "bump stocks"—an accessory that can turn a semi-automatic weapon into an automatic one. Trump also said school safety was a "top priority" for his administration, with meetings on the subject planned through next week, when he holds talks with governors from all 50 US states.

Calls to ban bump stocks have been mounting since Stephen Paddock, a retired accountant, used them on several of his weapons to kill 58 concertgoers in Las Vegas in October 2017 in the deadliest mass shooting in recent US history. Although the former student who shot dead 17 people in Florida last week did not use bump stocks, there has been a renewed focus on the devices because outlawing them is a rare point of agreement between Democrats, some Republicans and the powerful National Rifle Association (NRA) gun lobby. Less than a week after the shooting, the Florida state House of Representatives rejected a ban on assault weapons and large capacity magazines in a 36-71 vote, during a session that opened with a prayer for the people killed in the tragedy. About 100 student survivors of the tragedy plan to hold a gun control rally and speak with lawmakers about gun control and school safety yesterday at the state Capitol in Tallahassee. Trump—who received strong backing from the NRA during his White House run—said he had signed a memorandum "directing the attorney general to propose regulations to ban all devices that turn legal weapons into machine guns."

The president said he expected the measures to be finalized "very soon." "We must move past clichés and tired debates and focus on evidence-based solutions and security measures that actually work," Trump said

Putin nemesis Navalny, barred from election, tries political siege

MOSCOW: Two young anti-Putin activists trudged through a snow-logged Moscow housing estate on a recent Saturday, putting up fliers promoting a boycott of a presidential election next month. "It's not an election, it's a trick," read one, depicting a goggle-eyed caricature of Vladimir Putin, who polls show should be comfortably re-elected on March 18.

A man donning a fur hat ripped one of the fliers down within a minute. A woman, told by the activists "our elections have been stolen", quietly shut her door in their faces. Unglamorous and at times disheartening for those involved, this is the sharp end of opposition leader Alexei Navalny's campaign to boycott an election he says amounts to the rigged reappointment of Putin, whom he likens to an autocratic Tsar.

Navalny, a 41-year-old lawyer whose protests and corruption exposes of the sometimes gilded lives of government officials have irked the Kremlin, has been barred from the contest over what he says is a trumped up suspended prison sentence. Unable to challenge 65-year-

old Putin at the ballot box and kept off state TV, he has devised a different strategy: A long-term political siege of a man most Russians consider invincible.

"We want to tear Putin down from his pedestal," Vladimir Milov, an economic adviser and one of Navalny's allies, said in an interview. "Putin will get a formal victory, but we want to make it a pyrrhic victory. We want to use the election to show that he doesn't have as much support as he claims." Putin is credited with an approval rating of around 80 percent, bolstered by state TV, the ruling party and intense pride in parts of society over the 2014 annexation of Crimea and what the Kremlin has cast as military victory in Syria.

Nobody doubts that a man who has seldom been off Russian TV screens for the last 18 years is headed for a landslide. "Leader of the political Olympus" was how Putin's spokesman described his boss last month, a nod to the fact that none of the seven candidates registered to run against him are a threat. Among them are a female TV celebrity whose father was Putin's political mentor, a pro-Putin businessman who says he's not cut out to be president, and a millionaire communist. The contest, say critics, is a poor imitation of democracy.

Putin has dismissed Navalny as a troublemaker bent on sowing chaos on behalf of Washington. Navalny's immediate aim is to reduce turnout in the election by 10 percent or more with leaflets, social media, protests and telephone calls urging people not to vote. "We understand that Putin is reappointing himself and that all we can do is to make that reappointment less convincing," Oleg Stepanov, a senior Navalny activist, who has helped coordinate campaigning in Moscow, said. — Reuters

Students take action

Cruz legally bought the gun he used in the attack - an AR-15-style semi-automatic rifle-and the White House said it would consider options to raise the age for such purchases. "I think that's certainly something that's on the table for us to discuss and that we expect to come up over the next couple of weeks," spokeswoman Sarah Sanders told reporters. Many of the students who survived the shooting have vowed to make the tragedy a turning point in America's deadlocked debate on gun control.

They are planning a "March for Our Lives" in Washington next month, and they earned at least \$2 million in pledges from Hollywood A-listers. Sister rallies are set to take place around the country. George Clooney and his human rights lawyer wife Amal, Oprah Winfrey, director Steven Spielberg and his wife, actress Kate Capshaw, and film producer Jeffrey Katzenberg and his wife Marilyn each pledged \$500,000. "Amal and I are so inspired by the courage and eloquence of these young men and women," Clooney said in a statement. "Our family will be there on March 24 to stand side by side with this incredible generation of young people from all over the country." Winfrey then tweeted: "George and Amal, I couldn't agree with you more. I



UTAH: An AR-15 with a bump stock is shown at Good Guys Guns & Range in Orem, Utah. An AR-15 was used in the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida. — AFP

am joining forces with you and will match your \$500,000 donation." The US Congress is deadlocked on the gun control debate, accomplishing nothing since the October shooting in Las Vegas. Americans support stricter gun laws by a 66 percent to 31 percent margin, according to a poll released on Tuesday by Quinnipiac University. It described the margin as "the highest level of support" for stricter gun control since it began surveys on the question in 2008. — AFP



MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin speaks during a meeting at the Kremlin in Moscow. — AFP

International

US, N Korea 'secret meeting' planned - and then scrapped

US vice president denounces abuses from 'murderous regime'

WASHINGTON: Mike Pence and North Korean officials had planned to meet secretly during the 2018 Winter Olympic Games, but Pyongyang scrapped the talks after the US vice president denounced abuses from the "murderous regime," US officials said yesterday. Pence did not interact with the North Koreans even though he was seated in the same box as them at the opening ceremony of the Games on February 9 - nor did he shake hands with the North's ceremonial head of state Kim Jong Nam during an earlier leaders' reception.

The North Koreans, who had sent Kim Jong Nam and leader Kim Jong Un's sister Kim Yo Jong to the Games, backed out of the planned meeting after Pence announced Washington would soon unveil its "toughest and most aggressive sanctions" against Pyongyang. During his Asian tour, he also denounced the North's nuclear drive and sought to shore up ties with regional allies - and longtime North Korean foes Japan and South Korea. Pence, who led the American delegation to the Games, said at the time he traveled with the father of late former prisoner Otto Warmbier to the South to "remind the world of the atrocities happening in North Korea."

"North Korea would have strongly preferred the vice president not use the world stage to call attention to those absolute facts or to display our strong alliance with those committed to the maximum pressure campaign," Pence's spokesman Ayers said. State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said only a "brief meeting" with leaders of the North Korean delegation had been on the table. "The vice president was ready to take this opportunity to drive home the necessity of North Korea abandoning its illicit ballistic missile and nuclear programs," Nauert said in a statement. "At the last minute, DPRK officials decided not to go forward

with the meeting. We regret their failure to seize this opportunity."

'Murderous regime'

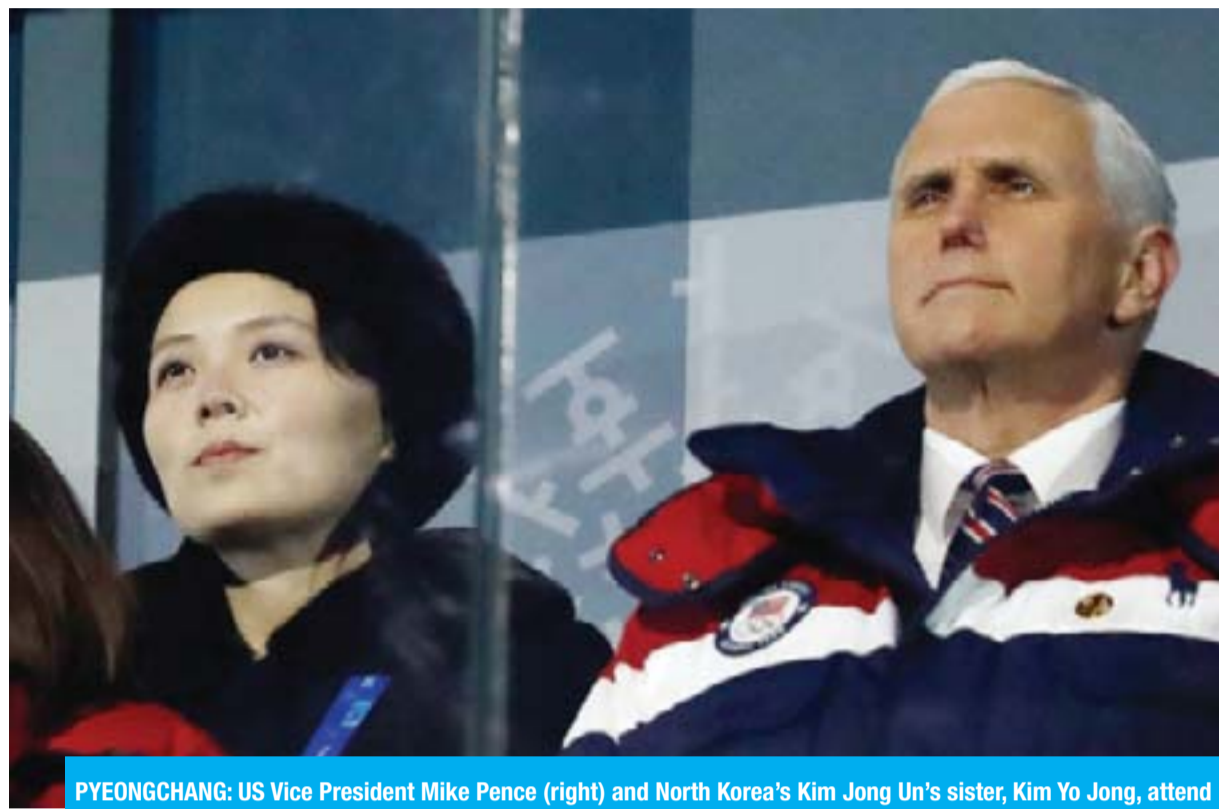
Ayers characterized the offer as the North having "dangled a meeting in hopes of the vice president softening his message, which would have ceded the world stage for their propaganda during the Olympics." "As we've said from day one about the trip: this administration will stand in the way of Kim's desire to whitewash their murderous regime with nice photo ops at the Olympics," Ayers said.

"Perhaps that's why they walked away from a meeting or perhaps they were never sincere about sitting down." Analysts say the North's Olympic diplomatic drive sought to loosen international sanctions against it and undermine the alliance between Seoul and Washington. Even as the US warned against falling for Pyongyang's Olympic charm offensive, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un issued an invitation via his sister Kim Yo Jong, who was attending the Games, for a summit with South Korean President Moon Jae-in.

But on his return trip from the Games, Pence said there was "no daylight" between the US, South Korea and Japan on efforts to isolate Pyongyang economically and diplomatically until it abandons its nuclear and ballistic missile program. Washington calls it a campaign of "maximum pressure." Mintaro Oba, a former State Department diplomat specializing in the Koreans, tweeted that "it's entirely possible that North Korea scheduled the reported secret meeting with VP Pence fully intending to cancel so that they could play the blame game." "Sudden cancellations/withdrawals are a well-established part of the North Korean playbook," added Oba, now a speechwriter in Washington.



No interaction as Pence, N Koreans sit in the same box



PYEONGCHANG: US Vice President Mike Pence (right) and North Korea's Kim Jong Un's sister, Kim Yo Jong, attend the opening ceremony of the Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympic Games at the Pyeongchang Stadium. —AFP

Denuclearization first

Global alarm at the rapid advance of nuclear-armed North Korea's weapons technology rose further last year when the regime tested its Hwasong-15 ballistic missile-theoretically capable of hitting the mainland US-in a challenge to Washington, which has threatened to "utterly destroy" the regime in the event of an attack. President Donald Trump and the North's leader Kim Jong Un have engaged in a series of personal insults. But as tensions rose between the North and Washington, the Games triggered a rapid reconciliation between the two Koreas, who are still technically at war. "The president made a decision that if they wanted to

talk, we would deliver our uncompromising message. If they asked for a meeting, we would meet," Ayers said, referring to Trump.

"He also made clear that until they agreed to complete denuclearization we weren't going to change any of our positions or negotiate," Woodrow Wilson Center vice president Aaron David Miller, a former advisor to Republican and Democratic diplomatic chiefs, highlighted the Trump administration's conflicting messages on whether to talk or not with the North Koreans. "Has the locked and loaded fire and fury Trump Administration come to conclusion that it's time to stop talking about North Korea and to start talking to them?" he asked.— AFP

News in brief

Five suspicious deaths

SYDNEY: A doctor has been reported to health authorities and three nurses fired over the suspicious deaths of five people at a Baptist-run aged care facility in Australia, authorities said yesterday. The dead were palliative care patients at the Carinity Fairfield Grange home in the northern city of Townsville, with their demise being investigated by police, the coroner and regulators who were tipped off by a concerned staff member. The Australian newspaper, which broke the story, said that 30 deaths in total going back to the facility's opening in August 2016 were under investigation. It said that lethal doses of morphine and the sedative midazolam were allegedly administered to at least one of the residents who was in relatively good physical health— AFP

8 killed in truck crash

NEW DELHI: A speeding truck driver yesterday crashed into a tea stall in central India, killing eight people and injuring four others in a horror accident that sparked angry clashes, police said. Police said the driver lost control of the vehicle at high speed, careering into the roadside eatery and nearby homes in Jabalpur district of Madhya Pradesh state. District deputy inspector general of police BS Chouhan said eight bodies were recovered at the scene. Hundreds of angry residents descended on the accident site, pelting stones at police and torching a patrol car. Chouhan said. Reinforcements were called to restore order, he added. Last week a truck driver was killed in a neighboring district after he rammed into a house, injuring six.— AFP

Malaysia abuse case

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian prosecutors yesterday charged a 60-year-old woman with murdering an Indonesian domestic helper who was found with bruises on her face and died from her injuries, state news agency Bernama said. It is the latest such case in a series. In 2008, a Malaysian was sentenced to jail for scalding her Indonesian domestic helper with a hot iron. Years later, a Malaysian couple were convicted of starving an Indonesian domestic helper to death. Adeline Lisao, 28, was rescued on Feb. 10 from her employer's home in Penang after neighbours reported she had been forced to sleep next to a dog in a covered car parking area attached to the house. She died the next day in hospital.— Reuters

Plane overshoots runway

LAGOS: Nigeria's aviation authorities said yesterday they had launched an investigation into how a passenger plane overshoot the runway while landing in the southern city of Port Harcourt. The incident involving a Dana Air Boeing MD-83 jet happened at about 7:30 pm on Tuesday. None of the 44 passengers and six crew on board was injured. But Sam Adurogboye, of the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA) said the plane was "badly damaged", adding: "We have launched an investigation." It was the second incident involving domestic airliner Dana Air this month: on February 7, an emergency exit door fell off as the plane as it landed in Abuja from Lagos. The Federal Airport Authority of Nigeria (FAAN) said Tuesday's overshoot "was suspected to have been caused by heavy rain, which was accompanied by strong wind and a storm"—AFP

Bahraini activist jailed for 'insulting' tweets

DUBAI: Jailed high-profile Bahraini activist Nabeel Rajab was yesterday sentenced to five more years behind bars over tweets critical of the Saudi-led intervention in the Yemen war and on the alleged mistreatment of prisoners, in a trial rights groups slammed as "shameful". Rajab, a leading figure in 2011 protests against the Gulf state's Sunni minority monarchy, is already serving a two-year sentence handed down last July for "disseminating rumors and false information" in television interviews critical of the government.

He has served multiple stints in prison since 2012, all linked to his role in the protests. A judicial source close to the case said Rajab was found guilty yesterday of insulting a neighboring country and spreading false news and rumors. The charges are linked to tweets and retweets made via Rajab's account and critical of a Saudi-led coalition, including Bahrain, that has been fighting in Yemen in support of its beleaguered government since 2015.

'Shameful attack'

The Bahrain Center for Human Rights, which Rajab co-founded, the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) released a joint statement yesterday saying the charges came over a March 26, 2015 tweet voicing criticism of the "hatred, destruction and horrors" of war. The Saudi-led military alliance had launched its first air raids on Yemen that same day. The charges also relate to tweets critical of Bahrain's treatment of inmates at the notorious Jaw prison, south of the capital Manama, according to the rights groups.

Amnesty International slammed yesterday's ruling as a "shameful attack on freedom of expression", while FIDH called the verdict an "outrageous sentence (that) contributes to further shut down space for civil society in the country." Human rights groups have warned they fear for the health of Rajab, who has been hospitalized multiple times in recent years. FIDH, OMCT and the Gulf Center for Human Rights said the activist had been advised not to take his medication back in January over fears the government had interfered with the treatment.

But Rajab's son Adam tweeted that his father's "first reaction to the court ruling was to smile and flash the sign to hold strong". Authorities in Bahrain, a tiny Shiite-majority kingdom strategically located between Saudi Arabia and Iran, have jailed dozens of high-profile activists and disbanded both religious and secular opposition groups since 2011. They have stripped hundreds of those convicted of their citizenship, making many stateless, according to Amnesty International. The archipelago plays a key military role in the Gulf, hosting both the US Navy's Fifth Fleet and a British military base that is under construction.

US President Donald Trump has eased restrictions on arms sales to Bahrain since taking office in January last year. The kingdom later announced it had signed deals with US defense company Lockheed Martin for the acquisition of upgraded F-16 fighter jets. US State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said on Tuesday that Washington had "very serious concerns" about the case against Rajab, whom she called "a prominent human rights activist". The Bahraini government has accused Iranian authorities of backing the protest movement in a bid to overthrow it. Tehran denies involvement.—AFP

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Computer shops embrace lucrative business: Outfitting crypto miners

Some of the biggest electronics bazaars in Asia are being flooded with customers looking for the latest piece of technology: Cryptocurrency mining rigs. Scores of miners from around the world are travelling to places like Hong Kong's Sham Shui Po and Singapore's Sim Lim Square to buy the rigs, which the shops' hardware geeks expertly build behind counters in their cramped boutiques. Some miners only buy components: A motherboard, graphic processing units, fans, power adapters, a display card and a memory card. But even if the vendors assemble them on the spot for a small fee, the finished product is usually still a relative bargain.

"It's 30-50 percent cheaper to buy equipment related to cryptomining in Hong Kong than in Europe," Russian bitcoin miner Dima Popov said. Hong Kong, for instance, has no sales tax and is closer to component suppliers. Popov buys display cards, motherboards and power supplies in Hong Kong and mines cryptocurrencies in Russia, where electricity is cheaper and the climate is more suitable.

The demand for the rigs has added a new dimension to Asia's tech shopping hubs whose once bustling business fizzled out in recent years hit by waning demand for personal computers. Storefronts that once catered mostly to locals, selling phones and other consumer gear, are now greeting foreign visitors searching for hardware that might make them rich.

Digital mining

The rigs are often stacked in warehouses as large as airplane hangars and are monitored constantly. Each unit contains energy-intensive processors that solve complex mathematical computations. When they do so, they are awarded the right to validate a blockchain transaction, earning them a "mining" fee. One cryptocurrency expert said anecdotal evidence suggests on average miners would get their money back in about three months. But those with small, home-based operations might have to wait much longer for a payoff.

In Hong Kong, shopkeepers say most buyers come from Russia, but they have had clients from western Europe, Africa and South Korea. Singapore sees visitors from neighboring countries with cheaper operation costs. Their mining machines' parts are mostly manufactured in China using chips from Advanced Micro Devices (AMD) and Nvidia, who are looking for export customers amid fears that Beijing will crack down on cryptocurrency miners.

"We've been selling more these few months and we often run out of stock" as miners move elsewhere and components flood out of China, said Grant Mak of C. Base Computer. Jerry Wu, shop manager of Wisetek Digital Technology Co. Ltd, says selling cryptocurrency mining equipment is 50 percent more profitable than selling computer parts and brings him HK\$50,000 to 60,000 (\$6,400-\$7,673) a month in profits. "The revenue is large," Wu said.

Chipmakers capitalize

As miners hunt for deals on gear, chipmakers see opportunity. Rigs can cost anywhere from a few thousand dollars to tens of thousands or more - and processing chips are the priciest component. Samsung Electronics, the world's biggest microchip producer, said "explosive" demand for the graphics processors used in mining cryptocurrencies is driving fresh growth. "A share of clients from the virtual currency industry is expected to grow dramatically this year in our foundry customer base," Lee Sang-hyun, vice president of Samsung's foundry business, said during a conference call.

Taiwan's Advanced Semiconductor Engineering predicted an upswing in demand this year for chips used for mining rigs. And Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co Ltd (TSMC), the world's No.1 foundry by revenue and volume, has embraced cryptocurrency mining as a business venture. But they know how fast that could change. "The urge to mine cryptocurrency is very strong. The incentive, of course, depends on the price of cryptocurrency. And the price of cryptocurrency is very volatile. But the demand right now or for the last year has been very strong, and we expect it to continue to be strong," TSMC's chairman, Morris Chang, said on an earnings call last month.

They trust Singapore

Singapore's smaller version of Sham Shui Po, the electronics shopping center at Sim Lim Square, is also seeing increased demand for mining equipment. Anuj Agarwal, a 39-year-old consultant for his brother's shop, Bizgram, said he has dealt with buyers from Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia and Russia. "Foreigners come to Singapore as there is immediate supply of mining rigs here, and they trust Singapore as a country," he said, adding that some were as young as 16 and came with their parents.

Nearby at Video-Pro, Liu Xiao Yu said he cannot keep up with the demand. "There was a customer who asked for a rig with 500 GPU cards, which amounted to over S\$350,000 (\$262,700)," Liu said. "There was another who came by last week asking for 1,000 GPU cards, but I am afraid to accept the offer as supplies are low now." One rig with GPUs usually has six to 12 such cards. —Reuters

BASHAR AL-ASSAD'S
BLOODIEST BOMBING
CAMPAIGN SINCE
THE BEGINNING OF
THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR



Cape Town charts new relationship with water

When Markus Rohner flew into Cape Town's airport this month, he found an unexpected line at the men's washroom. With the city facing an unprecedented water shortage, airport authorities had turned off all the sink taps but one, leaving visitors to wait in line to wash their hands, under the watchful eye of a bathroom attendant. "In Johannesburg, there were a lot of jokes about the situation. People were saying to each other: 'Let's go to Cape Town for a dirty weekend'," said Rohner, who visited both cities recently for his job as a sales and marketing director for a Swiss machinery manufacturer.

Cape Town, which is battling to keep its taps flowing as reservoirs run close to dry following a three-year drought, declared a national disaster this month. Without rain, Cape Town could run out of water by July 9, city authorities predict. For visitors thinking of flying into one of the world's tourism hotspots, threats of a water "Day Zero" raise a range of questions: Will a visit waste scarce water local people need? Will I be able to flush my hotel toilet and have a shower? Should I come at all?

Sisa Ntshona, who heads the tourism marketing arm of South Africa's government, has the answer you'd expect: Tourists - who support an estimated 300,000 jobs in South Africa's Western Cape province - should come but they should be prepared to help out and "Save like a local", as the slogan goes. In a city where residents now are expected to use no more than 50 litres of water a day - enough to drink, have a 90-second shower, flush the toilet at least once and wash a few clothes or dishes - tourists "don't have special privileges", he said.

That means no baths, swimming pools now sporting salt water instead of fresh, sheets and towels changed less regularly and signs urging visitors to flush toilets as infrequently as possible. At one Cape Town hotel, visitors who insist on a bath - which takes 80 litres of water - now have to conspicuously carry a large rubber duck placed in their bathtub to reception to exchange it for a bath plug.

With climate change expected to bring worsening water shortages to cities around the world - from Sao Paulo to Los Angeles to Jakarta - such changes are going

to be needed in many places in years to come, said Ntshona, the CEO of South African Tourism. "How do we recalibrate the norm for global tourism?" he asked, on a visit to London to reassure potential visitors. "Tourists are aware of recycling, carbon emissions. But now it's water. This is the new norm," he said. "Even if it rains tomorrow we can never go back to the old way of consuming water."

Tourist cash

For Cape Town, keeping tourists flowing through the city is an urgent priority. Foreign tourists represent only about 1 percent of the people in the city even at peak

“ How do we recalibrate the norm for global tourism? ”

times, but tourism - foreign and South African - contributes \$3.4 billion to the province's economy each year, said Ravi Nadasen, deputy chair of the Tourism Business Council of South Africa. Any tourism drop-off in Cape Town also hits the rest of the country, Ntshona said. With many visitors booking itineraries that start in Cape Town and move east, he said, a loss of visitors to Table Mountain also means fewer people at the country's game parks, vineyards and beaches. "If South Africa falls off the tourism radar screen globally, to get it back on will take so much attention and focus," he said.

Bookings for the first quarter of the year have so far not fallen, Ntshona and Nadasen say, though they have been fielding inquiries from worried potential visitors.

"We'll get a better sense by the end of March, when we look at forward bookings for the next six months," Ntshona said. Tourism officials are well aware of the potential threat, however. In 2014, an Ebola crisis in West Africa - a six-hour plane flight away - led to a 23 percent drop in visitors to Ebola-free South Africa as tourists shunned African destinations, Ntshona said.

To try to prevent a repeat of that disaster, government and business leaders are rushing to shore up water supplies - and confidence. Organizers of dozens of big conferences held in Cape Town each year are making plans to ship in water from other less thirsty parts of the country, Ntshona said. Hotels have installed low-flow showerheads, turned off fountains and replaced cloth napkins with paper ones.

A Cape Town subsidiary of leading hotel chain Tsogo Sun is this week taking delivery of a pioneering desalination plant, to suck seawater from Cape Town's harbor and churn out enough fresh water for the chain's 1,400 Cape Town hotel rooms. Cape Town itself is also making plans to bring in desalination plants - though not quickly enough to deal with the impending "Day Zero", now pushed back to July after a successful campaign to cut the city's water consumption by half.

Political obstacles

Experts have warned of water risks in Cape Town for years, but political infighting has got in the way of action, Ntshona admits. Cape Town is run by an opposition party to the ruling African National Congress - and even the ANC saw its embattled leader, President Jacob Zuma, pushed out of office last week. "Part of the lesson we're learning as a country is that when you have a crisis, stop bickering and focus on the issues," Ntshona said.

Another lesson, he said, is that water shortages - predicted to become longer and deeper across southern Africa as climate change strengthens droughts - cannot be seen as a passing problem. Winter rains are expected in Cape Town starting in May or June. If they arrive, the current crisis will ease, officials predict. But, regardless, "we need to recalibrate our relationship with water as a country", Ntshona said. —Reuters

Off-grid power pioneers pour into W Africa

Standing by a towering equatorial forest, Jean-Noel Kouame's new breeze-block house may be beyond the reach of Ivory Coast's power grid, but it's perfectly located for solar power entrepreneurs. Buoyed by success in East Africa, off-grid solar power startups are pouring into West Africa, offering pay-as-you-go kits in a race to claim tens of millions of customers who lack reliable access to electricity. At least 11 companies, including leading East African players such as Greenlight Planet, d.light, Off-Grid Electric (OGE), M-KOPE Solar, Fenix International and BBOX, have moved into the region, most within the last two years.

With a potential market worth billions of dollars, major European energy companies such as French utilities EDF and Engie are taking notice too. "It's important to be there now, because the race has already started," said Marianne Laigneau, senior executive vice president of EDF's international division. The main challenge facing smaller companies now is how to raise enough capital to supply the expensive solar kits in return for small upfront payments from customers.

Mobilising funding for firms providing home solar systems is also part of the U.S. government's Power Africa initiative. Major power generation projects have been slow to get off the ground so Power Africa has partnered with startups such as OGE, M-KOPE and d.light, among others,

to accelerate off-grid access.

In Abidjan, Kouame doesn't know when, or if, the national grid will reach the outer edge of the urban sprawl, but thanks to his new solar panel kit he has indoor lighting, an electric fan and a television. But it's the light bulb hanging outside his front door that he values the most. "At night we were scared to go outside," the 31-year-old taxi driver says as his pregnant wife watches a dubbed Brazilian soap opera. "Where there is light there is safety."

Some 1.2 billion people around the world have no access to a power grid, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA). Lighting and phone charging alone costs them about \$27 billion a year and some estimates put their total annual energy costs at more than \$60 billion. While governments in much of the developing world are extending access to national networks, Africa is lagging, with less than 40 percent of African households connected, IEA figures show.

But what has long been decried as a major obstacle to Africa's development is viewed as an opportunity by entrepreneurs such as Nir Marom, co-founder of Lumos Global, the Dutch startup that built and sold Kouame his kit. "I read an article about people paying 50 cents a day for kerosene and candles, and that just didn't make sense," said Marom. "I said I can give them four kilowatt hours for the price of kerosene. And that started everything."

Off-grid expansion

Lumos Global's kits, which cost about \$600, include a solar panel linked to a battery that supports power sockets, a mobile phone adapter and LED light bulbs. Kouame, who paid 30,000 CFA francs (\$57) upfront for his kit, is now leasing-to-own. A digital counter on the yellow bat-

tery pack tells him when he needs to top up his account using his mobile phone. If he doesn't pay, the kit, which also houses a global positioning system, shuts down. But in five years, he'll own it outright and his solar power will be free.

"Five years is nothing," he says, already weighing the option of another system to run a large freezer sitting empty and unplugged in the corner of his living room. "So my wife can do a little business." Pay-as-you-go solar home systems (SHS) like Kouame's have been the main driver of off-grid power expansion in Africa. In 2010, when most purchases were limited to simple lighting systems, customers spent \$30 to \$80 on average over a product's lifetime, according to GOGLA, an independent off-grid industry association. Now it's \$370 to \$1,120. Global revenues from the pay-as-you-go SHS sector were \$150 million to \$200 million in 2016, GOGLA estimates. That should jump to \$6 billion to \$7 billion in 2022. Most of the main players in West Africa cut their teeth in East Africa, drawn by the widespread use of mobile money transfers, a key element of the pay-as-you-go off-grid model. Success there drove annual sector-wide growth of about 140 percent from 2013 to 2016. But as the East African market becomes more crowded and mobile money services spread across the continent, many are now heading west.

"I remember doing a market sizing very early on and from a number of metrics West Africa was a better market," said Xavier Helgesen, CEO of Tanzania-based Off-Grid Electric (OGE), one of the sector leaders. About half of the overall African off-grid population are in West and Central Africa, according to the IEA. Nigeria, sub-Saharan Africa's biggest economy and most populous nation, is alone home to roughly 90 million people with no grid

access. Lumos is an outlier to the extent it picked West Africa as its first market. It launched in Nigeria in 2016 and by the end of 2017 had sold 73,000 kits and was averaging 16 percent month-on-month revenue growth. Late last year, it expanded into Ivory Coast, French-speaking West Africa's largest economy. Still, despite the rapid growth to date, off-grid solar startups say more must be done to improve the capacity of solar home systems and to bring down their cost so the sector can reach its full potential. "I don't believe off-grid electrification is a stop-gap," said Jamie Evans, director of partnerships with d.light. "I believe it's here to stay. If the price of batteries starts dropping precipitously, then it will almost certainly change the face of the industry," he said.

Capital intensive

The need to provide consumer financing for the relatively expensive kits means expansion requires significant capital. But banks, lacking expertise in the new sector, often shy away from lending to off-grid companies, said Rolake Akinkugbe, head of energy at Nigeria's FBNQuest Merchant Bank. "There's also a size issue. Most of the off-grid solutions, particularly those that deal with pay-as-you-go, from a funding perspective, are not within the threshold for banks," she said.

That means startups have largely relied on venture capital, impact investors looking to generate social benefits as well as a profit, and development finance institutions. But the model has its drawbacks. "Right now off-grid companies are having to constantly fundraise," said Lyndsay Handler, CEO of Uganda-based Fenix International. In what was considered a milestone in the African off-grid sector, Engie bought Fenix in October. —Reuters



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (center) poses for a group picture with the 93rd class of cadets of the King Faisal Air Academy during their graduation ceremony in the capital Riyadh yesterday. — AFP

Fears and outrage as Syrian regime...

Continued from Page 1

Next to her a man expressed his anger after bringing the body of his neighbors' daughter - retrieved dead from the rubble of her home - to the mortuary. "What crime did this girl commit, what is her crime?" he shouted. Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman said at least 67 children were among the 274 people killed in strikes since Sunday. "We are waiting our turn to die. This is the only thing I can say," said Bilal Abu Salah, 22, whose wife is five months pregnant with their first child in Douma. They fear the terror of the bombardment will bring her into labor early, he said. "Nearly all people living here live in shelters now. There are five or six families in one home. There is no food, no markets," he said.

Abdullah Kahala, a construction worker, was having breakfast with his wife and six children when a huge explosion shattered the wall.

"I saw Hala and Sara lying in blood with their mother hysterical and our other children shell-shocked on the floor," he said in a voice message. "Bombs were falling everywhere near our house. We have been spending the last week digging into the rubble of nearby areas with our bare hands," he added.

Reuters photographs taken in Eastern Ghouta yesterday showed men searching through the rubble of smashed buildings, carrying blood-smeared people to hospital and cowering in debris-strewn streets. An air strike warning system run by the Syrian Civil Defense, a rescue service in opposition areas, was by yesterday afternoon sending alerts every few minutes, triggered when warplanes are spotted taking off from air bases. "The estimated arrival time for the plane to reach the most bombed parts of eastern Ghouta: ... Harasta: Two minutes from now," a typical alert sent at 4:41 pm said.

The bloodshed prompted UN children's agency

UNICEF to issue a largely blank statement saying "we no longer have the words to describe children's suffering". UN chief Antonio Guterres said he was "deeply alarmed" by the escalation of violence. Guterres expressed support for a Swedish and Kuwaiti push for the 15-member council to demand a 30-day ceasefire in Syria. Diplomats said the council could vote on a draft resolution in the coming days. But Assad's veto-wielding ally Russia has called the proposal "not realistic". US State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert criticized the "siege and starve tactics" of the Assad regime and said: "The cessation of violence must begin now."

Eastern Ghouta is home to more than 400,000 people living under crippling siege, with little access to food or basic services. Anti-regime groups, mostly Islamist factions as well as Al-Qaeda's former Syrian affiliate, have controlled the area since 2012. With the Islamic State group's once sprawling "caliphate" now wiped of the map, the regime looks bent on completing its reconquest by taking on remaining enemies.

In recent days, government forces have been massing around Eastern Ghouta, apparently preparing for a ground offensive. "We have long feared Eastern Ghouta will see a repeat of the terrible scenes observed by the world during the fall of east Aleppo and these fears seem to be well founded," said Mark Schnellbaecher, the regional head of the International Rescue Committee. The battle that saw government forces wrest back the country's second city from rebel forces in 2016 caused extensive destruction and suffering that drew comparisons with the World War II era devastation in Stalingrad and the Warsaw ghetto.

The regime is also seeking to restore its grip on other areas in the north, including the province of Idlib, the last one that remains largely outside its control. On Tuesday, regime forces deployed inside the region of Afrin, a Kurdish enclave along Syria's northern border with Turkey. The move came after Kurdish forces asked Damascus to protect it from a month-old offensive by Ankara. They quickly came under shelling by Turkish forces, who said they had fired "warning shots" at the "pro-regime terrorist groups". — Agencies

Cybercrime costs \$600bn annually

WASHINGTON: The annual cost of cybercrime has hit \$600 billion worldwide, fueled by growing sophistication of hackers and proliferation of criminal marketplaces and cryptocurrencies, researchers said yesterday. A report by the security firm McAfee with the Center for Strategic and International Studies found theft of intellectual property represents about one-fourth of the cost of cybercrime in 2017, and that other attacks such as those involving ransomware are growing at a fast pace.

Russia, North Korea and Iran are the main sources of hackers targeting financial institutions, while China is the most active in cyber espionage, the report found. Criminals are using cutting-edge technologies including artificial intelligence and encryption for attacks in cyberspace, with anonymity preserved by using bitcoin or other cryptocurrency, the researchers said. "We are seeing the bad actor community taking advantage of the innovation in the technology industry," Steve Grobman, chief technology officer for McAfee, told a news conference in Washington.

Even though these technologies can offer "tremendous value" when used for legitimate purposes, they also can be adopted by criminals to hide their tracks, Grobman said. The McAfee-CSIS report suggested cybercrime costs were rising from a 2014 estimate of \$445 billion. "We were hoping it would flatten, but we didn't see that," said CSIS vice president James Lewis.

One of the reasons for the increase, according to

Lewis, is that "there's a whole 'dark web' phenomenon that creates a safe space for criminals to operate." These dark web marketplaces, the report noted, allow hackers and other criminals to offer their services or sell tools which can be used for attacks, and to sell stolen credit card numbers or other valuable data.

'Russia is the leader'

Lewis said meanwhile the geopolitical risks of cybercrime are a key element in these attacks. "Our research bore out the fact that Russia is the leader in cybercrime, reflecting the skill of its hacker community and its disdain for western law enforcement," Lewis said. "North Korea is second in line, as the nation uses cryptocurrency theft to help fund its regime, and we're now seeing an expanding number of cybercrime centers, including not only North Korea but also Brazil, India and Vietnam."

The report said there is often a connection between governments and the cybercrime community. It noted that in a massive attack against US-based Yahoo, "one of the cybercriminals who hacked Yahoo at the behest of Russian intelligence services... also used the stolen data for spam and credit card fraud for personal benefit." The study did not attempt to measure the cost of all malicious activity on the Internet, but focused on the loss of proprietary business data, online fraud and financial crimes, manipulation directed toward publicly traded companies, cyber insurance and reputational damage.

The global research report comes days after the White House released a report showing cyberattacks cost the United States between \$57 billion and \$109 billion in 2016, while warning of a "spillover" effect for the broader economy if certain sectors are hit. — AFP

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Sports

Brayden scores two goals as Tampa Bay beat Washington Capitals 4-2

Viktor Arvidsson scored his third goal in two nights

WASHINGTON: Brayden Point set the tone with two goals in the opening period, and the Tampa Bay Lightning beat the host Washington Capitals 4-2 in a battle of Eastern Conference division leaders on Tuesday night. Nikita Kucherov, who leads the league with 78 points, and Chris Kunitz also scored for Tampa Bay, which snapped a three-game losing streak on the road. The Lightning also won for just the second time in the past 12 matchups in Washington. Tampa Bay goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy came up huge again, finishing with 35 saves to help his team maintain the early lead. Washington's Alex Ovechkin pulled his team to within 3-2 with just under nine minutes left in the game. He leads the league with 36 goals. However, Kucherov responded for Tampa Bay just over a minute later.

BLUE JACKETS 2, DEVILS 1
Sergei Bobrovsky made 30 saves as Columbus held on for a victory over New Jersey in Newark, N.J. Bobrovsky beat the Devils for the third time this season by withstanding a late flurry in the final minutes before and after New Jersey pulled goaltender Keith Kinkaid for the extra attacker. Columbus' Boone Jenner scored in the first period and Scott Harrington netted the tiebreaking tally in the second. New Jersey's Taylor Hall collected his 25th goal of the season.

FLYERS 3, CANADIENS 2 (OT)
Jake Voracek scored two goals, including the game-

winner in overtime, as Philadelphia defeated visiting Montreal. Voracek, who also tied the game with 1:25 left in regulation, has now scored nine career overtime goals. He registered the game-winner with 3:34 left in the extra session. Nolan Patrick added a goal for the Flyers while Shayne Gostisbehere had two assists.

MAPLE LEAFS 1, PANTHERS 0
Frederik Andersen made 40 saves for his career-high fifth shutout of the season as Toronto defeated visiting Florida. Andersen (30-16-4) is five wins short of his career high, set in 2014-15. James van Riemsdyk scored late in the first period, helping the Leafs improve to 11-2-0 in their past 13 games.

PREDATORS 3, RED WINGS 2
Viktor Arvidsson scored his third goal in two nights as Nashville squeaked past host Detroit. Arvidsson notched two goals in a 5-2 home victory over the Ottawa Senators on Monday. Scott Hartnell and Kyle Turris had the other goals against the Red Wings in the second meeting between the clubs in four nights. Roman Josi and Ryan Ellis supplied two assists apiece, and Juuse Saros made 34 saves for the Predators.

SHARKS 3, BLUES 2
Logan Couture and Mikkel Boedker each scored a goal and added an assist in San Jose's three-goal second period during a win at St. Louis. Joonas Donskoi snapped a 1-1 tie in the middle of the second period, and Boedker scored less than four minutes later as San



NEWARK: Travis Zajac #19 of the New Jersey Devils clears the puck from Matt Calvert #11 of the Columbus Blue Jackets during the second period on Tuesday at Prudential Center in Newark, New Jersey. — AFP

Jose started a four-game road trip with its third straight win. Ivan Barbashev and Vladimir Tarasenko scored second-period goals for St. Louis, which dropped its fourth straight game.

KINGS 4, JETS 3
Darcy Kuemper had 30 saves and Dustin Brown scored what proved to be the game-winning goal with 4:07 remaining to lead Los Angeles to a victory at Winnipeg. Torrey Mitchell, Alec Martinez and Dion Phaneuf also scored goals and Adrian Kempe had two assists for the Kings, who earned their third straight win. The contest was the final game of Los Angeles' 4-3-0 road trip. Dustin Byfuglien, Blake Wheeler and Patrik Laine each had a goal and an assist for Winnipeg, which had a three-game win streak snapped in the final game of a

franchise-record, 10-game homestand. The Jets went 6-3-1 in that stretch.

BRUINS 3, OILERS 2
David Krejci scored the game-winning goal with 1:04 left in the third period to help Boston erase a two-goal deficit in a win at Edmonton. Krejci took Danton Heinen's feed from behind the net and slammed it home for the winner, snapping the Bruins' six-game losing streak against the Oilers. Boston earned its first win over Edmonton since Nov. 6, 2014. Noel Acciari and Matt Grzelcyk also scored, and Anton Khudobin made 18 saves for Boston, which won its second straight. Ryan Strome and Juhar Khaira each had a goal and Cam Talbot made 40 saves for Edmonton. — Reuters

NHL results/standings

Toronto 1, Florida 0; Columbus 2, New Jersey 1; Philadelphia 3, Montreal 2 (OT); Tampa Bay 4, Washington 2; Nashville 3, Detroit 2; San Jose 3, St. Louis 2.

Eastern Conference							Western Conference						
Atlantic Division							Central Division						
	W	L	OTL	GF	GA	PTS		W	L	OTL	GF	GA	PTS
Tampa Bay	40	17	3	215	161	83	Nashville	36	14	9	185	154	81
Boston	37	13	8	191	142	82	Winnipeg	35	16	9	199	161	79
Toronto	37	20	5	205	172	79	Dallas	34	21	4	179	157	72
Florida	26	25	6	166	186	58	St. Louis	34	23	4	173	156	72
Detroit	24	26	9	157	177	57	Minnesota	32	20	7	177	169	71
Montreal	22	29	8	151	188	52	Colorado	32	23	4	184	177	68
Ottawa	21	28	9	158	204	51	Chicago	25	27	8	170	173	58
Buffalo	17	32	11	143	198	45	Pacific Division						
Metropolitan Division							Las Vegas	39	16	4	202	160	82
Washington	34	19	7	187	180	75	San Jose	33	19	8	178	163	74
Pittsburgh	35	22	4	195	180	74	Los Angeles	33	22	5	174	149	71
Philadelphia	31	19	10	181	174	72	Anaheim	30	20	11	169	170	71
New Jersey	31	21	8	181	183	70	Calgary	30	21	9	169	175	69
Columbus	30	25	5	159	170	65	Vancouver	23	30	7	161	194	53
Carolina	27	23	10	162	180	64	Edmonton	24	31	4	164	194	52
NY Islanders	29	26	6	203	219	64	Arizona	17	32	10	143	197	44
NY Rangers	27	28	5	173	191	59							

Note: Overtime losses (OTL) are worth one point in the standings and are not included in the loss

Voracek scores game-winner in overtime

Bastareaud makes France Six Nations comeback for Italy clash

AIX-EN-PROVENCE: Matthieu Bastareaud has been recalled to France's Six Nations team to face Italy, named by coach Jacques Brunel yesterday, following a three-week ban for using a homophobic slur. Ahead of Friday's encounter in Marseille, Brunel has made five changes to the team that lost 32-26 to Scotland 10 days ago, prolonging France's losing streak to eight matches.



Hugo Bonneval

Given that eight players were handed a one-game international ban after a late-night drinking session in Edinburgh following the Scotland defeat, Bastareaud's return was widely expected among a raft of enforced changes. He was part of Brunel's initial pre-Six Nations squad announced in January before being handed the ban for insulting Treviso's Sebastian Negri in a European Champions Cup match for Toulon.

There was a slight worry he might not be fit for the game after sitting out training on Tuesday due to a tight thigh muscle. "There's no tear, nothing at all. We just gave him a rest yesterday afternoon," said Brunel from France's training camp in Aix-en-Provence. "Today (Wednesday) he will have some treatment and then train in the morning—it should be fine."

Toulon's Bastareaud replaces Remi Lamerat of Clermont at outside centre as four of the five changes are in the backs. Benjamin Fall comes off the bench and into the starting XV in place of Six Nations top try-scorer Teddy Thomas at right wing while on the opposite flank Remy Grosso earns only his second cap in replacing Virimi Vakatawa, one of two changes not induced by the Edinburgh suspensions. The other sees Hugo Bonneval start at full-back instead of Geoffrey Palis while the only forward change is at lock where Paul Gabrillagues takes the place of Arthur Ithurria.

"The line-up was based on two criteria. One: keeping a spine that at least has some points of reference," said Brunel. "Two: freshness. We couldn't bring in the players who played the entire match on Sunday (for their clubs)." Although he was on the bench in France's first two matches of this tournament, this will be 28-year-old Fall's first France start in five years to the day. He will have big boots to fill as Thomas has been France's star performer in the tournament, running in three brilliant individual tries. The

other two changes in the back three are based on form, with Palis a disappointment at full-back after only making his debut against Ireland three weeks ago and Fiji-born Vakatawa failing to show the talent that made him a France sevens star.

Bonneval's inclusion is perhaps a surprise after his club coach Fabien Galthie said following Toulon's 43-5 win over Stade Francais on Saturday that he was "lacking sharpness". "That's true," said Brunel. "But in training he hasn't had any particular difficulties. We believe he'll be able to cope with this type of match." There were also six changes to the eight replacements. Already just two games into the Six Nations, this match has the feel of a battle to avoid the wooden spoon.

France have not chalked up a win for 11 months since a controversial last-gasp success over Wales in the final game of last year's tournament. Italy have won only one of their last 14 Tests, and that was at home to Fiji in November.

Their last Six Nations victory was three years ago when Brunel was their coach—and if they're defeated on Friday it will set a new worst losing streak in the competition for the Azzurri of 15 matches.

France team (15-1): Hugo Bonneval; Benjamin Fall, Matthieu Bastareaud, Geoffrey Doumayrou, Remy Grosso; Lionel Beauxis, Maxime Machenaud; Marco Tauleigne, Yacouba Camara, Wenceslas Laurent, Sebastian Vahaamahina, Paul Gabrillagues, Rabah Slimani, Guilhem Guirado (capt), Jefferson Poirat.

Replacements: Adrien Pelisse, Dany Priso, Cedate Gomes Sa, Roumain Taofifenua, Kelian Galletier, Baptiste Coulloud, Francois Trinh-Duc, Gael Fickou. —AFP

Raptors hope to change playoff fortunes

LOS ANGELES: Toronto is trying to rewrite their history, Cleveland has re-tooled through trades and Boston's cooling off as the NBA enters the final seven weeks of the season following the annual all-star break.

The Toronto Raptors lead the Boston Celtics in the Eastern Conference by two games while the Houston Rockets sit atop the West with the best record in the league at 44-13. The NBA regular season resumes on Thursday after Sunday's entertaining all-star game which saw LeBron James score 29 points, including the go-ahead layup with 34 seconds left, as his hand-picked team rallied to beat Team Stephen 148-145.

James' Cleveland Cavaliers square off against the Washington Wizards in one of six games today. The Cavs are seeking to make the NBA finals for the fourth consecutive season as they appear to have resurrected following a mid-February roster overhaul through

trades. "Championships is what I play for," said James, who is looking for his eighth straight finals appearance. "We just added four new guys before the break, and we have a lot of work to do. Winning championships is what it's all about. That's what this league is all about and hopefully at the end of the road then I have the Cavs there to be in a finals representing the East."

"So that's my goal. Getting back," he said at the all-star game in Los Angeles on the weekend. "I'm looking forward to getting back to our guys. I know they're excited, and that's going to be my mindset."

RAPTOR EVOLUTION

The Raptors were eliminated in the second round of the playoffs last season after making it to the conference finals the year before. In 2015 and 2014 they didn't get past the first round. "It's an evolution of growth and making us a better team," said Toronto's DeMar DeRozan. "So I love it. Obviously it's showing, and we've been winning at a high level this year."

DeRozan said another reason for their success is the play of their younger guys coming off the bench. "Our bench is everything," he said. "Our bench gives us older

guys an opportunity to not play in the fourth quarter and to rest."

"It's great to be able to sit back and cheer those guys on while they go out there and pull out victories." The Celtics are 18-15 in their last 33 games after starting the season 22-4. Veteran Al Horford, 31, said Saturday in Los Angeles, that the Celtics can't afford to get ahead of themselves. "What I try to emphasize to (teammates) is embracing the now," centre Horford said. "So I just think it's embracing and taking advantage and doing the best you can with the group that you have."

In the West, Houston has the best record in the league but sit just a half game ahead of the defending NBA champion Golden State Warriors. "We set a goal," said Rockets star guard James Harden. "We wanted to be the best team and come out this year with the championship."

"We got the right group around us. You can't guard us." The Rockets went into the all-star break on a 10-game winning streak and this marks the first time in franchise history Houston is on top at the break. "We got a long way to go but we are going to continue to try to get better and continue to grow and make a run in the playoffs," Harden said. — AFP



KUWAIT: On the occasion of the 57th National and 27th Liberation Day, International Women's Group (IWG) with Dar Al Shifa Hospital held 2.4 kilometre walkathon 'A Step Up With Healthier Living' yesterday. Ambassador of Guyana Prof Shamir Ally's wife won the third place in this event.

Sports

Australia down N Zealand in T20 final, take number one ranking

Agar double strike sent Black Caps' innings spinning out of control

SCOREBOARD

AUCKLAND: Completed scoreboard in the rain-affected final of the T20 tri-series between New Zealand and Australia in Auckland yesterday:

New Zealand:

M. Guptill c Warner b Stanlake	21
C. Munro c Agar b Richardson	29
K. Williamson b Agar	9
M. Chapman lbw Agar	8
R. Taylor not out	43
C. de Grandhomme c Maxwell b Agar	10
M. Santner c Carey b Tye	0
T. Siefert b Stoinis	3
T. Southee c Maxwell b Richardson	5
I. Sodhi b Tye	13
T. Boult not out	1
Extras (lb3, w5)	8
Total (9 wickets; 20 overs)	150
Fall of wickets: 1-48 (Guptill), 2-59 (Munro), 3-72 (Williamson), 4-73 (Chapman), 5-91 (de Grandhomme), 6-93 (Santner), 7-101 (Seifert), 8-110 (Southee), 9-148 (Sodhi)	
Bowling: Stanlake 4-0-37-1 (3w), Richardson 4-0-30-2, Tye 4-0-30-2, Agar 4-0-27-3, Stoinis 4-0-23-1.	

Australia:

D. Warner b Sodhi	25
D. Short c Chapman b Munro	50
A. Agar stumped Siefert b Santner	2
C. Maxwell not out	20
A. Finch not out	18
Extras (b4, lb1, nb1)	6
Total (4 wickets; 14.4 overs)	121
Fall of wickets: 1-72 (Short), 2-78 (Warner), 3-84 (Agar)	
Bowling: Boult 3-0-27-0, Sodhi 4-0-21-1, Southee 2-0-21-0, Santner 3.4-0-29-1, Munro 2-0-18-1	
Did not bat: C. Lynn, M. Stoinis, A. Carey, A. Tye, K. Richardson, B. Stanlake	

Result: Australia won by 19 runs under Duckworth-Lewis system

AUCKLAND: Australia cruised to a 19-run victory in a rain-affected T20 tri-series final with New Zealand yesterday to claim the world number one ranking in the shortest form of the game for the first time. New Zealand struggled to 150 for nine after electing to bat first at Auckland's Eden Park but failing to repeat the pyrotechnics that saw them score 243 against Australia at the same ground last Friday.

Australia's bowlers avenged that pasting as they tore through New Zealand's middle order, led by spinner Ashton Agar's career-best T20 figures for three for 27. Ross Taylor's 43 of 38 balls was the highlight of a poor New Zealand batting display that included just five sixes, despite Eden Park's notoriously short boundaries.

Australia never looked in danger of missing the 151-run target but the manner in which the victory came was



Taylor's 43 of 38 balls was the highlight

anti-climatic. The players were off the pitch when officials decided to abandon the match due to persistent rain, awarding Australia a 19-run win under the Duckworth-Lewis system. The result means David Warner's men complete the tri-series undefeated, notching convincing wins in all their five matches against New Zealand and England. It also means Australia leapfrog Pakistan to become the top-rated T20 team, the first time they have held the number one spot since rankings were introduced in 2011. "I'm over the moon, right from the get-go we played superb cricket," Warner said, crediting the series win to the skills his players learned in Australia's domestic Big Bash League. "It just shows the great depth we have in Australian cricket. The clarity and roles that these individuals have at Big Bash level can (also) be executed on the international stage."

ACCURATE AGAR

New Zealand openers Martin Guptill and Colin Munro made their intentions clear with a flurry of boundaries in the early overs. They raced to 48 without loss but Warner



AUCKLAND: Australia's cricket players celebrate after winning the final Twenty20 Tri Series international cricket match between New Zealand and Australia at Eden Park in Auckland yesterday. — AFP

held his nerve and backed his attack to take early wickets, constantly switching bowlers so the batters could not settle. Lanky paceman Billy Stanlake made the breakthrough in the fourth over when Guptill departed for 21 after sending his shot straight to Warner. Munro followed for 29 in the next over leaving the New Zealanders at 59 for two.

An Agar double strike in the seventh over then sent the Black Caps' innings spinning out of control, as skipper Kane Williamson and Mark Chapman both failed to reach double figures. Agar was not done, tempting a rash shot from Colin de Grandhomme to send the big-hitting dangerman back to the pavilion for 10.

Taylor and Ish Sodhi combined for a 38-run partnership but it was too late to revive the innings. The only negative for Australia was when Chris Lynn left the field after dislocating his troublesome shoulder. Australia made a solid start, with D'Arcy Short beginning to lift the run rate before a 20-minute rain delay.

It slowed Short's momentum and he was dismissed shortly after bringing up his 28-ball half century. Warner soon followed on 25 and Agar's stumping had the tourists looking vulnerable on 83 for three.

But Aaron Finch and Glenn Maxwell had Australia cruising and the win was not in doubt before the final rain shower ended the match. —AFP

Ozil, Ramsey to miss Arsenal's Europa tie against Ostersunds

LONDON: Arsenal midfielders Aaron Ramsey and Mesut Ozil will miss the Europa League last 32 clash against Ostersunds today, but manager Arsene Wenger is hopeful they will feature in this weekend's League Cup final versus Manchester City.

Wenger took close to a full-strength squad to Sweden for the first leg which his side won 3-0 last week and will look to give his younger players some game time today. Ozil and Ramsey were involved in first team training yesterday but Wenger said the Germany playmaker had struggled with illness this week while the Wales international needs more time to prove his fitness after returning from a groin injury.

"He (Ozil) was in bed Monday, Tuesday for sickness," Wenger told a news conference. "I would cer-

tainly have played him, but because he was sick he will have to work hard tomorrow and will not be involved.

"Ramsey's not in the squad tomorrow, he had a good training session. We will see how his evolution goes between now and (the League Cup final on) Sunday. I don't rule him out," Wenger confirmed. Henrikh Mkhitaryan will be given the responsibility of producing chances going forward in the absence of Ozil, and Danny Welbeck will start up front. Goalkeeper David Ospina, who has been picked for the majority of Arsenal's matches in cup competitions this season, will keep his place ahead of first-choice Petr Cech.

Arsenal are sixth in the Premier League, eight points adrift of fourth-placed Chelsea, and need to finish the season in top-four or win the Europa League to qualify for next season's Champions League.

When Wenger was asked whether he would prioritise the Europa League as Manchester United boss Jose Mourinho did last term, the Frenchman replied: "He did that much later, once they were in the semi-finals. "We have to focus on the Premier League. It (Europa League) is one of the priorities we have. We are focused to do well. But ideally we want to come back to the Champions League through the Premier League." — Reuters

through. Barca midfielder Ivan Rakitic compared Chelsea's tactics to a handball team, huddled around the edge of their area.

WILLIAN OUTSHINES HAZARD

But Messi had the final word as Barcelona capitalised on a rare Chelsea defensive error, scoring his first goal against the west Londoners to equalise Willian's second-half goal with 15 minutes to go.

Hazard had spoken on the eve of the game about having to do more in Europe's premier club competition to justify comparisons with the five-time World Player of the Year and his eternal Real Madrid rival Cristiano Ronaldo. Instead, it was Willian who shone brightest. The Brazilian sent Barca two huge warnings before the break of his threat from range as he beat Marc-Andre ter Stegen to his right and then his left, only to see both efforts come back off the post.

He finally broke the deadlock in the 62nd minute, arrowing a low shot past the Barcelona goalkeeper following a short corner. Willian saw enough in Chelsea's performance at Stamford Bridge to suggest they can upset the odds in the second leg.

"In a difficult game we played very well," he told the club's website. "We had to stay compact, we had a plan and we did exactly as we expected. "They had the ball and we expected to counter-attack, and we could win this game. But we did not and the result is still open, we have to go there and try to win."

"Barcelona had more possession but they did not create more dangerous chances to score. We can go there and make the game. "To play in the Nou Camp is totally different and we have to go there with the same mentality and try to win the game."

Conte gave a glowing assessment of the 29-year-old Brazilian's performance. "Willian has the potential to play this type of game in any game. I hope that to see this type of performance for a long time," said Conte of a player who has not always been first-choice this season. "When you play this way, the coach doesn't have a doubt and you play." — AFP

Klaassen takes attack to India as S Africa level T20 series

PRETORIA: Heinrich Klaassen smashed 69 from 30 balls to steer South Africa to a six-wicket victory over India in the second Twenty20 International at Pretoria yesterday and level the three-match series at 1-1.

After being put into bat, India reached 188 for four in their 20 overs, their innings anchored by a magnifi-

cent 79 from 48 balls by Manish Pandey, while MS Dhoni pitched in with a brilliant 52 from 28 balls.

The pair put on an unbeaten 98 in 56 balls to see their side post an above par score. Yet wicketkeeper-batsman Klaassen tore into the tourists' attack, in particular leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal (0-64 in four overs), as he smashed seven sixes in his best score in the international 20-over format in just his second match.

Captain JP Duminy (64 not out from 40 balls) saw the side home with an innings that did not produce the same explosive power, but was clever in its execution, as South Africa reached 189 for four with eight balls remaining. The third and series-deciding match will be played in Cape Town on Saturday. — Reuters



PRETORIA: India's Manish Pandey bats during the second T20I cricket match between South Africa and India at Super Sport Park Stadium in Pretoria yesterday. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

CENTURION: Scoreboard at close of play of 2nd twenty20 between South Africa and India yesterday at Centurion.

South Africa win by 6 wickets

India	
S Dhawan c Farhaan b JP Duminy	24
R Sharma lbw Junior Dala	0
S Raina lbw Phehlukwayo	30
V Kohli c Klaassen b Junior Dala	1
M Pandey Not Out	79
MS Dhoni Not Out	52
Extras Ob lbw Onb Open 1w	2
Total	(20.0 overs)
188-4	
Fall of Wickets : 1-0 Sharma, 2-44 Dhawan, 3-45 Kohli, 4-90 Raina	
Did Not Bat: Pandya, Kumar, Unadkat, Chahal, Thakur.	
Bowling: Ov-Md-Rn-Wk, C Morris 4-1-42-0, J Dala	

South Africa

R Hendricks c H Pandya b S Thakur	26
JJ Smuts c S Raina b Unadkat	2
JP Duminy Not Out	64
H Klaassen c Dhoni b Unadkat	69
D Miller c S Thakur b Pandya	5
F Behardien Not Out	16
Extras Ob 2lb Onb Open 5w	7
Total (18.4 overs)	189-4
Fall of Wickets : 1-24 Smuts, 2-38 Hendricks, 3-131 Klaassen, 4-141 Miller	
Did Not Bat : Phehlukwayo, Morris, Paterson, Dala, Shamsi	
Bowling: Ov-Md-Rn-Wk, B Kumar 3-0-19-0, S Thakur 4-0-31-1, J Unadkat 3.4-0-42-2, H Pandya 4-0-31-1, Y Chahal 4-0-64-0	

Willian confident of Champions League progress despite Messi magic

LONDON: Chelsea's Willian is confident Antonio Conte's side can pull off a shock win in Barcelona after he came close to upstaging Argentine superstar Lionel Messi in their Champions League clash at Stamford Bridge. Nine years on from a hugely controversial semi-final between the clubs, Andres Iniesta and Messi combined once more to ensure the Catalans ended the first leg of the last-16 tie the happier of the two sides with a 1-1 draw.

This time roles were reversed for Barca's two all-time greats, with Iniesta providing the pass for Messi to score his first goal in nine attempts against Chelsea after pouncing on a mistake from 21-year-old centre-back Andreas Christensen.

It is not as fatal a blow as when Iniesta fired a late goal into the top corner from Messi's calm cut-back in 2009 in a match that famously saw the hosts have four penalty appeals waved away by Norwegian referee Tom Henning Ovrebo.

But Conte says his side will need to do "something incredible" in Catalonia in three weeks' time to progress. The Italian was left to rue a case of what might have been. His tactical plan to sit deep, cede possession and hit Barca with the pace of goalscorer Willian, Eden Hazard and Pedro Rodriguez worked a treat for 75 minutes.

Despite flashes of brilliance, in particular when one stamomg first-half run left Antonio Rudiger tackling thin air, there was always one Chelsea body too many between Messi and the goal for the Argentine to get

Sports



Zagitova, 15, smashes skate record as Vonn gets bronze

Ridzik recovers from crash in ski cross final to take bronze

PYEONGCHANG: Record-breaking Alina Zagitova, 15, stole the show in figure skating yesterday as America's Lindsey Vonn wound up her Olympic downhill career by becoming the oldest female alpine ski medalist in Games history.

Zagitova was breathtaking in the Russian-dominated short programme, breaking the world record set just minutes earlier by her team-mate, 18-year-old Evgenia Medvedeva. It put the Russians top of the standings ahead of Friday's free skate, where Zagitova will attempt to become the youngest women's singles figure skating champion since Tara Lipinski in 1998.

They also look set to win the first gold of the Games for the Olympic Athletes from Russia, who are competing as neutrals after Russia's national team was banned over a major doping scandal. "We are friends, we are young girls, we can talk about anything with each other," said Medvedeva, 18, who like Zagitova is making her Olympic debut.

"But on the ice, we must fight, I feel like it's a little war, when you skate you are alone," added the double world champion. America's Vonn, 33, was aiming for a second downhill title in her final Olympics, but it was not to be as she finished third behind Italy's Sofia

Goggia and Ragnhild Mowinckel of Norway.

But the 2010 winner was delighted to reach the podium—the oldest female alpine skier to do so—after a series of injuries threatened to wreck her career and ruled her out of Sochi 2014. "If you think what's happened over the last eight years and what I've been through to get here, I gave it all and to come away with a medal is a dream come true," said Vonn.

"You've got to put things into perspective. Of course, I would have loved a gold medal but, honestly, this is amazing and I'm so proud."

“ You've got to put things into perspective ”

SKI CROSS CHAOS

In other action yesterday, Russian skier Sergey Ridzik recovered from a crash in the ski cross final to take bronze, behind Canada's Bredy Leman and Marc Bischofberger of Switzerland. Ridzik went down early in the race but he got up, clambered to the top of a slope and restarted his run, coming in behind the front two as Canada's Kevin Drury failed to finish.

The competition, where four skiers race each other down a twisting track featuring a number of jumps, was marred by a series of heavy falls. France's Terence Tchiknavorian broke his leg and Canadian racer Chris Del Bosco was also taken to hospital after



GANGNEUNG: Russia's Alina Zagitova competes in the women's single skating short program of the figure skating event during the Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympic Games at the Gangneung Ice Arena in Gangneung yesterday. — AFP

a sickening wipe-out. Later on Wednesday, the women's bobsleigh will feature trailblazing Nigeria, who are the first athletes from their country to compete at a Winter Olympics. Thirty years after the

Jamaican men's team of "Cool Runnings" fame, Jamaica's women will also race, following a turbulent build-up in which they lost their coach just days ahead of competition. — AFP

Cursed? Elise Christie, 'Britain's unluckiest Olympian'

PYEONGCHANG: In her last six Olympic races, short-track speed skater Elise Christie has crashed out or been disqualified six times—no wonder she's been dubbed "cursed" and "Britain's unluckiest Olympian".

Christie is a world-record holder and triple world champion who came to the Pyeongchang Winter Games as one of Britain's few real hopes for gold. But the 27-year-old's Olympics ended in tears once more after she was disqualified from the 1,000m on Tuesday, her third failure in Pyeongchang.

Christie's ill-fated campaign comes four years after she was disqualified from all three of her races at Sochi 2014.

The Scot's travails have been followed closely in Britain—and met mostly with sympathy. The Sun, the best-selling tabloid newspaper, branded her "cursed". In her native Scotland, The Herald called her "Britain's unluckiest Olympian". As Christie's Pyeongchang Games came to a dismal end, penalised for a rule infraction, she left the rink in tears.

She also departed the arena in tears on Saturday—in pain and on a stretcher—after being wiped out in a collision with a Chinese rival in the 1,500m. Christie also crashed out in the final of the 500m, in which she is the world-record holder. At Sochi 2014, she was disqualified from the 500m, 1,000m and 1,500m. Christie also competed at Vancouver 2010, where her best result was 11th in the 500m.

However, it hasn't deterred Christie, who said she will make another tilt at an Olympic medal at Beijing 2022. "In terms of me as a person, I didn't see this as, 'This is the Olympics and that's why it happened'," she said.

"I guess with Sochi that's how I had seen it, like I wasn't supposed to be an Olympic medalist, it wasn't in me. "I don't see that now, I just see it as three races that went rubbish in the last four years."

GOLD OR BUST?

Short track is a notorious for its crashes and penalties. In the women's 1,000m heats on Tuesday, six skaters were disqualified.

And in the women's 3,000m relay A final, only two of the four teams finished the race. One reason is that the skaters race in such close proximity to one another, often bumping and tripping while whizzing round the rink at speeds of up to 50 kilometres (30 miles) per hour.

But not everyone is convinced it is merely bad luck that is plaguing Christie.

Britain's Daily Telegraph, reporting from Pyeongchang, said hard questions must be asked. "In a sport of such fine margins, the gap between success and failure is minuscule and unforgiving," the newspaper said.

"Perhaps Christie's attitude that 'it's just unlucky it's happened at both Olympics' is a healthy outlook from a sanity perspective.

"But, equally, it is worth asking the difficult questions as well, because talent is not the problem." The Guardian took a similar line, pondering whether she was too aggressive, too daring or simply cracked under the pressure. "After rewatching all of Christie's races in Sochi and Pyeongchang there is a case to be made that her all-or-nothing approach narrows the gap between glory and disaster by too great a margin," said the Guardian. "Hers is a muscular style, an eye-of-the-needle approach, a gold-or-bust attitude." — AFP

Britain, Switzerland to battle for last playoff spot

GANGNEUNG: Britain were forced into a tie-breaker with Switzerland in a bid to secure a semi-final spot in the Olympic men's curling competition after being crushed 10-4 by the United States in eight ends yesterday. The rout gave the American foursome third spot in the final rankings behind Sweden (7-2) and Canada (6-3) while the US, Britain and Switzerland all wrapped up preliminary round play on 5-4. The United States secured third place with a better head-to-head record leaving Kyle Smith's British foursome to battle Peter De Cruz's Swiss today for the last of the coveted playoff spots.

The British foursome had looked prepared to battle leading 3-2 after four ends but then let the contest get away giving up three in the fifth and allowing the US to steal four in the eighth with Smith waving the white flag. "Just disappointing, to be honest," said Smith. "We weren't our sharpest today, didn't create enough chances when we had the last stone."

"We've still got a chance of making the Olympic semi-finals, so it's exactly the same situation as today. Win and we're in. "I don't really see it as pressure, to be honest, these chances are what we all play for, so we'll be ready. "It's a great chance to showcase our sport and show how we can play in those situations. We'll be coming for the Swiss." Japan (4-5) missed their chance to get into the tie-break mix when they were humbled 10-4 by South Korea while Canada closed out with an 8-3 win over last place Denmark (2-7). One semi-final is set with North American neighbours Canada and the United States facing off for a spot in the gold medal match while Sweden will take on the winner of Switzerland and Britain.

"This is what you dream about as a teenager when you are out practising and throwing rocks," U.S. vice-skip Tyler George said. "If you want to play anybody at the Olympics with medals on the line - it's Canada. "To actually get to a game like that - man! It's amazing!"

"But we've played these guys plenty of times. This is not a situation that we're going to be uncomfortable in. "They are going to come at us with everything they've got - but man - it's going to be fun." — Reuters

Japan set Olympic record to claim gold

GANGNEUNG: Japan dethroned defending champions the Netherlands to claim gold in the women's Olympic team pursuit final yesterday as the Dutch took the silver medal. The Japanese trio of Miho Takagi, Ayano Sato and Nana Takagi set an Olympic record of two minutes and 53.89 seconds, beating the previous record set by the Netherlands during Monday's quarter-final by 1.72 seconds. The United States edged Canada for bronze, their first Olympic speed skating medal since the Vancouver Games in 2010, with Heather Bergsma, Brittany Bowe and Mia Manganello finishing 0.45 seconds ahead of their local rivals.

The Netherlands team of Lotte van Beek, Ireen Wust and Antoinette de Jong easily beat the US in their semi-final, but were outskated by Japan even though they brought in the fresh legs of substitute Marrit Leenstra for the final. World record holders Japan came into the race as the favourites having won nine of the last 11 World Cup races in the event, including the last six.

Skating in perfect symmetry, with the substitute Sato in for Ayaka Kikuchi who raced in the semi-finals, they stormed out of the gates and kept ahead of the three Dutchwomen who won the event in Sochi.

With victory in the bag, the four Japanese skaters took a lap of the track with their flag held between them and they bowed in unison before taking their place on the top step of the podium to accept Japan's first medal in the event. The Japanese have now won five of their total 11 medals, including two of their three



GANGNEUNG: Britain's Kyle Smith throws the stone during the curling men's round robin session between Britain and the US during the Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympic Games at the Gangneung Curling Centre in Gangneung yesterday. — AFP

MEDALS TABLE

PYEONGCHANG, South Korea: Medals table after the 12th day of competition at the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics yesterday (gold, silver, bronze, total):

Norway	13	11	9	33	Belarus	1	1	0	2
Germany	12	7	5	24	Great Britain	1	0	3	4
Canada	9	5	7	21	Poland	1	0	1	2
Netherlands	6	6	4	16	Ukraine	1	0	0	1
United States	6	4	6	16	China	0	5	2	7
France	5	4	5	14	Olympic Athlete from Russia	0	4	9	13
Sweden	4	4	0	8	Australia	0	2	1	3
South Korea	4	3	2	9	Slovenia	0	1	0	1
Austria	4	2	4	10	Finland	0	0	4	4
Japan	3	5	3	11	Spain	0	0	2	2
Italy	3	2	4	9	Kazakhstan	0	0	1	1
Switzerland	2	5	1	8	Latvia	0	0	1	1
Czech Republic	1	2	3	6	Liechtenstein	0	0	1	1
Slovakia	1	2	0	3					



GANGNEUNG: Japan's Miho Takagi, Japan's Ayaka Kikuchi, Japan's Nana Takagi and Japan's Ayano Sato celebrate on the podium during the women's team pursuit speed skating event venue ceremony at the Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympic Games at the Gangneung Oval in Gangneung yesterday. — AFP

golds, at the Oval in Gangneung, making it their most successful sport at the current Winter Games and all their speed skating medals have been won by women.

The Dutch, who won 23 of 36 speed skating medals

at the Sochi Games, started off on a dominant note in South Korea too, with six gold medals in the first seven races, but have not topped the podium in any of the four races held this week. — Reuters

Sports



Undefeated Czechs knock USA out of Olympic men's hockey

Finland women claim bronze with win over Russians

GANGNEUNG: Undefeated Czech Republic knocked the United States out of the Olympic men's hockey tournament yesterday with a tension-packed 3-2 shootout victory, advancing to a semi-final showdown against the Olympic Athletes from Russia.

American dreams of a first gold medal since 1980 were shattered as Petr Koukal scored the only goal in a penalty shootout while Czech goaltender Pavel Francouz blanked five US sharpshooters. "It was our dream before the tournament to go this far, but I really hope it's not the end," Francouz said. "We can go farther if we keep playing really good as a team."

"We haven't had any easy games in the tournament. That has made us stronger." The sudden ending left the Americans stunned after battling through the game and a 10-minute scoreless over-time. "It's a huge disappointment because we were right there," US captain Brian Gionta said.

In search of their first gold medal in 20 years, the Czechs advanced into a Friday matchup against the Russians, who routed Norway 6-1. The Russians, who hasn't taken Olympic hockey gold since 1992, dominated a Norwegian squad that lost 11 consecutive Olympic games before Tuesday.

Mikhail Grigorenko, Nikita Gusev and Vyacheslav Voinov scored in the first period, when Norway was outshot 19-2, and the all-star squad from Russia's two top clubs cruised from there. Czechs and Russians

haven't met so deep in the Olympic playoffs with a title at stake since the Czechs beat Russia 1-0 in the 1998 final. "We know we have a tough game in front of us," Czech captain Martin Erat said. "We have to play our own style and focus on ourselves." In the shootout, Koukal faked and when US goaltender Ryan Zapolski moved, flipped the puck past him on the decisive shot.

"I'm so happy it was a goal," Koukal said. "It's a big moment for me. I know the Czech people are so happy."

BATTLED TO THE END

While the NHL's top stars are absent for the first time since 1994 over money and injury issues, no drama was lacking on a day when four teams ensure playing for a medal and four are sent home empty handed.

"It's tough to go out that way," Zapolski said. "We competed as hard as we could. We battled to the end." Former

Tension-packed 3-2 shootout victory

NHLer Jim Slater, whose shorthanded breakaway equalised for the Americans, was dismayed.

"Disappointed. Frustrated. I feel pretty empty right now," Slater said. "To lose at the Olympics that way is pretty tough. We thought we were good enough to challenge for a gold medal."

Meanwhile, Finland beat the Olympic Athletes from Russia 3-2 on Wednesday to claim the bronze medal in women's Olympic ice hockey. The Finns built a two-goal lead twice and held off the Russians in the third period after they had narrowed the margin to one.



GANGNEUNG: Team USA react after their loss in the men's quarter-final ice hockey match between Czech Republic and the USA during the Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympic Games at the Gangneung Hockey Centre in Gangneung yesterday. — AFP

Petra Nieminen scored in the first period for the Finns, netting her third goal of the Games, and Susanna Tapani doubled the lead early in the second period. Russia's Olga Sosina narrowed the margin to 2-1, but Linda Valimaki restored Finland's two-goal cushion later in the period.

Lyudmila Belyakova tallied on a Russian powerplay to make it 3-2 in the third and end the scoring. Finland

have now won three Olympic medals in women's ice hockey, all of them bronze. They last earned a medal in Vancouver in 2010 and their first came in Nagano in 1998 when women's hockey made its Olympic debut.

The gold medal game is set for today, a showdown between Canada and the United States who are the only two countries to have won Olympic gold in the sport. — Agencies

Cross-country skier Klaebo cruises to relay gold for Norway

PYEONGCHANG: Cross-country skiing prodigy Johannes Hoesflot Klaebo of Norway cruised to his second Olympic gold medal in Pyeongchang yesterday, joining up with Martin Johnsrud Sundby to win the men's team sprint relay by 1.71 seconds.

Denis Spitsov and Alexander Bolshunov, representing the Olympic Athletes from Russia, took silver and Richard Jouve of France held off Sweden's Calle Halfvarsson to claim bronze with Maurice Manificat.

"It is an incredible feeling to finish first here," Klaebo told reporters. "Both of us have been very nervous today and I did not sleep good today also." Sweden led a tightly-bunched field for most of the race as Marcus Hellner skirmished with Sundby at the front of the field, but the Norwegians soon exerted their cross-country dominance once again.

The Nordic nation had taken three of the four men's cross-country gold medals on offer in Pyeongchang and with the 21-year-old Klaebo anchoring the race, any team looking to beat them would have to make an early move. Klaebo surged on a tough uphill stretch during the fourth lap to give Sundby a slender lead on his last trip around the course.

Sundby increased the lead to over five seconds before handing back to Klaebo for the final lap and his young team powered up the first hill and away from the rest of the field. In the end he was unthreatened, turning the final corner and gliding across the line at a leisurely pace for his second gold. Sundby now has two gold medals and one bronze to show for his efforts in Korea. — Reuters

Goggia wins Olympic downhill, Vonn third

PYEONGCHANG: Lindsey Vonn's bid for a second Olympic downhill gold medal came unstuck yesterday as the US ski star finished third in the women's blue riband event won by "crazy" close friend Sofia Goggia of Italy.

Goggia described herself as a "samurai" after timing 1min 39.22sec for a first ever downhill title for the Italian women's team. The 25-year-old came in 0.09sec ahead of Norway's giant slalom silver medallist Ragnhild Mowinckel, with Vonn a further 0.42sec adrift. Goggia made a mistake on the upper part of the polished 2.8km-long Jeongseon course, but produced a magnificent gliding mid-section and strong bottom third. It reaffirmed the fine form she has shown on the World Cup circuit this season, with two victories and two second places in the downhill, and also second and third placings in the super-G. "I was really focused, I moved like a samurai," said Goggia, her head coach Massimo Rinaldi labelling her as "crazyhorse". "Usually, I'm really chaotic, but I wanted to take in every little detail, every particular in the morning. I believed in myself-and then what counts. I didn't take any risks. I just used my brain because I have one sometimes and I use it!"

Rinaldi said it was a "special" day for Italy, adding: "Sofia's always skiing fast, always skiing 110 percent, sometimes the mistakes come, but she's always trying to do her best." Vonn made few errors in her descent, but it was just not enough. Mowinckel providing a surprise factor with her second place after starting 19. After the race Vonn, 33, confirmed that it would be her last Olympic downhill and said: "I gave it all today, skied a great race. Sofia just skied better than I did."

"It's sad. It's my last downhill. I wish I could keep going. I'm having so much fun and I love what I do, but my body just can't take another four years," she said. "But I'm proud to be



PYEONGCHANG: (L-R) Norway's silver medallist Ragnhild Mowinckel, Italy's gold medallist Sofia Goggia and USA's bronze medallist Lindsey Vonn pose on the podium during the medal ceremony for the alpine skiing Women's Downhill at the Pyeongchang Medals Plaza during the Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympic Games in Pyeongchang yesterday. — AFP

competing for my country, giving it all and proud to come away with a medal." Mowinckel followed up on her giant slalom podium with another strong showing for Norway, which now tops the alpine medal table with six. "Well, we do have a lot of snow up there in Norway," she said. "It's a great environment for winter sports and there's saying that 'we are born with skis on our feet!'"

DISAPPOINTMENT

Vonn's bronze at least made up for disappointment of her sixth place in the super-G when an error at the bottom cost a podium place in a sensational race won by Czech snowboard-

er Ester Ledecka. All eyes were again on Vonn, winner of 81 World Cup races, as she started the second race in her Pyeongchang Games campaign in brilliant sunshine. Dressed in a figure-hugging white catsuit with red and blue stripes, Vonn reached speeds of 115 kmh and flew more than 30 metres off the jumps. Vonn won the blue riband title at the 2010 Vancouver Games but missed Sochi through injury.

But the gold was beyond her as she finished behind Goggia, whose friendship she has said is based on them both being "100 percent crazy". The pair embraced at the finish area, Vonn allowing herself a slight look skywards, a sigh and shrug of the shoulders. — AFP

Svitolina labours as former number ones book Dubai clash

DUBAI: Holder and top seed Elina Svitolina toiled for more than two hours before finally overcoming Wang Qiang in her opening match at the Dubai Championships yesterday. The Ukrainian worked hard to push past stubborn resistance from China's Wang, a lucky loser from qualifying, winning 6-1, 5-7, 6-2 to move into the quarter-finals.

Svitolina, this season's Brisbane champion, scraped through after saving nine of 11 break points against the world number 46 who entered the field after the withdrawal of Petra Kvitova. "I was a little bit angry at myself that I didn't bring my best game in the end of the second set. I had to accept and bounce back," Svitolina said. "But I was very happy the way I was playing."

"In the end, the win is the win." Former top-ranked players Karolina Pliskova and Angelique Kerber advanced to set up a battle of ex-number ones in the last eight. Czech Pliskova, the third seed, beat Carla Suarez Navarro 5-7, 6-2, 6-4, while Germany's Kerber dispatched Italian qualifier Sara Errani 6-4, 6-2.

Sixth seed Kerber, who won the Sydney title in January before reaching the Australian Open semi-finals, leads the series with her Czech opponent 6-3, winning their last two matches. "It was a tricky match, especially because she was playing well," Kerber said after taking the win over Errani on a secondary show-court at the Aviation Club. "I don't care which court I play on. It's always important now to win the matches and focus more on my opponent, on my game, on the next round," Kerber said. "I know how to play on the centre court. I know how to play on the outside court. It's just about your mentality, just focusing on not the



DUBAI: Elina Svitolina of Ukraine returns the ball to China's Wang Qiang (unseen) during their match on the second day of the WTA Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championship yesterday. — AFP

schedule, more on the game." Japan's Naomi Osaka, the next opponent for Svitolina, beat Anett Kontaveit of Estonia 6-2, 7-6 (7/5), while French fifth seed Caroline Garcia put out Ekaterina Makarova 6-4, 6-2.

Ostapenko exits

Russian Elena Vesnina upset Roland Garros champion and fourth seed Jelena Ostapenko 6-1, 7-6 (8/6).

"It was a weird match. At the beginning, everything was going my way. I was playing very clean. Jelena was missing a lot of shots," Vesnina said. "In the second set, she got back. She is a top 10 player, she is a Grand Slam champion. Of course, she will rebound, she will change something in her game."

"I had some kind of weird games on my serve. I will speak with my coach about that." Pliskova, who headed the rankings from mid-July to mid-September, needed a

fightback against Suarez Navarro after losing the opening set to her 27th-ranked opponent from the Canary Islands. The Czech won the second set and survived a run of three consecutive breaks of serve in the third, taking a 4-3 lead over Suarez Navarro. Pliskova reached 5-3 and served out the fighting win two games later in just over two hours.

"I was not playing the best tennis today, we were both a little bit struggling," Pliskova said after finishing with 11 aces, six double-faults and losing her serve five times. "For me, this was the first match here after couple days of practice. I haven't had that many matches for last couple of weeks since I came from Melbourne."

"I'm just finding the rhythm of the matches. Finally I got the win, so maybe it's better in the next match. "These are the important wins - when you are not playing your best tennis." — AFP



Matches on TV (Local Timings)

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE		
Lokomotiv Moscow v OGC Nice	beIN SPORTS HD 1	19:00
Atletico de Madrid v Kobenhavn	beIN SPORTS HD 2	21:00
Dynamo Kyiv v AEK Athens	beIN SPORTS HD 7	21:00
Zenit St. Petersburg v Celtic	beIN SPORTS HD 11 EN	21:00
Leipzig v Napoli	beIN SPORTS HD 4	21:00
Villarreal v Olympique Lyonnais	beIN SPORTS HD 3	21:00
Viktoria Plzen v Partizan	beIN SPORTS HD 12 EN	21:00
Lazio v Steaua Bucurest	beIN SPORTS HD 5	21:00
Sporting v Astana	beIN SPORTS HD 6	21:00
Atalanta v Borussia Dortmund	beIN SPORTS HD 4	23:05
Athletic de Bilbao v Spartak Moscow	beIN SPORTS HD 3	23:05
Red Bull Salzburg v Real Sociedad	beIN SPORTS HD 7	23:05
Milan v Ludogorets Razgrad	beIN SPORTS HD 2	23:05
Arsenal v Ostersunds	beIN SPORTS HD 5	23:05
Sporting Braga v Olympique Marseille	beIN SPORTS HD 6	23:05

13 Australia down N Zealand in T20 final, take number one ranking



14 Zagitova, 15, smashes skate record as Vonn gets bronze



15 Goggia wins Olympic downhill, Vonn third



Man United settle for Sevilla draw

Super De Gea stars with two breathtaking saves



SEVILLE: (From L) Sevilla's French midfielder Steven N'Zonzi vies with Manchester United's English defender Chris Smalling and English midfielder Scott McTominay during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 first leg football match Sevilla FC against Manchester United at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan stadium in Sevilla yesterday. — AFP

SEVILLE: David de Gea deflected the attention away from Paul Pogba with another spectacular display of goalkeeping as Manchester United came away from their Champions League last 16, first leg against Sevilla in Spain with a 0-0 draw yesterday.

De Gea made two breathtaking saves to deny Steven N'Zonzi and Luis Muriel at the end of the first half at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan, denying Sevilla a lead to take to England for next month's return.

Sevilla were the more likely side, with United offering little going forward despite the presence of Alexis Sanchez, Romelu Lukaku and Juan Mata in their attack. Lukaku had a late goal disallowed, but United's was the kind of cautious approach seen time and again in such games by Mourinho's teams down the years.

Their inability, unwillingness even, to get an away goal leaves the tie wide open ahead of the second leg, with United looking to reach the quarter-finals in their first appearance in the knockout stage of the Champions League since 2014.

Mourinho decided to leave Pogba out of his starting line-up, despite the Frenchman being back in the squad after illness had kept him out of United's FA Cup win at Huddersfield Town. Fuelling the speculation of an uneasy relationship between Mourinho and the France midfielder, the United manager chose to select 21-year-old Scott McTominay ahead of Pogba in a midfield three. However, an untimely injury to Ander Herrera meant Pogba was thrown on after just 17 minutes of a first half dominated by the Spanish side. Sevilla, looking

to make it past the last 16 of the Champions League after falling in their three previous appearances at this stage over the last decade, could and should have had a goal to show for their performance.

De Gea made one good early save low down to deny Colombian Muriel, while Jesus Navas, impressive at right-back, fired just wide after latching onto Ever Banega's cross-field pass. Stepping up the pressure just before half-time, Joaquin Correa's shot from a good position was too easy for De Gea, but the Spain keeper displayed all his class as he kept out headed attempts from N'Zonzi and Muriel from point-blank range, both saves requiring breathtaking reactions.

The importance to United of not letting in a goal was clear—they had kept eight clean sheets in their 10

matches before heading to Andalusia, with their only defeats in that time coming in the two games in which they had conceded.

And they seemed content enough to leave Spain with a 0-0 draw, continuing to soak up pressure in the second half and relying on Sevilla's indecision in the final third.

They were also aided by Pablo Sarabia's inability to find the target from an inviting Muriel cross in the 73rd minute, before Lukaku's goal was ruled out by French referee Clement Turpin for a handball as he controlled before shooting.

Whether Mourinho's team should have been more adventurous will only become clear after the return in Manchester in three weeks. — AFP



KHARKIV: Shakhtar Donetsk's midfielder Marios (C) vies for the ball with Roma's Dutch midfielder Kevin Strootman during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 first leg football match between Shakhtar Donetsk and AS Roma at the OSK Metalist Stadion in Kharkiv yesterday. — AFP

Fred gives Shakhtar advantage over Roma

KHARKIV: Shakhtar Donetsk fought back from a goal down as Fred's free-kick gave the Ukrainians a 2-1 victory over Roma yesterday in their Champions League last 16, first leg. Turkish youngster Cengiz Under marked his Champions League debut for Roma with a

well-taken 41st-minute opener after latching onto Edin Dzeko's clever through ball.

Shakhtar were much-improved after the break, though, and Facundo Ferreyra ran clear to slot under onrushing goalkeeper Alisson Becker. The hosts completed the turnaround in style with 19 minutes to play, as Fred curled a free-kick in off the crossbar.

But an extraordinary goalline block from Roma substitute Bruno Peres to deny Ferreyra in the final minute of injury-time kept the tie finely balanced ahead of the second leg at the Stadio Olimpico on March 13. — AFP

Real fight back to win without Ronaldo

MADRID: Cristiano Ronaldo was rested as Real Madrid came from behind to win 3-1 at Leganes yesterday and move back up to third place in La Liga. Unai Bustinza had put Leganes in front at Butarque, raising hopes that the home side could record another famous victory just weeks after they ousted Real from the Copa del Rey.

However, the reigning European champions turned this Madrid derby around before half-time with Lucas Vazquez and Casemiro both on target. Sergio Ramos sealed the win with a late penalty, and Real have now taken 16 points from the last 18 available in La Liga.

"It's another win, the fourth in a row and it's important to get the points," said Real coach Zinedine Zidane. "We're happy, we're third in the table and that's an important result for us. We want to continue like this, we have had hard times so we want to take advantage of this good spell."

"We are confident, we believe more and each player is giving more on the field." They are still a massive 14 points adrift of unbeaten league leaders Barcelona, but they are up to third above Valencia and within seven points of city rivals Atletico, who are second.

With the games piling up for his team, Zidane rested Ronaldo for this rescheduled fixture, initially postponed in December due to Real's involvement in the Club World Cup. With Toni Kroos, Luka Modric and Marcelo all injured and in a race against time to be fit for the Champions League last 16, second leg against



LEGANES: Leganes's Guadaleupean forward Claudio Beauvue (R) jumps for the ball during the Spanish league football match Club Deportivo Leganes SAD against Real Madrid yesterday. — AFP

Paris Saint-Germain in a fortnight, this was another chance for some of Real's fringe players to shine.

Theo Hernandez and Isco were among the starters, but Gareth Bale was back on the bench as he struggles to rediscover his best form. Kiko Casilla was handed a start in place of regular number one Keylor Navas, and Casilla was picking the ball out of his net inside six minutes, with Bustinza bravely stooping to score from almost on the line after his initial effort had been blocked.

However, it took Real just five minutes to draw level, Casemiro helping the ball into the path of Vazquez, who slotted home low. Casemiro is a defensive midfielder by trade but he put Madrid in front just before the half-hour mark, scoring at the end of a lovely one-touch move also involving Karim Benzema and Vazquez.

It took Real until the 90th minute to make sure of the victory, though, with Ramos scoring from the penalty spot after Mateo Kovacic had been fouled. Zidane's side will bid to continue their improved form when they host Alaves at the weekend. — AFP

Business

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2018

18 Limak signs KD 249.2m syndicated credit agreement with NBK and KFH



19 Flydubai sees strong growth in revenues, record passengers



21 Agility's net profit rises 16% to KD 68.5 million for 2017



SINGAPORE: Pedestrians wait to cross the street along the Orchard Road shopping district in Singapore yesterday. —AFP

Six remanded in \$1.8bn India fraud case

Jindal, Vipul Ambani among top executives in police custody

MUMBAI/NEW DELHI: An Indian court yesterday remanded six people including a general manager at state-run Punjab National Bank (PNB) in police custody for nearly two weeks, after the latest arrests in a probe into an alleged \$1.8 billion fraud.

Among those arrested by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) was Rajesh Jindal, currently a general manager with the bank, who between August 2009 and May 2011 ran the Mumbai branch at the center of the biggest fraud in Indian banking history. Five executives from companies run by billionaire jeweler Nirav Modi and his uncle Mehul Choksi, who heads Gitanjali Gems, were also arrested on Tuesday.

They were presented before a Mumbai court, which allowed a police request to keep them in custody until March 5 for further questioning. The five executives included Vipul Ambani, the finance chief of Modi's flagship Firestar group of companies. Jindal is the highest ranking PNB executive to have been arrested so far in the case, which has also led to the detention of five other employees of the bank, including two branch officials it accuses of colluding with executives from Modi and Choksi's companies to help them obtain fraudulent loans.

A lawyer for Modi, who runs eponymous high-end diamond jewelry stores that spread from New York to Beijing, has denied any wrongdoing by his client. Choksi has not commented on the case but Gitanjali, in a stock exchange filing, has denied his involvement in the alleged fraud.

The bank has alleged that as far back as 2011, firms tied to the pair began receiving fraudulent letters of undertaking (LOUs) from its Brady House branch in Mumbai that enabled them to borrow money from overseas banks. "During his tenure at PNB Brady House branch, the practice of issuance of LOUs without sanctioned limits to Nirav Modi group firms had started," a CBI spokesman said, referring to Jindal.

It was not immediately possible for Reuters to reach Jindal, Ambani and the other executives who are in custody, or their lawyers. Punjab National Bank has not commented on the arrests since it triggered the inquiry with a complaint to federal police.

Shares in PNB, which have lost more than a quarter of their market value since the \$1.8 billion fraud came to light last Wednesday, closed 0.6 percent higher. Gitanjali shares fell 9.9 percent to an all-time closing low of 27.40 rupees.



MUMBAI: Indian businessman Vipul Ambani, one of the accused in the Punjab National Bank (PNB) fraud case, is escorted after his appearance in the special CBI court in Mumbai yesterday. —AFP

"Near future is uncertain"

Modi, who police say left India with his family in January before PNB filed a complaint, wrote to his employees in India saying they should look for other jobs as he would not be able to pay them after the seizure of his assets and freezing of bank accounts, local media reported yesterday.

"The near future is uncertain," Hindustan Times daily quoted Modi, who was worth \$1.8 billion last year according to the Forbes rich list, as writing in the email to employees. "I hope that we will be able to re-associate ourselves in better days. But, I make it clear that I am committed to pay your past dues, if any, once I have access to stocks and the bank accounts," Modi wrote in the email, according to the newspaper. In an earlier letter to PNB, a copy of which was seen by Reuters, Modi had said that his companies owed the bank less than 50 billion rupees (\$775.3 million), much lower than the amount alleged by the bank. He also said PNB had jeopardized its chances of recovering the sums owed by going public with its allegations. Modi's stores in New Delhi and Mumbai have been closed since investigators raided them and seized stocks last week. His corporate website was also not working yesterday. The fraud has cast a shadow on the workings of the state-run banks, which dominate lending activities in Asia's third-largest economy. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley on Tuesday decried a "lack of ethics" among sections of Indian business and criticized inadequate oversight by auditors and regulators. —Reuters



Near future is uncertain: Nirav Modi

Global reports KD 14.1m revenues, KD 2.5m net profit in 2017

KUWAIT: Global Investment House ("Global" or the "Company"), a regional asset management and investment banking firm headquartered in Kuwait, with offices in major capital markets in the MENA region, yesterday announced its financial results for the year ended 31 December 2017 reporting a net profit of KD 2.5 million (\$8.3 million), total revenues of KD 14.1 million (\$46.7 million), and fee and commission income of KD 10.3 million (\$34.1million) representing 73 percent of total revenues. During 2017, the Asset Management business remained resilient with KD 910 million (\$3.0 billion) of assets under management. Our asset management teams remained focused on launching products and services best suited to our clients' investment needs offering recurring income/yield accompanied with low volatility. During the year, the Company raised over \$71 million of new money in various strategies primarily income-yielding UK real estate and has distributed to clients more than \$93 million from dividends and proceeds from exits.

MENA Asset Management continued to report competitive performance for its managed funds and portfolios in the regional equity markets resulting in recognitions from industry leaders. Several funds managed by the Company outperformed their respective benchmarks and peers.

The Real Estate Asset Management team has successfully acquired four properties in 2017 to raise the total assets acquired through the commercial real estate program launched late 2015 to seven assets with total value of GBP300 million. These properties were off-market investment opportunities outside Central London, of Grade A specifications, producing rental income on long-term triple-net leases with investment grade or government related entities. The team has successfully distributed an average annualized income of 9.25 percent on the managed assets since inception and is currently working on several transactions in the developed markets.

In Private Equity, the team's efforts to add value to portfolio companies resulted in achieving major milestones in implementing the growth strategies for several companies. The team successfully exited three portfolio companies and continued to provide its clients with liquidity in challenging geopolitical and economic environment. The team is expected to distribute more than \$35 million to its clients in the first quarter 2018.

Special Situations Asset Management, a tailored "wind-down" asset management service offered to clients seeking value enhancement and optimal realization of difficult assets portfolio covering multi asset classes with focus on the MENA region, has successfully executed the portfolios' strategies and resulted in generating cash inflows with an exit multiple around



Hareb Al-Darmaki



Sulaiman Mohammed Al-Rubaie

1.6x to clients' target valuations. During 2017, the Investment Banking team generated revenues from four different mandates in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, including the sale of a controlling stake one of the largest social infrastructure companies in Kuwait. The team is currently working on several mandates and has an interesting pipeline of M&A and advisory mandates.

On the brokerage front, Global made focused efforts to grow the institutional brokerage business leading to gains in Jordan market share. Due to handsome increase in the market turnover in Kuwait and market share gains in Jordan, the brokerage fee revenues recorded a 25.6 percent year-on-year growth. The Company's continuous efforts to control and rationalize its cost base resulted in a marginal decline of KD 0.2 million in the operating cost base to KD 12.0 million, despite one-off impact of change in Kuwait Labor Law relating to indemnities for Kuwaiti employees. Full impact of the change in law, amounting to KD 0.6 million, was recorded in 2017 financial results. Following the KD 22.9 million (\$75 million) distributed in August 2017 through capital reduction, the board of directors have proposed a 5 percent cash dividend (KD 0.005 per share) for distribution to the shareholders subject to the annual general meeting of the shareholders' approval.

Hareb Al-Darmaki, Chairman of the Board of Directors, said: "Global has remained on a consistent path of profitability for the fifth consecutive year, driven by effective implementation of its fee business driven strategy. We are delighted by these financial results, which were generated during difficult times for the capital markets and the investment services industry in the region." Sulaiman Mohammed Al-Rubaie, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, commented: "Despite the extremely volatile and challenging times, we successfully widened our client base, enhanced our product offering, signed new mandates, raised new money and maintained our profitability momentum. Being a MENA player, Global cannot be isolated from the regional headwinds; however, we remain committed to continue creating value to all our stakeholders, through our resilient and robust fee-based business model, innovative strategies and execution capabilities."

Business

Limak signs KD 249.2m syndicated credit agreement with NBK and KFH

Agreement to partly finance Kuwait Airport's new passenger Terminal II



KUWAIT: Limak Holding Chairman Nihat Ozdemir, NBK Chairman Nasser Musaed Al-Sayer (right) and KFH Chairman Hamad Al-Marzouk (left) during the signing of the agreement.



KUWAIT: Limak Insaat, one of world's leading contractors currently constructing the new passenger terminal at Kuwait International Airport, and Kuwait's two largest banks, the National Bank of Kuwait S.A.K.P. (NBK) and Kuwait Finance House K.S.C.P. (KFH), yesterday signed a KD 249.2 million Syndicated Credit Agreement to partly finance the construction, completion, furnishing and maintenance of Kuwait International Airport (KIA) New Passenger Terminal II.

Under the Agreement, NBK is the Mandated Lead Arranger, Intercreditor Agent, Security Agent and Account Bank, and KFH is the Mandated Lead Arranger and Commodity Murabahah Investment Agent. With the signing, NBK and KFH will jointly finance KD124.6 million each to facilitate construction works on KIA New Passenger Terminal II currently being constructed by Limak, a global award-winning construction company. The terminal is designed to handle 25 million passengers per year and accommodate all aircraft types through 51 gates and stands.

The agreement was signed by Limak Holding Chairman Nihat Ozdemir, NBK Chairman Nasser Musaed Al-Sayer, and KFH Chairman Hamad Al-Marzouk. In attendance at the signing ceremony were Ayse Hilal Sayan Koytak, the Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to Kuwait and her delegation, and senior executives and board members from Limak Insaat, Limak Holding, the National Bank of Kuwait, Kuwait Finance House, and the Ministry of Public Works.

At the signing ceremony the Borrower, Limak Insaat represented by Limak Holding Chairman Ozdemir, presented the company's current construction progress on the new passenger terminal and announced the commencement of construction of the superstructure, commission of the region's largest Steel and Concrete Cassette Factory, prepared operations of a Precast Arch Factory, and 33 tower cranes prepared for mobilization with a lifting capacity of 100 thousand metric tons.

Limak Holding Chairman Nihat Ozdemir said: "We are extremely happy and proud to have taken part in the construction of this iconic new terminal building which will be Kuwait's new gateway. This financing agreement demonstrates our capacity to work with international financial institutions for a project that we have undertaken abroad as a Turkish contracting company. The signing of the agreement today is an extremely important step for our strong and lasting relationship with Kuwait where we also have a hospital and infrastructure works project in addition to the airport. Today marks a remarkable day for the future of our business in Kuwait and we hope to extend the strong relationship between us to other countries using Kuwait's financing power and the ability of Turkish companies to do business."

NBK Chairman Nasser Musaed Al-Sayer said: "The National Bank of Kuwait is pleased to be selected as the lead arranger of this transaction to finance and arrange credit facilities for the new passenger terminal project at Kuwait Airport. This reflects our strong commitment to be the partner of choice for the world's leading and renowned contractors, executing Kuwait's multi-billion dollar projects. Our journey with Limak actually started in 2016 when we partnered with KFH to issue a Performance Bond on behalf of the company for the much awaited New Passenger Terminal. Since then, we've been providing the day-to-day banking support to Limak and are delighted to conclude and sign today Limak's needs for additional banking facilities including Bank Guarantees, Letters of Credit and Working Capital, to the tune of KD 249.2 million."

He added, "ever since our incorporation in 1952, NBK has worked hand-in-hand with the government and private sector to support the development needs of Kuwait. We have a long and well established track record of backing critical infrastructure projects important for Kuwait's economic expansion. The New Passenger Terminal is one such project.

Valued at KD 1.3 billion, the contract will also inject significant funds into the local market, bolstering Kuwait's private sector and pushing our economy toward the success envisioned by His Highness the Amir's Kuwait 2035 development plan.

The new passenger terminal, due for completion in August 2022, is a strategic part of this development and will open the doors for other critical developmental projects.

Because as we all know, building infrastructure is necessary for the development of Kuwait's potential, we cannot build a successful and growing economy without first laying the solid foundation of infrastructure needed to support such growth. In supporting Limak in building this new passenger terminal, NBK reaffirms our commitment to building our beloved country's future achievements and success."

KFH Chairman Hamad Al-Marzouq said: "Kuwait Finance House is honored to be selected as the lead arranger for sharia-compliant facilities for this landmark project considered to be one of the most important construction and infrastructure projects under Kuwait's development plan. Under this agreement we will contribute to the extension of credit lines for the Kuwait International Airport Terminal II project to Limak who have significant experience in establishing international airports. The transaction builds on KFH's growing track-record of financing mega-projects with advanced sharia-compliant finance solutions spanning four decades. We wish Limak success in the completion



Iconic new terminal building to be Kuwait's new gateway



Nihat Ozdemir with Nasser Musaed Al-Sayer



Nihat Ozdemir (left) with Hamad Al-Marzouk



— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

of the airport project and look forward to a fruitful and long-lasting relationship and cooperation on future vital projects."

Transaction Facts and Figures:

- Syndicated Credit Agreement value: KD 249.2 million
 - Mandated Lead Arranger, Intercreditor Agent, Security Agent and Account Bank: National Bank of Kuwait
 - Contribution: KD 124.6 million
 - Mandated Lead Arranger and Commodity Murabahah Investment Agent: Kuwait Finance House
 - Contribution: KD 124.6 million Airport Project
- Highlights:
- Concrete Foundations: 80% complete
 - Precast Arch Factory: ready for operation

- Steel and Concrete Cassette Factory: commissioned and now the largest plant in the Middle East
- Baggage handling system, facade, roof covering lifts, escalators, and travelers: out to tender
- Lifting Capacity: 100,000 tons with 33 tower cranes and 10 crawler cranes are installed and ready for mobilization. Expected to break a World Record.
- Construction of the superstructure has commenced
- Subcontractors: 25% are local companies and over KD 30 million spent on National (Kuwait) Products.
- Over 3,000 people are currently working on the project: expected to increase to 12,000 by Q3 2019.
- Approximately 4 million hours of non-stop work since the start of the project.

EXCHANGE RATES

Al-Muzaini Exchange Co.	
ASIAN COUNTRIES	
Japanese Yen	2.752
Indian Rupees	4.695
Pakistani Rupees	2.720
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.946
Nepali Rupees	2.957
Singapore Dollar	228.630
Hongkong Dollar	38.448
Bangladesh Taka	3.604
Philippine Peso	5.842
Thai Baht	9.524
GCC COUNTRIES	
Saudi Riyal	80.227
Qatari Riyal	82.630
Omani Riyal	781.315
Bahraini Dinar	798.860
UAE Dirham	81.932
ARAB COUNTRIES	
Egyptian Pound - Cash	19.700
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	16.985
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.207
Tunisian Dinar	126.860
Jordanian Dinar	424.050
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	2.004
Syrian Lira	0.000
Morocco Dirham	33.406
EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES	
US Dollar Transfer	300.650

Euro	374.910
Sterling Pound	421.960
Canadian dollar	241.290
Turkish lira	80.500
Swiss Franc	324.500
Australian Dollar	239.620
US Dollar Buying	299.450
GOLD	
20 Gram	260.52
10 Gram	133.18
5 Gram	67.43
Dollarco Exchange Co. Ltd	
Rate for Transfer	
US Dollar	300.050
Canadian Dollar	239.305
Sterling Pound	420.810
Euro	373.195
Swiss Frank	280.880
Bahrain Dinar	797.945
UAE Dirhams	82.095
Qatari Riyals	83.325
Saudi Riyals	80.910
Jordanian Dinar	424.475
Egyptian Pound	17.060
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.932
Indian Rupees	4.666
Pakistani Rupees	2.714
Bangladesh Taka	3.639
Philippines Peso	5.745
Cyprus pound	17.863
Selling Rate	
Japanese Yen	3.810
Syrian Pound	1.585
Nepalese Rupees	2.927
Malaysian Ringgit	78.035
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	47.690
Thai Bhat	10.535
Turkish Lira	80.195

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL		
CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
Europe		
British Pound	0.413951	0.421451
Czech Korune	0.0066717	0.016017
Danish Krone	0.045658	0.050958
Euro	0.366328	0.373828
Georgian Lari	0.133795	0.133795
Hungarian 0.001101	0.001321	0.001321
Norwegian Krone	0.034545	0.039745
Romanian Leu	0.064150	0.081000
Russian ruble	0.005323	0.005323
Slovakia	0.008914	0.018914
Swedish Krona	0.033555	0.038555
Swiss Franc	0.315981	0.326981
Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.229602	0.241602
New Zealand Dollar	0.214699	0.224199
America		
Canadian Dollar	0.233558	0.242358
US Dollars	0.296300	0.300720
US Dollars Mint	0.296800	0.300720

Asia	
Bangladesh Taka	0.003224 0.003808
Chinese Yuan	0.046071 0.049571
Hong Kong Dollar	0.036522 0.039272
Indian Rupee	0.004229 0.004870
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000018 0.000024
Japanese Yen	0.002733 0.002913
Korean Won	0.000270 0.000285
Malaysian Ringgit	0.073044 0.079044
Nepalese Rupee	0.002997 0.003167
Pakistan Rupee	0.002520 0.002810
Philippine Peso	0.005697 0.005997
Singapore Dollar	0.223360 0.233360
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001641 0.002221
Taiwan	0.010306 0.010486
Thai Baht	0.009198 0.009748
Arab	
Bahraini Dinar	0.790249 0.798749
Egyptian Pound	0.014064 0.019782
Iranian Riyal	0.000083 0.000084
Iraqi Dinar	0.000202 0.000262
Jordanian Dinar	0.419076 0.428076
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000 1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000154 0.000254
Moroccan Dirhams	0.022647 0.046647
Omani Riyal	0.773942 0.779622
Qatar Riyal	0.078223 0.083163
Saudi Riyal	0.079020 0.080320
Syrian Pound	0.001272 0.001492
Tunisian Dinar	0.121456 0.129456
Turkish Lira	0.074441 0.084741
UAE Dirhams	0.080362 0.082062
Yemeni Riyal	0.000976 0.001056

Business

Flydubai sees strong growth in revenues, record passengers

Total revenue increases 9.2% to \$1.5 billion in 2017

KUWAIT: Flydubai has yesterday announced its full-year results for the year ending 31 December 2017. It reported total revenue of AED 5.5 billion (\$1.5 billion) compared to AED 5 billion (\$1.37 billion) last year; an increase of 9.2 percent compared to the same period reported in last year's results.

It reported a profit of AED 37.3 million (\$10.1 million); the airline has continuously reported full-year profitability since 2012. The aviation sector continues to be a key contributor to the development of the business landscape in support of international trade links.

* Flydubai carried 10.9 million passengers - a record number for the airline. Passenger numbers grew by 5.5 percent compared to the previous year.

With up to 295 aircraft on order flydubai becomes one of the world's top ten airlines in terms of order backlog. Represents the scale of the ambition planned for the airline.

Statements on the annual results

Commenting on the announcement of the airline's Full-Year Results for 2017, Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al-Maktoum, Chairman of flydubai, said: "the Results announced today demonstrate the key role that flydubai continues to play in the development of trade and tourism in the UAE. 2017 also saw flydubai

place its third and largest aircraft order illustrating its contribution to Dubai as a center of aviation and represents the scale of the ambition planned for the airline."

Commenting on the expanded codeshare announced last year, Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al-Maktoum, said: "in its early stages, the

numbers of passengers travelling with us as well as sustained growth in our revenue."

Looking to the year ahead, Al-Ghaith, added: "the introduction of new and more fuel efficient aircraft into our fleet will be a positive influence and we will see greater benefit as more Boeing 737 MAX 8 aircraft join the fleet. We know how important aviation is to the business landscape and we remain confident about the road ahead."

Arbind Kumar, Senior Vice President, Finance of flydubai, said: "our persistent and rigorous approach to cost management continues to ensure that the business remains robust to support our sustainable growth over the next few years."

Cost and revenue performance

- EBITDARI was 23.6 percent of revenue; an improvement of the previous year's figure of 21.1 percent.

- Closing cash and cash equivalents position, including pre-delivery payments for future aircraft deliveries, is AED 2.4 billion compared to AED 2.3 billion last year.

- Fuel costs were 25 percent of total operating costs; the same as last year. Hedged fuel was 12 percent of total volume compared to 21 percent last year.

- Ancillary revenue comprising baggage, cargo and inflight sales contributed 11.9 percent of revenue compared to 13.8 percent last year.

Operational Results

- Efficient fleet management: Eight new



aircraft joined the fleet including two Next-Generation Boeing 737-800 and six Boeing 737 MAX 8 aircraft. For the first time since the airline was launched in 2009, the airline retired four aircraft in line with its fleet management policy to maintain a young and efficient fleet.

- Sustained network expansion: flydubai continues to closely monitor and assess the performance of its route network. In a chang-

ing socio-economic environment, flydubai is responsive to changing market dynamics and remains flexible in its approach to adjusting capacity. Its objective is to maintain a strong route network and increase passenger flows in support of sustained growth within its geographic flying radius. It will continue to review the performance of its schedule and routes ensuring that its network is performing at optimal levels.



Airline reports a profit of \$10.1 million

partnership with Emirates has enjoyed a significant response from passengers who recognise the benefits of travelling around the world on a single ticket. As the opportunities presented by the codeshare progress it will create new passenger flows going forward."

Ghaith Al-Ghaith, Chief Executive Officer of flydubai, commenting on the financial and operational performance of the airline, said: "the oil price continues to shape the business landscape and it remains a fine balance between fares, yields and passenger growth. Despite the socio-economic environment we have seen across our network, we have record

Transfer your salary to ABK and the choice is yours!

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced yesterday the launch of a new salary transfer campaign. This promotion, which is open to ABK's new customers only, will last until May 31st 2018.

Running under the tagline "Transfer your salary and the choice is!" the campaign offers new customers a choice of one of these three benefits upon salary transfer:

- Up to KD500 cash gift
- Up to KD5,000 interest free loan
- Up to 100,000 Skywards Miles, issued on a free pre-paid card



Prior to this campaign, ABK launched several promotional campaigns to allow customers to receive various benefits including the recent 'Spend and Win' draw, which allowed lucky customers to witness the 2018 FIFA World Cup live in Russia.

holders. Upon card issuance, cardholders will receive an initial bonus Avios as a welcome gift to get them started. The initial bonus Avios can, depending on the card type, reach 12,500 Avios which can be enough for a one-way flight from Kuwait to London.

Hameed continued that cardholders will then-on be able to collect Avios for every KD 1 spent on purchases locally and internationally, from booking flights to paying for dinner or fuel or everyday shopping. Upon collecting enough Avios, customers can redeem them with reward flights with British Airways and oneworld 13 airline partners (such as Qatar Airways, Royal Jordanian, SriLankan Airlines, among others), or seat upgrades on British Airways flights, or part-pay with Avios when booking a flight on British Airways.

The cards are also loaded with benefits depending on card type, such as Lounge access, concierge service, free global travel insurance (on all 3 cards), free nights in more than 1,200 hotels of luxury Starwood hotels around the world (SPG hotels), spa offers, and discounts at Luxury Serviced Apartments, including access to MasterCard Priceless Cities, which offers VIP treatment and unique experiences in entertainment, dining, hotels and shopping in cities around the world, and several other benefits.

Your vacation gets better with CBK BA MasterCard

KUWAIT: As the National and Liberation Days are getting closer, this is the best time to use your British Airways credit card from Al-Tijari.

As the only British Airways-branded MasterCard credit cards in the Middle East, the products combine a world-leading card concept with a global loyalty program, offering cardholders the opportunity to collect Avios points (the reward currency of the British Airways Executive Club) for every IKD they spend using their card and redeem them for flights and upgrades.

More clarification from Hameed Ibrahim Salman, Assistant General Manager of the Retail Banking sector at Commercial Bank of Kuwait that the cards come in 3 types: MasterCard World, MasterCard Platinum and MasterCard Prepaid, and offer several benefits to their

VIVA concludes 'Scratch & Win' offer this Friday at Avenues branches

KUWAIT: VIVA, Kuwait's fastest-growing and most developed telecom operator, will conclude 'Scratch & Win' offer amid amazing February offers tomorrow (February 23) at its Avenues Mall branches 'exclusively' for the third week in a row during February.

VIVA's branches in the Avenues witnessed enormous turnout during first and second week. Customers enjoyed the 'Scratch & Win' offer which grants them vouchers on a 'first come first serve' basis once they subscribe to any of VIVA's voice or data postpaid plans. The vouchers allow them to instantly win one of plenty valuable instant prizes including ATVs, LED screens and smart devices.

This will be the last Friday during February to benefit



from the 'Scratch & Win' offers at the VIVA Avenues Mall branches.

S Africa raises VAT for first time in 25 years

CAPE TOWN: South Africa will in April implement its first value-added tax (VAT) hike since the dawn of democracy over two decades ago, the Treasury said yesterday, part of efforts to cut the budget deficit and

stabilize debt under new President Cyril Ramaphosa.

The government of Africa's most industrialized country wants to plug a revenue hole in its budget and repair its economy after nine years of mismanagement under Jacob Zuma, who resigned as president this month on orders of the ruling African National Congress following a series of scandals.

Zuma has denied all wrongdoing. Raising VAT is potentially unpopular ahead of a national election next year but will generate an additional 23 bil-

lion rand (\$2 billion) of revenue in 2018/19 as the economy recovers from a recession last year.

Unchanged since 1993, the South African VAT rate would increase to 15 percent from 14 percent effective April 1, the Treasury said in a document laying out its budget plans for the next three years.

Raising VAT is less harmful to economic growth than raising other taxes, the Treasury said. "This is a tough, but hopeful budget," Finance Minister Malusi Gigaba said. — Reuters

Tender awarded to KGL Rent a Car

KUWAIT: Kuwait and Gulf Link Transport Company announced that one of its subsidiary companies, KGL Car Rental, has been awarded a tender with Kuwait Gulf Oil Company for the rental of vehicles

with a total of KD 1.4 million for three years. The company confirmed that the expected return of this contract is around 5 percent, which is subject to change up or down during the implementation period. KGL Car Rental has branches around the world, offering car rental services including airport pick-up services and from many international hotels.

The company offers a large variety of vehicle segments to meet the needs of its diverse customers from the commercial, corporate and government sectors.



CELEBRATING KUWAIT

ABK extends its congratulations to HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and to the Kuwaiti government and its people on the occasion of National and Liberation days.

The Bank will be closed for business on Sunday 25th & Monday 26th February 2018 and will resume its operations on Tuesday 27th February 2018. During this period, ABK's online services and Call Center will be available.

Simpler Banking

eahli.com

Ahlan Ahli 1 899 899



Business

US stocks bounce ahead of Fed minutes

NEW YORK: Wall Street stocks rose early yesterday, bouncing from the prior session's losses ahead of Federal Reserve meeting minutes that will be scrutinized for signals on interest rate hikes.

About 15 minutes into trading, the Dow Jones Industrial Average was up 0.3 percent at 25,047.69. The broad-based S&P 500 advanced 0.5 percent to 2,728.46, while the tech-rich Nasdaq Composite Index gained 0.5 percent to 7,272.20.

Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare noted that the Fed minutes come from the policy meeting held just before the strong February 2 jobs report was released, igniting a stock market selloff on worries over accelerated rate hikes.

"With the market knowing what it knows now, the minutes will likely prove netlessome if they connote a hawkish tone," O'Hare said. New Fed chief Jay Powell will testify before Congress next week which will provide more insight on his thinking.

following disappointing earnings. The big retailer was off 0.1 percent yesterday.

The dollar rose to its highest level in a week yesterday and world stocks fell for the third day as investors braced for minutes from the Fed's last policy meeting to see if they would herald more rises in interest rates and global bond yields. Wall Street looked set for a weaker session, with equity futures down around 0.2 percent and the VIX volatility gauge up for the third day in a row.

The dollar index, which measures the greenback against a basket of peers, rose 0.2 percent. The index has bounced almost 1 percent so far this week, after slumping 1.5 percent the previous week to its lowest level in three years.

violent sell-off in stocks earlier this month.

"Markets are particularly sensitive to inflation, and we think the odds that the minutes reinforce the narrative of firming inflation are high," said Elsa Lignos, RBC's global head of FX strategy.

"We think there is a high probability that the Fed moves the dots to four hikes in 2018 (from three) near-term, and that the minutes could be another step in that direction." The US currency has been weighed down this year by concerns that Washington might pursue a weak-dollar strategy, and by the perceived erosion of its yield advantage as other countries start to scale back their easy-money strategies.

Confidence in the dollar has also been shaken by mounting worries over the U.S. budget deficit.

But the greenback appeared finally to be benefiting from rising US bond yields, especially as the Treasury Department is issuing more debt in anticipation of a higher deficit from last year's tax overhaul and plans to

increase federal spending.

As markets braced for the next wave of this week's \$258 billion deluge of new debt, two-year and 10-year yields eased a touch, with the former retreating from nine-year highs of 2.282 percent, hit on Tuesday. German bond yields, the benchmark for Europe, fell to two-week lows after weaker-than-expected business activity data in the two biggest euro zone economies.

The data dampened expectations of a speedy end to the European Central Bank's ultra-easy monetary policies. "It might well be the case that people in the market were getting carried away about strength of recovery and what that means for the ECB," said Chris Scicluna, head of economic research at Daiwa Capital Markets. In Britain, an unexpected jump in the jobless rate weighed on the pound.

Down day for stocks

While emerging Asian shares had

shrugged off Wall Street's Tuesday weakness to rise 0.7 percent, and Japan's Nikkei firmed 0.2 percent, the momentum failed to carry into Europe. The pan-European STOXX 600 index fell 0.6 percent and Germany's DAX lost 0.8 percent, still spooked by the recent rises in bond yields.

There were some bright spots, however, such as bank Lloyds, telecommunications firm Orange and commodities trader Glencore. Analysts noted that more than half of MSCI Europe firms have either met or beaten analysts' earnings expectations, according to Thomson Reuters data.

"The underlying earnings season has been quietly delivering the goods," UBS equity strategists told clients, adding that they remained bullish on European equities for 2018. On commodity markets, dollar strength fuelled a half percent fall in Brent crude futures to \$64.61 per barrel. US crude oil futures slipped 1 percent to \$61.16. —Agencies

Daily Kuwait Stock Exchange Report. Table with columns: Index, Change, Closing, Last Closing. Includes sections for Trades, Basic Materials, Consumer Goods, Health Care, Financial Services, Investment Instruments, Technology, and Parallel Market.

National Bank of Kuwait Financial Markets Daily Report. Table with columns: Index, Previous Close, Last Price, Change, Daily Performance %, Yearly Performance %. Includes sections for Global Stock Indices, MENA Stock Indices, Global Currencies Exchange Rate, MENA Currencies Exchange Rate, Global Interest Rates, Global Bond Yields, and Commodities.

Business

Agility's net profit rises 16% to KD 68.5 million for 2017

Revenue reached KD 1,407 million, EBITDA KD 135.2 million

KUWAIT: Agility, a leading global logistics provider, yesterday announced its 2017 financial results, reporting a net profit of KD 68.5 million, or 54.4 fils per share, an increase of 16 percent over 2016. Revenue for the year reached KD 1,407 million and EBITDA was KD 135.2 million.

For the fourth quarter 2017, Agility reported a net profit of KD 19.3 million, or 15.3 fils per share, an increase of 22.5 percent over Q4 2016. EBITDA for Q4 2017 was KD 37.6 million, an increase of 19.8 percent.

Board of directors recommendation

The Board of Directors has recommended a cash dividend distribution of 15 percent (15 fils per share), along with 15 percent bonus shares (15 shares for every 100 shares), subject to approval of the General Assembly.

Agility consolidated results

"In 2017, Agility posted another year of healthy growth and continued to plant the seeds for a future of sustainable growth. To reach our target of \$800 million EBITDA by 2020, we remained focused on improving GIL's performance and investing in our Infrastructure companies. For every business in the group, 2017 was a critical year," said Tarek Sultan, Agility CEO and Vice Chairman.



KD 19.3m net profit for fourth quarter 2017

2017 Milestones:

- * 17.4 percent growth in EBITDA largely as a result of strong Infrastructure group performance
- * Net profit and EPS growth of 16 percent and 16.6 percent respectively.
- * Healthy operating cash flow growth, but limited Free Cash flow due to the required investment to grow the business
- * Balanced dividends distribution which rewards shareholders without inhibiting business growth
- * Increasing borrowing to fund company's future developments which resulted in a net debt position of KD 93.2 million
- * The settlement of the US Department of Justice litigation:

Agility Global Integrated Logistics

Agility Global Integrated Logistics (GIL) revenue grew 14.3 percent to KD 1,061.6 million in 2017. The

increase is attributable to growth in the freight forwarding business and contract logistics. Full year net revenue grew 2.6 percent. Net revenue margins shrank to 23.7 percent from 26.4 percent amid yield pressure across the industry.

In Q4, GIL revenue was KD 293 million, a 21.5 percent increase over Q4 2016. Air and ocean revenue were up 25 percent on air tonnage growth of 9.7 percent and a 12 percent increase in ocean TEUs. Contract logistics and specialties (Project Logistics and Fairs & Events) improved revenue 17.6 percent over the same period in 2016.

Fourth-quarter net revenue increased 6 percent, but net revenue margins declined to 22.6 percent vs. 26 percent in Q4 2016, amid yield pressure throughout the freight forwarding industry. Contract logistics continued its strong growth in Q4, primarily in the Middle East and Asia Pacific, aided by a combination of new customers and investments in new facilities. EBITDA improved 30.7 percent with margins expanding from 4 percent in Q4 2016 to 4.3 percent in Q4 2017.

"GIL is growing through a strategy that focuses on defined solutions and customer segments, enhanced sales productivity and efficient trade lane development," Sultan said. "In addition, GIL is building systems and solutions that enable business insight, efficiencies, and increased productivity for our operations and for our customers. As always we are working hard to maintain cost discipline."

Agility's infrastructure companies

For the full year, revenue for the Infrastructure group grew by 12.7 percent, EBITDA has also increased by 28.2 percent to KD 120.9 million with margins expanding from 29.7 percent in FY 2016 to 33.7 percent in 2017. Agility is investing in those companies to drive its future growth.

Infrastructure group revenue grew 25 percent in Q4 2017. EBITDA increased largely on strong performance by Global Clearinghouse Systems (GCS), Agility Real Estate (RED), National Aviation Services (NAS) and Tristar.

Agility Industrial Real Estate, a leading owner and developer of logistics parks, remains one of the strongest contributors to Agility's performance. Agility Industrial Real Estate is working to improve the efficiency of its Kuwaiti assets, develop a Saudi logistics park and expand in multiple locations in

	FY 2017 (Million KD)	FY 2016 (Million KD)	Variance (%)	Q4 2017 (Million KD)	Q4 2016 (Million KD)	Variance (%)
Revenue	1,407	1,234	14%	386	314.8	22.6%
Net Revenue	469.9	429.1	9.5%	125.7	112.4	12%
EBITDA	135.2	115.2	17.4%	37.6	31.4	19.8%
Net Profit	68.5	59.1	16%	19.3	15.7	22.5%
EPS (fils)	54.4	46.7	16.6%	15.3	12.5	23.1%

Figures in the table above have been rounded

Africa. In 2017, Agility broke ground on two warehouses of 38,000 SQM each in Saudi Arabia. Delivery is expected this year. In Africa, Agility identified new locations for logistics parks, and established operations in Ghana, Cote D'Ivoire and Mozambique to cater for increasing demands for warehousing services in the continent.

Tristar, a fully integrated liquid logistics company, on-boarded the strategic investor Gulf Investment Corporation (GIC) in 2017. Tristar received a capital injection of \$100 million for a consideration of 19.4 percent of the company's capital. Tristar revenue grew from existing and new customers in 2017. Tristar continues to diversify its business via shipping growth and geographic expansion in an effort to create more value for shareholders.

National Aviation Services (NAS), Agility's airport services subsidiary posted healthy growth in Kuwait, Cote D'Ivoire and Afghanistan; with revenue in Cote D'Ivoire and Afghanistan growing more than 20 percent. In Q4, NAS also launched operations in Liberia and Uganda. The company is working to turnaround performance in Tanzania and Morocco.

UPAC, a leading real estate and facilities management company in the Middle East, experienced a strong year in 2017. It improved operational efficiencies and reduced costs across its key operations within the Kuwait International Airport, Sheikh Saad Terminal and Discovery Mall. UPAC is also developing the 450-store Reem Mall in Abu Dhabi in partnership with National Real Estate Company (NREC). Financing for the \$1.2 billion project concluded in 2017.

GCS, a company specialized in customs modernization, manages all customs activities at ports of Kuwait

and aims to enhance customs modernization through its services. GCS showed improved performance in 2017 by deploying new services within different ports.

Financial performance for 2017

* Agility's net profit reached KD 68.5 million, a 16 percent increase from KD 59.1 million in 2016. EPS was 54.4 fils, compared with 46.7 fils a year earlier.

* EBITDA was KD 135.2 million, a 17.4 percent increase from 2016.

* Agility's revenue for 2017 was KD 1,407 million, an increase of 14 percent from KD 1,234 million in 2016. Net revenue increased by 9.5 percent.

* GIL's revenue was KD 1,061.6 million, a 14.3 percent increase from 2016.

* Infrastructure group revenue was KD 358.2 million compared with KD 317.9 million in 2016, a 12.7 percent increase.

* Agility enjoys a healthy balance sheet with KD 1,729 million in assets. Its net debt position was KD 93.2 million as of Dec. 31, 2017. Operating cash flow was KD 63.5 million for full year 2017 a figure that accounts for the settlement of litigation claims.

Closing

"Agility thanks its shareholders, customers, employees and partners for a strong year. The company continues to grow in emerging markets logistics parks, fuel logistics, airport services, and commercial real estate development. The core commercial logistics business is also growing its volumes, despite margin pressure in a tight market. Agility is accelerating its strategy to transform the business through technology and establish its position as the leading digital player in our industry," Sultan said.

Turkish Airlines starts flights to Freetown, its 52nd destination in Africa



KUWAIT: Turkish Airlines, flying to more destinations in Africa than any other airline, marks another milestone in its international expansion with the launch of flights to Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone. With existing services to city-hubs of Accra, Lagos, Bamako, Conakry, Dakar, Abidjan, Cotonou, Douala, Yaounde, N'Djamena, Ougadougou, Niamey, Cape Town, Johannesburg and more, Turkish Airlines now adds flights to Freetown as its 52nd destination in Africa.

Beginning February 24, Turkish Airlines will operate its Freetown flights 2 times per week on Tuesdays and

Saturdays. The services will provide a link between Istanbul Ataturk International Airport and the Lungi International Airport via Ouagadougou. The return flight will also provide a substantial access to passengers departing from Sierra Leone to top global destinations such as London, Dubai, Paris, Frankfurt, Muscat, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Brussels, Berlin, Amsterdam, Vienna, Asmara, Hamburg, Tel-Aviv, Dusseldorf, Milano, and to a lot more via Turkish Airlines, the airline that flies to more countries and international destinations than any other in the world.

Gulf Bank closes on National, Liberation Day holidays



KUWAIT: On the occasion of the National and Liberation day, Gulf Bank's management conveys its sincere congratulations to the Amir of the State of Kuwait His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and to the people of Kuwait.

Gulf Bank's head office and all branches will be closed on Sunday and Monday, 25 and 26 February, while will resume its regular working hours on Tuesday, 27 February 2018.

During the holiday, Gulf Bank will continue to provide round-the-clock access and assistance through customer contact center at 1805805. Customers can also conduct their daily transaction needs through Gulf Bank's mobile banking application as well as through the Bank's Interactive Teller Machines 'Gulf Live', which will be available from 10AM to 3PM at Jabriya, South Surra (Al-Salam), Al-Adan and Fahaeel branches. 'Gulf Live' gives customers the opportunity to communicate with a teller through a live video session and to conduct everyday transactions typically available through branch tellers.

AUB to reward Al-Khair long-term deposit customers

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank (AUB) announced the success of the promotional campaign, 'Your Investment is Worth Gold' which was launched by the Bank to reward Al-Khair long-term deposit customers, in attracting more new customers in addition to the large and positive turnout received from customers. The campaign offers AUB's customers the chance to enter the draw to win one of 10 valuable gold prizes upon opening an Al-Khair long-term deposit for a period of one year or more. The first prize of the draw is valued at 1 kilogram of gold, the 2nd prize at a half kilogram of gold and the 3rd prize at a quarter kilogram of gold. The 4th to 10th prizes are all valued at 100 grams of gold.

each. The campaign will run until February 28, and the draw will take place and winners will be announced on 20 March 2018.

The campaign offers customers one chance to enter the draw for every new KD 10,000 deposited for a period of one year, 2 chances when maintained for 2 years and 3 chances when maintained for 3 years. On this occasion, AUB's Head of Branches Amer Najem said, "We at AUB are very pleased with the considerable success achieved by this campaign."

Moreover, Al-Khair deposits from AUB offer one of the best investment opportunities that are Shari'ah compliant. Now customers can choose a longer tenor for higher profit return reaching a very competitive rate of 2.75 percent yearly for the three-year Wakala Fixed deposit. The deposit offers three investment terms (1 year, 2 years and 3 years) with a minimum deposit of KD 10,000. Profits are deposited to customers' accounts via monthly payments. Furthermore, the Al-Khair long-term deposit can be broken and customers can withdraw their funds before the maturity date, subject to relevant terms and conditions applied.

Ooredoo launches StarGo game

KUWAIT: In celebration of Kuwait's national holidays and embracing the digital age and delivering products that keep up with the needs of customers; Ooredoo Kuwait announced the launch of its new application, the first augmented reality game in Kuwait, StarGo, available on iOS and Android. The game will allow the users to roam around Kuwait collecting stars and redeem them into Nojoom points with any of Ooredoo's Nojoom Rewards Program partners. Established in 2012, the Nojoom Rewards Program is now revamped to match the Kuwaiti lifestyle, which is modern and youthful and is on the same pace of the international trends.

Ooredoo's newly revamped Nojoom rewards pro-

gram offers its customers the best exclusive discounts. Accessible to all Ooredoo customers, the program offers members free upgrades, vouchers and discounts from a large variety of partners, ranging from service providers, retailers and hotels, and airline companies. In addition, customers use their Nojoom points to buy products from the Nojoom Online Rewards Store.

The revamped Nojoom rewards program has many new benefits which include transferring Nojoom points to friends and family, donate Nojoom points for charitable causes, and redemption for partners' voucher which are readily accessible through nojoom.ooredoo.com.kw or the My Ooredoo app.

Launching the revamped app and the game are yet another milestone for Ooredoo Kuwait's plans to further embrace digitalization and solidify its position as a leading local telecom service provider. StarGo app is available for free on both Android and iOS operating systems.



Discounted packages for Burgan Bank's premier female customers



KUWAIT: Burgan Bank is delighted to announce that its Premier female customers can now save 15 percent on their yoga classes at The Yoga Center in Kuwait. Ensuring optimal value for all segments through affordable and exclusive offers at popular locations, the latest deal is designed to accommodate the needs of its women premier customers.

Delivering on its mission to enhance its customers overall experience while adhering to current demands, Burgan Bank seeks to provide its premier segment with the opportunity to indulge in a leading practice that will benefit both their health and lifestyle. This discount will be provided on two packages: the 12 classes package which will cost KD 100 after the discount, and the 30 class package which will be offered at an attractive price of KD 204. The Yoga Center is conveniently situated in Kuwait City's Al-Soor Street, in Burj Jassim Tower in the basement floor.

Established in 1977, Burgan Bank is the youngest commercial Bank and second largest by assets in Kuwait, with a significant focus on the corporate and financial institutions sectors, as well as having a growing retail, and private bank customer base. Burgan Bank has majority owned subsidiaries in the MENAT region supported by one of the largest regional branch networks.

The Bank has continuously improved its performance over the years through an expanded revenue structure, diversified funding sources, and a strong capital base. The adoption of state-of-the-art services and technology has positioned it as a trendsetter in the domestic market and within the MENA region. Burgan Bank's brand has been created on a foundation of real values - of trust, commitment, excellence and progression, to remind us of the high standards to which we aspire. 'People come first' is the foundation on which its products and services are developed.

Technology

Top experts warn against the 'malicious use' of AI

'AI may pose new threats, or change the nature of existing threats'

PARIS: Artificial intelligence could be deployed by dictators, criminals and terrorists to manipulate elections and use drones in terrorist attacks, more than two dozen experts said yesterday as they sounded the alarm over misuse of the technology. In a 100-page analysis, they outlined a rapid growth in cybercrime and the use of "bots" to interfere with news gathering and penetrate social media among a host of plausible scenarios in the next five to 10 years.

"Our report focuses on ways in which people could do deliberate harm with AI," said Sean O hEigeartaigh, Executive Director of the Cambridge Centre for the Study of Existential Risk. "AI may pose new threats, or change the nature of existing threats, across cyber-, physical, and political security," he told AFP. The common practice, for example, of "phishing"—sending emails seeded with malware or designed to finagle valuable personal data—could become far more dangerous, the report detailed.

Currently, attempts at phishing are either generic but transparent—such as scammers asking for bank details to deposit an unexpected windfall—or personalized but labor intensive—gleaning personal data to gain someone's confidence, known as "spear phishing". "Using AI, it might become possible to do spear phishing at scale by automating a lot of the process" and making it harder to spot, O hEigeartaigh noted.

In the political sphere, unscrupulous or autocratic leaders can already use

advanced technology to sift through mountains of data collected from omnipresent surveillance networks to spy on their own people. "Dictators could more quickly identify people who might be planning to subvert a regime, locate them, and put them in prison before they act," the report said. Likewise, targeted propaganda along with cheap, highly believable fake videos have become powerful tools for manipulating

or threaten critical infrastructure to gain ransom.

Autonomous weapons

"Personally, I am particularly worried about autonomous drones being used for terror and automated cyberattacks by both criminals and state groups," said co-author Miles Brundage, a researcher at Oxford University's Future of Humanity Institute.

The report details a plausible scenario in which an office-cleaning SweepBot fitted with a bomb infiltrates the German finance ministry by blending in with other machines of the same make.

The intruding robot behaves normally—sweeping, cleaning, clearing litter until its hidden facial recognition software spots the minister and closes in. "A hidden explosive device was triggered by proximity, killing the minister and wounding nearby staff," according to the sci-fi storyline. "This report has imagined what the world could look like in the next five to 10 years," O hEigeartaigh said. "We live in a world fraught with day-to-day hazards from the misuse of AI, and we need to take ownership of the problems."

The authors called on policy makers and companies to make robot-operating software unhackable, to impose security restrictions on some research, and to consider expanding laws and regulations governing AI development. Giant high-tech companies—leaders in AI—"have lots of incentives to make sure that AI is safe and



Powerful tools for manipulating public opinion

public opinion "on previously unimaginable scales".

An indictment handed down by US special prosecutor Robert Mueller last week detailed a vast operation to sow social division in the United States and influence the 2016 presidential election in which so-called "troll farms" manipulated thousands of social network bots, especially on Facebook and Twitter. Another danger zone on the horizon is the proliferation of drones and robots that could be repurposed to crash autonomous vehicles, deliver missiles,

Twitter bots, fabricate evidence, and propagate dubious articles and conspiracy theories.

"If you know what it is like to walk in the shoes of someone who is actively trying to deceive you, it should increase your ability to spot and resist the techniques of deceit," said Sander Van Der Linden, director of the university's Social Decision-Making Lab. "We want to help grow 'mental antibodies' that can provide some immunity against the rapid spread of misinformation," she added. The psychological theory behind the effort is called "inoculation".

Researchers at Cambridge last year found that briefly exposing people to tactics used by fake news producers can act as a "psychological vaccine" against bogus anti-science campaigns. A pilot study conducted with teenagers in a Dutch high school used an early paper-and-pen trial of the online game, and showed the perceived "reliability" of fake news to be diminished in teens that played compared to a control group. —AFP

Play 'fake news tycoon' to combat misinformation

LONDON: Trolling, impersonating, demonizing: these are just some of the behaviors encouraged in a new online game launching Tuesday in which young players become "fake news tycoons"—to counter growing misinformation. Researchers at Cambridge University have teamed up with a Dutch media collective to develop an English version of the game aimed at inoculating people against the spread of so-called fake news.

The exercise encourages participants, who are tasked with building audiences for their imaginary fake news sites, to stoke fear, anger and mistrust by simulating the manipulation of online content. In the game they choose polarizing falsehoods to publish, cultivate an army of

Electric car market raises cobalt prices

LONDON: Cobalt is hitting historically high prices fuelled by the automobile industry, which needs the rare metal to make light and durable electric batteries. The price per ton of cobalt rose to \$82,000 on the London Metal Exchange in mid-February, its highest level since it began tracking the commodity in 2010, and has almost tripled in value since the beginning of 2016. However, the rapidly growing demand has not yet peaked, according to Darton Commodities, which specialises in the sale of cobalt.

"The market is expected to remain in surplus supply until forecasts of exponential growth in electric vehicle sales materialize around 2020," said its annual report. "During 2017, lithium-ion batteries used in portable consumer electronics still consumed around 72 percent of total cobalt consumed in (lithium-ion batteries)," Darton Commodities said, adding however that this share was likely to decline because of growth in the auto sector.

Electric start

"Electric cars came of age in 2017, with sales rising 51 percent," said analysts at Macquarie, noting that the halting of state subsidies for sales in China could slightly slow this growth in 2018. In the rest of the world, more and more countries are planning to phase out petrol and diesel cars, prompting manufacturers to devise strategies to meet the demand for electric vehicles.

In December, Swiss mining giant Glencore said it was in discussion with Volkswagen and Tesla to supply them with cobalt, according



PARIS: Flow Machines project developers group research director Francois Pachet (R) poses with music composer Benoit Carre head of the artistic group SKYGGE prior to the presentation of the multi-artist album "Hello World" in Paris on January 10, 2018. "Hello World" was composed with artificial intelligence tools developed by the Flow Machine project team. — AFP

beneficial," the report said. Another area of concern is the expanded use of automated lethal weapons.

Last year, more than 100 robotics and AI entrepreneurs—including Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk, and British astrophysicist Stephen Hawking—petitioned the United Nations to ban autonomous killer robots, warning that the digital-age weapons could

be used by terrorists against civilians. "Lethal autonomous weapons threaten to become the third revolution in warfare," after the invention of machine guns and the atomic bomb, they warned in a joint statement, also signed by Google DeepMind co-founder Mustafa Suleyman. "We do not have long to act. Once this Pandora's box is opened, it will be hard to close." — AFP



KOLWEZI, DR Congo: A man watches a conveyor belt loaded with chunks of Raw cobalt after a first transformation at a plant. — AFP

to managing director Ivan Glasenberg, quoted by Bloomberg. While the high-profile electric vehicle manufacturer Tesla remains discreet about its raw material needs, news reports said that Volkswagen's negotiations with cobalt producers had broken down. In response to the demand, Glencore announced in late 2017 that it planned to produce about 63,000 tons of cobalt by 2020, compared with 27,000 tons in 2017.

before other mines could be brought online to compensate for such a decline in production. In addition, more than half of cobalt mining production came from the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2017. The country, faced with soaring demand, plans to increase its metal tax fivefold, which is sending shockwaves through the sector.

Market fever?

Some believe the daily price set by the LME may have overestimated cobalt's potential. The LME price only reflects part of the true value of the metal, since cobalt exchanges are largely outside the public market. Financial investors, seduced by the potential for electric vehicles, may have induced a market fever, argued Darton Commodities. "In 2017, average annual cobalt prices more than doubled, owing to strong demand from consumers, limited availability of cobalt on the spot market and an increase in metal purchases by investors," the US Geological Survey said in its annual report. — AFP

Singapore invites cyber attacks to strengthen defenses

SINGAPORE: Hundreds of hackers have targeted Singapore's defense ministry—but the attacks were at the government's invitation in an unusual attempt to strengthen cybersecurity. Authorities said yesterday they had paid out US\$14,750 in prize money to the best of the 264 so-called "white hat" hackers—specialists who seek to break into networks to check for vulnerabilities—involved in the project.

The program, which ran from mid-January to early February, was introduced after an embarrassing breach last year which saw hackers steal personal data from about 850 military servicemen and other employees from a defense ministry web portal. It was run with cybersecurity network HackerOne, which specializes in coordinating "bug bounty programs" in which hackers are rewarded for spotting weaknesses in computer systems. The top hacker in the contest was a Cyber Security Manager from Ernst and Young Singapore who gave his name only as Darrel and goes by the online moniker "Shivadagger". He was awarded US\$5,000. A total of 97 vulnerability reports were submitted from 34 participants during the program, with 35 reports deemed valid, according to the defense ministry. David Koh, the defense ministry's cybersecurity chief, hailed the project. — AFP

Germany's Bosch snaps up US commuter app

FRANKFURT AM MAIN: The world's largest car parts supplier Bosch leapt into ride-sharing services yesterday, announcing the takeover of US commuter carpooling startup Splitting Fares. Stuttgart-based Bosch did not say how much it paid for the Detroit-based firm, also known as SPLT, which was founded in 2015. In a market that has been dominated in recent years by taxi-style giants such as Uber and Lyft, Bosch said it saw

development opportunities in the sector for companies to offer ride-sharing services to their employees.

"Companies and commuters have been seen as less of a priority" so far, it said in a statement. Bosch believes travel to and from work is a "growth market", part of a far-reaching shift in personal transport powered by the mobile internet. Bosch is following in the footsteps of other German giants like BMW or Daimler, who have been exploring ride-sharing for much longer. The move yesterday fitted into a wider re-organization at the company to create a "Connected Mobility" division with more than 600 employees, offering everything from ride-sharing to real-time safety alerts for drivers. — AFP

Samsung to launch new flagship smart phones

SEOUL: Samsung Electronics will unveil its next flagship smartphones—the Galaxy S9 and Galaxy S9+ — on Sunday, after it reported record profits in recent weeks and its vice chairman was released from prison. Samsung, the flagship subsidiary of South Korea's biggest business group, suffered a humiliating recall of its Galaxy Note 7 device in 2016, and was then embroiled in the sprawling corruption scandal that brought down ousted president Park Guen-hye. But its Galaxy S8 smartphone was a consumer and critical success and financially it has gone from strength to strength.

It enjoyed net profit of more than 42 trillion won (\$39 billion) last year, and this month Lee Jae-yong, heir to the founding family, was released from prison after most of his bribery convictions were quashed on appeal. Its latest phones will be launched at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona, with teasers



GANGNEUNG: People visit a virtual reality exhibit at a Samsung house Gangneung Olympic Park during the Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympic Games. — AFP

suggesting the major changes will be to the camera. Visually they will resemble their predecessors but with a slightly smaller bottom bezel, a spate of leaks suggest.

Both Galaxy S9 and Galaxy S9+ have upgraded cameras with variable apertures capable of shooting up to 960 frames per

second for "super slow-motion" videos, according to tech website WinFuture, and stereo speakers. Samsung has also revamped the series' internals with faster processors, it added, and their batteries—the issue at the heart of the Galaxy Note 7 debacle—can last a full working day. —AFP

Health

The Tasmanian tiger was just another marsupial in a pouch

One of the clearest examples of 'convergent evolution' in mammals

SYDNEY: Australia's ill-fated Tasmanian tiger looked like any other marsupial when born but assumed dog-like features by the time it left the mother's pouch, scientists said yesterday in shedding new light on its puzzling evolution. Using CT technology, they scanned all 13 juvenile specimens of the extinct carnivore found in collections around the world, developing the first 3D models of the tiger from birth to adulthood.

"These scans show in incredible detail how the Tasmanian tiger started its journey in life as a joey that looked very much like any other marsupial, with robust forearms so that it could climb into its mother's pouch," said Christy Hipsley, from Museums Victoria. "But by the time it left the pouch around 12 weeks to start independent life, it looked more like a dog or wolf, with longer hind limbs than forelimbs."

Kangaroos, koalas, wombats and the Tasmanian devil are also marsupials. The animal's resemblance to the dingo, a wild dog native to Australia, is one of the clearest examples of "convergent evolution" in mammals, which is when two unrelated species evolve to look very similar. The Tasmanian tiger last shared a common ancestor with dogs and wolves around 160 million years ago.

Effective technique

Once ranging throughout Australia and New Guinea, *Thylacinus cynocephalus* disappeared from the mainland around

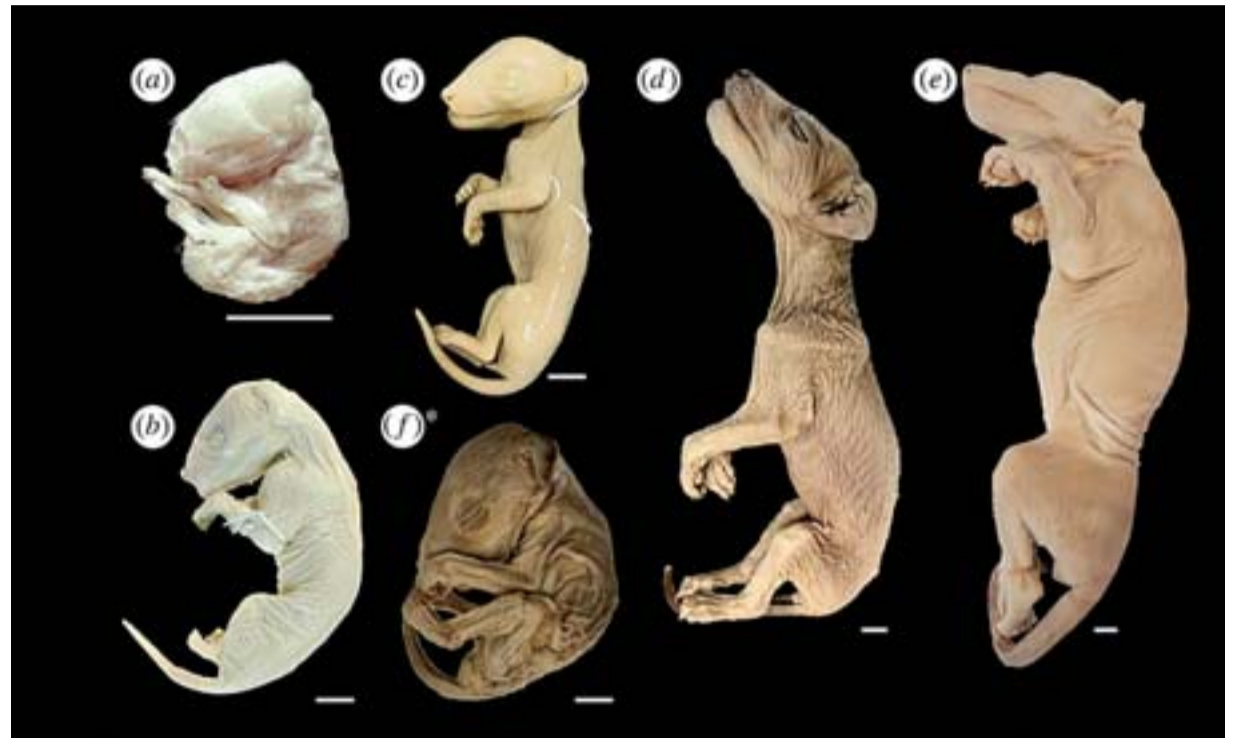
3,000 years ago, likely due to competition with humans and dogs. The remaining population—isolated on the island of Tasmania—was hunted to extinction in the early 20th century. The last known individual died at Hobart Zoo in 1936. The juvenile specimens, representing five stages of postnatal development, were scanned using non-invasive X-ray micro-CT scanning technology to create high-resolution 3D digital models.

University of Melbourne professor Andrew Pask said it was an incredibly effective technique to study the skeletal anatomy of the specimens without causing any damage. "This research clearly demonstrates the power of CT technology. It has allowed us to scan all the known Thylacine joey specimens in the world, and study their internal structures in high resolution without having to dissect or cause damage to the specimen," he said. "By examining their bone development, we've been able to illustrate how the Tasmanian tiger matured and identify when they took on the appearance of a dog."

Museums Victoria had received many requests over the years to dissect its Tasmanian tiger specimens still in the pouch, but always refused. "This new technology enabled us to do research and answer many questions without destruction of the sample specimens," said its senior curator of vertebrate zoology, Kathryn Medlock. The study was published in the journal Royal Society Open Science. —AFP



The power of CT technology



This handout document obtained yesterday from the Royal Society shows thylacine pouch young gross morphology: from a litter of four specimens from Charles university (a), from Museums Victoria (b), one of two aged specimens (c), an individual from the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (d), the largest known thylacine pup from the Australia Museum (e) and (f), one of two documented specimens determined to be another species in this study. —AFP

Dementia clearly linked to chronic boozing

PARIS: Chronic heavy drinking is a major risk factor for all types of dementia, especially early onset of the disease,

according to a study published yesterday in The Lancet Public Health. Researchers examining more than 57,000 cases of early-onset dementia in France found that well over half were either alcohol-related, or accompanied by an additional diagnosis of alcohol abuse.

Overall, alcohol use disorders were associated with a three-fold higher risk of all types of dementia. Alzheimer's and

other forms of dementia are said to be premature before the age of 65. Previous research was inconclusive on the effect of alcohol on cognitive health. Some studies have shown a possible benefit of light-to-moderate drinking, while others have found that heavy drinking boosts the risk of dementia.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines "chronic heavy drinking" as more than 60 grams of pure alcohol—six or

more standard drinks—a day for men, and in excess of 40 grams per day for women. For the new study, researchers combed through medical records of more than one million adults in France diagnosed with dementia from 2008 to 2013. The link with alcohol was statistically unmistakable, leading the authors to suggest screening, brief interventions for heavy drinking, and alcoholism treatment to help reduce cognitive decline.

"The link between dementia and alcohol use disorders ... is likely a result of alcohol leading to permanent structural and functional brain damage," said lead author Michael Schwarzer, a scientist at the Translational Health Economics Network in Paris. Alcohol use disorders are also associated with high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, and heart failure, which may in turn increase the risk of vascular dementia, he said in a statement. —AFP

CLINIC

PAGE

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What's On

Moroccan breakfast at Palms Beach Hotel



Enjoy delicious Traditional Moroccan Breakfast at the Palms Beach Hotel and Spa, every day from 8 am-12 pm. The Tagine Restaurant set-menu offers authentic dishes to give customers a true Moroccan breakfast experience. Indulge yourself in a delicious combination of textures and flavors that feature freshly baked Moroccan bread & pastries, varieties of mouthwatering tagine, authentic Hareera soup, pastilla and more. To complete the Moroccan feel and ambience of the morning, guests can enjoy Moroccan mint tea.

LOYAC holds special concerts for National anniversaries



In collaboration with NCCAL, LOYAC's Academy for Performance Arts (LAPA) organized a concert on the occasion of celebrating the national anniversaries for the Arab Heritage Choral led by maestros Nisreen Nasser and Yousif Para at Abdul Hussein Abdul Redha Theatre. Speaking on the occasion, the head of LAPA's music department, Nisreen Nasser said that the concert attracted a large audience and was held for the second year with the aim of linking children with their country's history and musical heritage. Nasser added that a large number of schools in Kuwait were racing to join the Arabic heritage choral to have their students practice singing in classical Arabic. She added that admission to the choral is open from the age of eight and that there is a special class for each age category.



Pakistan Sports Association Kuwait organizes 3rd Blood Donation Drive



Pakistan Sports Association Kuwait, a well known sports organization in Kuwait, organized its 3rd Annual Blood Donation Camp on Friday at Kuwait Central Blood Bank in Jabriya. A large turnout of its members & associates turned up with enthusiasm honoring the occasion and donated the blood. HE Ghulam Dastgir, Ambassador of Pakistan to Kuwait was the Chief Guest of the event. He was briefed on different stages the donated blood goes through, how it is preserved and how a bot-

tle of donated blood can save up to 3 lives. He also commended the efforts of reaching to masses with a great message and achieving a large turnout for such a great cause. He stated "I am delighted to see such a well-organized, disciplined and successful blood donation camp by Pakistani community organized by Pakistan Sports Association Kuwait. He congratulates and appreciated the efforts made by Pakistan Sports Association in this noble cause of blood donation. Dr Umar Javaid Community wel-

fare Attache from Pakistan Embassy also visited blood donation camp and appreciated PSA Team for its remarkable services in noble cause of blood donation. He mentioned such activities develop the soft image of Pakistan and Pakistani community. He assured all support from Embassy of Pakistan in the future as well. People from other nationalities including Kuwait, India, Bangladesh, Egypt, Syria, China, Malaysia and Indonesia visited the camp and donated blood for the noble cause.

TIES announcement

You are cordially invited to another session of our series about some prophets and messengers of Allah (SWT) today, February 22nd at 7:00 pm. In this class, we will examine some physical and spiritual benefits of patient perseverance during afflictions, discover

how Ayyoub (Job) reacted to the loss of his wealth, health and family, and learn why he is famous for being the 'Paragon of Patience.' We will also study his reply given to his wife's suggestion that he beseech Allah (SWT) to relieve his suffering, and her reaction to that, as well as Ayyoub's brothers' accusation and how he reacted. Finally, we will discuss the illness that Ayyoub suffered from and some Fatwas (religious rulings) about it. From these events we will deduce a lot of lessons of paramount significance in our lives today. All are welcome.

Bhavan's SIS' triumphant Annual Day 'SRISHTI 2018'



Bhavan's Smart Indian School celebrated its maiden Annual day 'Srishti 2018'. A rainbow of colors unfurled in the invocation dance performance of our enthralled students, ending with a tenacious note among the assemblage after the formal lighting of the ceremony. An ardent rendition by the choir groups of French and Hindi dispelled the feel to not only admire the familiarized songs but to be serenaded going beyond borders.

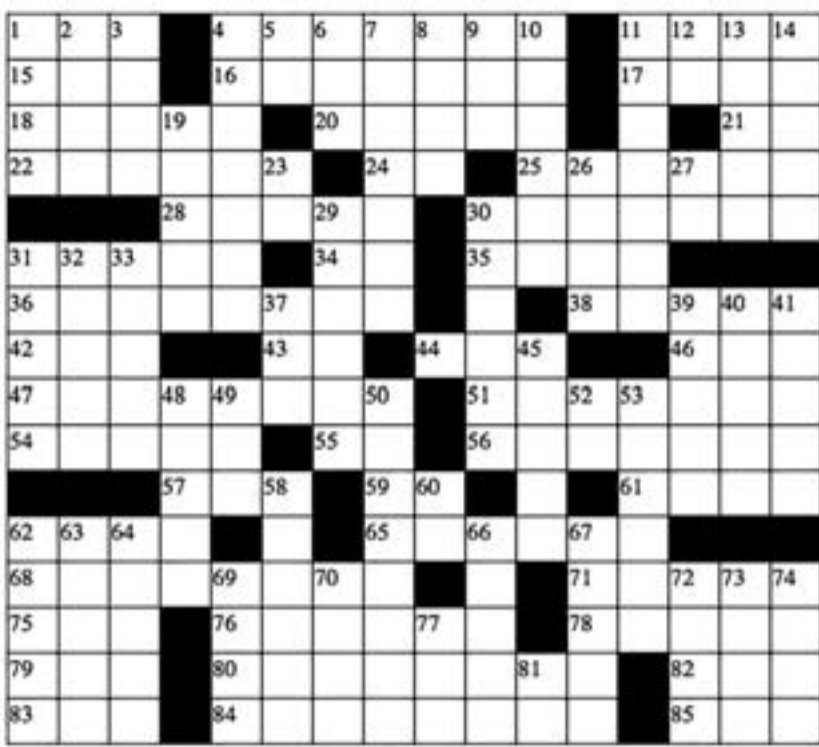
The accomplishments in the name of Annual Report was brought to fore by Principal Mahesh Iyer, Smart Indian School revealing all the treasures that prettified the castle of Smart Indian School during the academic year 2017-2018 through students who acted as News Readers. The amalgamation of skits, dance, singing and musical band under the canopy of a cultural program took the audience in a journey of unfolding happiness through myriad of sentimentality that life offers in the passage of our existence to the spellbound feel of loving life in the end.

The theme behind every performance

was stupefying and jaw-dropping. It was all on - the cherubic first grade students' skit performance on happiness, seraphic portrayal of honesty by Grade 2, surprisingly selfless presentation of sacrifice by Grade 3, electrifying depiction of courage by Grade 4, jarring display of gender equality by Grade 5 through a mesmerizing mime, witty witness of wit a portrayal of appreciation by Grade 6 and confounding battle of life (virtue) depicted by Grade 7 followed by the love to pursue carpe diem in every day's life by Grade 8. The Arabic department's skit and dance was noted for its feet tapping number and the magical quality of life driven through encouragement. The memento presentation took a special turn to monumentalize each and every holder to forever bring the moment down the memory lane. The culmination of human values ended with respect towards the disabled was portrayed as the Indian National Anthem was brought forward through sign language. Hence the program ended on a jubilant note as the guests and the audience left the auditorium reminiscing their good old days.

Stars

CROSSWORD 1842



ACROSS

1. South American wood sorrel cultivated for its edible tubers.
4. A member of the radical movement that instituted the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution.
11. An elementary particle with a negative charge and a half-life of 2 microseconds.
15. Tag the base runner to get him out.
16. A state in the southeastern United States on the Gulf of Mexico.
17. Of the color of black ink.
18. A member of a Turkic people of Uzbekistan and neighboring areas.
20. Very close in friendship or affection.
21. A very poisonous metallic element that has three allotropic forms.
22. The fifth month of the civil year.
24. A state in New England.
25. (computer science) A unit for measuring computing power.
28. Any of several tall tropical palms native to southeastern Asia having egg-shaped nuts.
31. Of great mass.
34. A highly unstable radioactive element (the heaviest of the halogen series).
35. The content of cognition.
36. Impossible to use.
38. American Revolutionary patriot.
42. The sense organ for hearing and equilibrium.
43. A radioactive element of the actinide series.
44. A flexible container with a single opening.
46. The square of a body of any size of type.
47. A cut of pork ribs with much of the meat trimmed off.
51. An esoteric or occult matter that is traditionally secret.
54. An elongated leather strip (or strip of similar material) for binding things together or holding something in position.
55. A white metallic element that burns with a brilliant light.
56. United States filmmaker (born in 1928).
57. A humorous anecdote or remark.
59. A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali earth group.
61. (prefix) In front of or before in space.
62. Same in identity.
65. An Asian river.
68. Someone from whom you are descended (but usually more remote than a grandparent).
71. Affect with wonder.
75. The basic unit of money in Albania.
76. Of or relating to Papua or its people or language.
78. Submerged aquatic plant having narrow leaves and small flowers.
79. American prizefighter who won the world heavyweight championship three times (born in 1942).
80. Extinct order of jawless vertebrates.
82. An informal term for a father.
83. A spacecraft that carries astronauts from the command module to the surface of the moon and back.
84. A great raja.
85. A period marked by distinctive character or reckoned from a fixed point or event.

DOWN

1. An onerous or difficult concern.
2. Money in the form of bills or coins.
3. A French abbot.
4. Capital and largest city of Indonesia.
5. A silvery ductile metallic element found primarily in bauxite.
6. A compartment in front of a motor vehicle where driver sits.
7. Of a leaf shape.
8. Strong woody fibers obtained especially from the phloem of from various plants.
9. The United Nations agency concerned with international maritime activities.
10. An embroidered rug made from a coarse Indian felt.
11. Lead someone in the wrong direction.
12. An organization of independent states to promote international peace and security.
13. Similar to the giraffe but smaller with much shorter neck and stripe on the legs.
19. United States anatomist who identified four pituitary hormones and discovered vitamin E (1882-1971).
23. A brittle silver-white metalloid element that is related to selenium and sulfur.
26. Any wingless blood-sucking parasitic insect noted for ability to leap.
27. In operation or operational.
29. Derived from or containing calcium or lime.
30. Seizure of a vehicle in transit either to rob it or divert it to an alternate destination.
32. Not elegant or graceful in expression.
33. 100 aunar equal 1 krona.
37. A room or establishment where alcoholic drinks are served over a counter.
39. At full speed.
40. Money extracted as a penalty.
41. A right or legal share of something.
45. Spanish architect who was a leading exponent of art nouveau in Europe (1852-1926).
48. East Indian cereal grass whose seed yield a somewhat bitter flour, a staple in the Orient.
49. A federal agency established to coordinate programs aimed at reducing pollution and protecting the environment.
50. Indonesian wild pig with enormous curved canine teeth.
52. A small pellet fired from an air rifle or BB gun.
53. The Creator.
58. A Spanish female Gypsy.
60. A colorless and odorless inert gas.
63. Administer an oil or ointment to.
64. United States neoclassical architect (1847-1909).
66. A narrow headband or strip of ribbon worn as a headband.
67. The capital and largest city of Yemen.
69. (trademark) A tinned luncheon meat made largely from pork.
70. Large elliptical brightly colored deep-sea fish of Atlantic and Pacific and Mediterranean.
72. An officer who acts as military assistant to a more senior officer.
73. A Chadic language spoken in northern Nigeria.
74. Tropical starchy tuberous root.
77. The month following March and preceding May.
81. A person who announces and plays popular recorded music.

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Aries, you may be approached by someone who's in a very harsh situation: you figure out where the problem started and help resolve it. Domestic and work fronts are fiery, supporting volatile energy within both: sit back and watch as this plays out without you in it. A hobby could take on a serious, professional role: a hobby that creates revenue is indicated here. A revealing discussion with like-minded people lends power to thoughts and theories. The stars are aligned to create acceptance of your quirks and unique perspective: constructive progress is made as you open your mind to more effective methods of operating. A material surprise arrives this evening that you didn't expect: take your time with this and figure out how to use it for the best, Aries.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Taurus, opportunities to make money are abundant now: this is connected to real estate or other things relating to domestic items. By watching closely, you figure out what people want and get it for them, thus creating happiness for them and income for yourself. This is a good time to keep your eyes open for new, organic additions to your diet. You get a pat on the back from those around you: enjoy the well deserved praise! You feel connected to those you work and live with and there is a strong sense of tranquility indicated. Your comfort and peace of mind is grounded in those you are closely associated with: hopes, dreams and wishes fuel your activities. You enjoy something new this evening when you shop in a place you have never visited, Taurus.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Gemini, you've entered a phase of change and movement: questioning the beliefs and memes you were raised with could be strongly indicated. This is a good time to discard and let go of anything that doesn't create productive forward progress. You're more concerned with what is at the core of your being than all the frills. Tendencies to be controlling could be present: this could be apparent with a desire for sexual activity. Your interests lie in the healing arts and organic growing where you could find investment opportunities. Memories of someone on the other side is heavy on your heart. Make an effort to stay on the positive side as the energy for this is available. A nice evening with beloved animals could bring joy and perhaps surprises, Gemini.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Cancer, your mind is clear and focused on finding answers to a puzzling situation: getting to the heart of the matter is easy as you know the right inquiries to make. You're not shy today as you pull back the layers of a secret: take time to come to the correct conclusions. You hate conflict but you don't run from it later when someone asks sensitive questions regarding someone you love. You have entered a cycle of feeling like a fit within your living or work situation after struggling with this for some time. You could see an opportunity to prosper in a surprising area of endeavor: revisit your decisions at a later date as things unfold. You have just exactly the right words when you address a group that could represent a charity or governmental effort, Cancer.



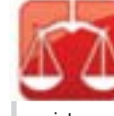
Leo (July 23-August 22)

Leo, the energy of enjoyment and entertainment is prominent: dancing, drinking, eating or perhaps shopping, spas and gambling are indicated. Single lions, you're interested in finding chemistry and sexual compatibility. Married or attached leos desire more warmth and intimacy in your current relationship and do whatever it takes to create this result. Fiction in books or film could be just the thing to help you escape the pressure of the day. You ponder what the world would be like without disease and war, wondering what you could do about this. A friend asks for your help in unraveling a very intimate, upsetting situation: you may not be of any help with this. Keep an eye on yourself as you step out with friends for some fun this evening, Leo.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Virgo, a strong sense of family and belonging begins with the new cycle you've entered. You have a desire to be taken care of and, in return, you long to take care of others. Memories of long ago seem to linger and you could feel melancholy. A strong interest in real estate could lead to a new investment in this area for personal or business purposes. An intimate, close relationship is on the way: be wise in your decision regarding this and any other new connections you may decide to make. This is a good window of time to reconsider and re-evaluate the associations and affections you share. You're empathic to those around you: this evening could reveal a secret admirer you would never have dreamed of, and you should take care not to hurt feelings, Virgo.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Libra, someone makes it clear that your ways aren't the right ways. You resist confrontation because you realize it's just not worth it: this person isn't an important part of your life. You down to earth logic works well to solve a problem friends ask you to help with. You're overwhelmed with being thankful for your life and home, the simple things in life mean a great deal to you. You could find it hard to control your urge to splurge on unhealthy food: a day off sometimes does more good than harm! If you encounter blocks in working with others, you could manage the project on your own with ease. The evening brings a visit from someone you love: this could be a special dinner with a person you have not seen in a very long time, Libra.



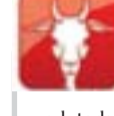
Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Scorpio, your priority and focus is your family and other close relationships. You're committed to creating prosperity and a legacy for down the road: thoughts of life and death seem to be top of mind just now. New bonds are formed, others strengthened and others, still, are broken: this is all for the best and creates what you need to move forward. Someone important makes their feelings known and you agree. You're more comfortable in your skin: this will continue if you allow it. Some partnerships work, others don't but you're on the road to finding someone new to make money with. A definite need to break away and have fun is full force: romance is indicated here. The best of food and desert is yours tonight as you join friends visiting from out of town, Scorpio.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Sagittarius, against your will, you find yourself the center of attention when a tough project is completed. Financial gain is strongly indicated and could be a result of this finished project: there could also be another assignment from this same client. The energy feels right at work and you could be up for a promotion and salary increase: an earlier inquiry you made about another job could bring results now. You speak your mind without hesitation or fear. An angry person could try to make you seem wrong later today: your work is meticulous and in perfect order. An opportunity for a quick getaway presents itself. Your natural tendency to put everyone else first is changing: you now consider the protection and consideration of your well-being, Sagittarius.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Capricorn, an unusual mood is prevalent today. Something unexpected provides a surprise you like very much. You could find yourself far away from work today as you succumb to the lure of fun and games. Someone secretly wishes you would give them a second chance at being friends. You finally understand something that's been a thorn in your side for a long time: this knowledge sets you free! Energy flows smoothly among the team as you work to get an assignment off the ground. Your tendency to daydream threatens to take over but duties demand that you keep your thoughts focused and your feet planted firmly on the ground: great results are just around the corner. Do what you know is right when push comes to shove later this evening, Capricorn.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

Aquarius, your wants and not your needs tempt you: focus on what you have committed to and just do it. Daydreams of future and possibly past events keep you disconnected and fighting a mid-week slump. Your desire for an active sexual life could be related to needing to feel that you have control over things or you are wanting to be loved. This could also be referring to strong interest in real estate or monetary investment. Your curiosity about the cosmos and the energy generated by the planets increases. You take center stage in a professional setting: your job and the attention it requires bring great satisfaction. Doing something fun later with enjoyable people could find you at a restaurant you have been wanting to try for quite some time, Aquarius.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Pisces, your people skills soar as you work with teams or groups to organize a certain event. There could be passionate clashes with someone regarding a very delicate topic: this issue may represent a strong challenge to something you have always believed. You may feel uncomfortable with a certain circumstance, as though someone has put you in a bad position you disagree with. It is possible to comprehend what someone is saying: guard against over analyzing and tearing apart things you can't change and focus on where you can make a positive difference. Strong efforts to create harmony and fairness goes a long way this evening: share yourself and your true feelings with several close people who are good listeners with fairness in mind, Pisces.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Old TV Shows 1

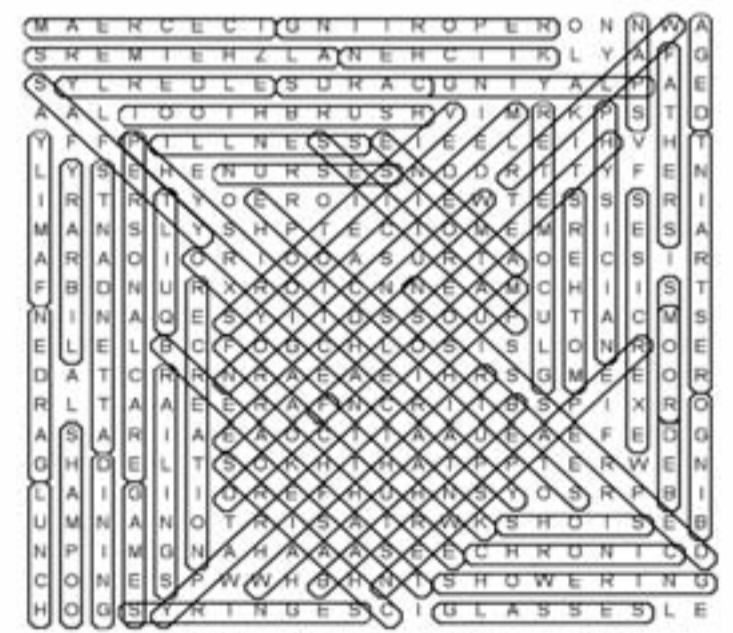
Find and circle all of the old TV shows that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell the name of an additional old TV show.



- | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| ALICE
BEN CASEY
BEVERLY HILLBILLIES
CHIPS
CANNON
CAPTAIN KANGAROO
DOBIE GILLIS
DONNA REED
DR. KILDARE
EMERGENCY
FLIPPER | FLYING NUN
FUGITIVE
GOMER PYLE
GOOD TIMES
GREEN ACRES
GREEN HORNET
HOWDY DOODY
I SPY
IRONSIDE
JETSONS
KOJAK | L.A. LAW
LASSIE
LOVE BOAT
MAD ABOUT YOU
MAUDE
MEDICAL CENTER
MIAMI VICE
MOD SQUAD
MOONLIGHTING
MURPHY BROWN | ODD COUPLE
PEYTON PLACE
RAWHIDE
RIFLEMAN
RIN TIN TIN
SOAP
ST. ELSEWHERE
TAXI
THREE'S COMPANY
WALTONS |
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Yesterday's Solution

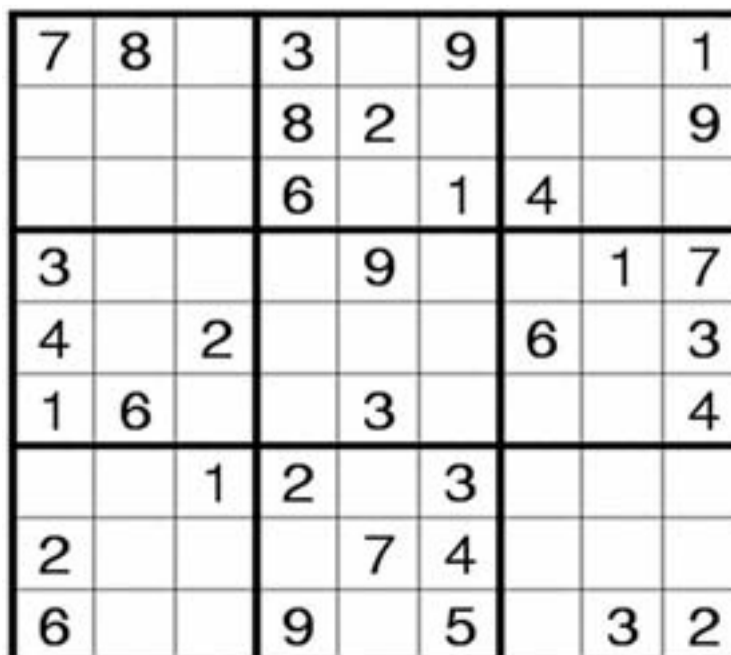
Nursing Home 3



- | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| AGED
ALZHEIMERS
ATTENDANTS
BATHTUB
BEDROOM
BINGO
BREAKFAST
CARDS
CHAIRS
CHRONIC
DEPRESSION
DINING | ELDERLY
ENEMA
EXERCISES
FALSE TEETH
FAMILY
FATHERS
FOOD
FRACTURE
GAMES
GARDEN
GLASSES
GLUCOMETER | ICE CREAM
ILLNESS
KITCHEN
LIBRARY
LUNCH
MEDICATION
MOTHERS
MUSIC THERAPY
NAPS
NEWSPAPER
NURSES
OXYGEN TANK | PARTIES
PERSONAL CARE
PHYSICIAN
PHYSIOTHERAPY
PLAYING CARDS
QUIET
RAILINGS
RECREATION
REPORTING
RESTRAINT
ROOMS
SAFETY | SHAMPOO
SHOTS
SHOWERING
STETHOSCOPE
SYRINGES
TOOTHBRUSH
VISITORS
WALKER
WASH HAIR
WOUND CARE |
|--|---|---|---|---|

The hidden message is: ONLY A LIFE LIVED FOR OTHERS IS A LIFE WORTHWHILE

Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution



Berlin filmfest offers dark vision of E. European 'drift'

This week's Berlin film festival is turning a wary eye eastward with a series of new movies spotlighting the rise of violent extremism and anti-migrant sentiment in the ex-communist bloc. The filmmakers show a region at a crossroads, divided between old loyalties to authoritarian Russia and forces trying to avert a drift away from the European Union and the West. "They're isolated, don't want to share anything with other countries, they reject liberal values—this is the vision which is gaining strength in former communist countries," said Czech director Jan Gebert, who presented "When the War Comes", a chilling documentary about a Slovak paramilitary group. For three years, from 2015 to 2018, the 37-year-old filmed the rise of "Slovak Recruits" (Slovenski Branci), one of the country's leading far-right organizations. The militia was founded in 2012 by Peter Svrcak, a then 20-year-old archaeology student, who drew up to 200 young middle-class men to join him in the woods and undergo weapons training on the sidelines of their "civilian" lives. The guns they use have been disabled but feel real in the clenched fists of the weekend warriors.

'Slavic blood'

Their ideology glorifies "Slavic blood", ultranationalism, hatred of refugees and foreigners, rejection of Europe and its values and a desire for a strong state on the model of Vladimir Putin's Russia. Their goal? To halt the "invasion" of migrants, fight against "evil" and cure a "sick Slovak society", Gebert said. "It looks like Europe has to take moral lessons again," said Arpad Bogdan, a 37-year-old Hungarian director of Roma origin, who premiered his second feature film "Genesis". The poignant movie focuses on a series of vicious racist attacks against Roma people in 2008-09 in Hungary in which six people including a child were killed.

"Genesis" examines how a tragedy targeting a minority contributes to a rot that is penetrating the entire society. The film is inspired by events in Hungary but "it is not a Hungarian film", Bogdan told AFP, because the violence and "evil" shown in "Genesis" have infected many parts of Europe. This includes countries in the west of the continent, he said, such as Germany, where attacks against asylum seekers spiked

at the height of the refugee influx in 2015-16. "A lot of disturbing things are happening in Europe," the Hungarian director sighed, lamenting the populist, anti-migrant course charted by Viktor Orban, prime minister of Hungary since 2010.

'Tip of the iceberg'

Gebert said much of eastern Europe was gripped by an "atmosphere of fear", with deep anxiety about "terrorism, migration, Brexit, crisis in the EU, war in Ukraine" all feeding the rise of openly xenophobic political movements. "They feel that history is on their side, and feel encouraged by the victory of Donald Trump and the victories of populists" in Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, he said. "They feel that they are not extremist anymore when all these politicians say the same things as they do." He said groups such as "Slovak Recruits" were only "the most visible thing of what is going on in eastern Europe, like the tip of the iceberg" of a movement to ensure that "former communist countries (keep) drifting away from the EU". Bogdan said he had placed his faith in cinema



Czech director Jan Gebert, who presented the film "When the War Comes", a documentary about a Slovak paramilitary group, poses during an interview with AFP during the Berlinale film festival in Berlin. — AFP photo

as a force to shore up a more inclusive version of society. "I would say I'm an optimist as an artist but not as a Hungarian person," he said. "I believe that films can transform society because I think that films are supposed to teach hope, a fresh start. This is something that 'Genesis' is meant to do." — AFP

'Black Panther' toy sales fierce as film opens big

Panther claws, masks and action figures are leaping off store shelves after runaway hit "Black Panther"—the first film in the Marvel universe focused on a black superhero—shredded box office expectations with a massive opening weekend. Toys and accessories linked to the movie, which is also making waves for its strong black female leading roles, have the potential to become an enduring presence in stores, like Spider-Man and other iconic figures, company executives say. Toy tie-ins are a crucial profit driver for movie studios, even if each merchandise opportunity is not massively successful, experts say.

"It is a huge opportunity," John Frascotti, president of US toy giant Hasbro, told AFP on the sidelines of the giant Toy Fair trade show in New York. "We're still in the early days of this, but it certainly has all the indications that it could be over time as successful" as other major franchises in terms of staying power, he said. The movie pulled in an impressive \$242 million in its opening weekend, a record for this time of year following strong reviews. "It's just surpassed expectations," said Mark Robben, marketing director for Funko, which sells Black Panther bobble heads, plush dolls and fashion.

"It's an important movie culturally," Robben said. "That is then translated into people wanting to own a piece of it for their desk or for a t-shirt they're wearing." The film has generated huge enthusiasm within the black community, but also more broadly—many see the strong opening weekend as a sign that audiences will embrace heroes that don't fit the cookie cutter model if the story is well told. "I think it's filling a void, it's serving a need and it will sell accordingly, and not just with African Americans," said Kimberly Mosley, president of the American Specialty Toy Retailing Association. People "are looking for a hero," she said.

Toys don't always boom

"Black Panther" comes less than a year after "Wonder Woman," another big superhero movie that went against the grain, and upended the long-held idea that a female superhero couldn't attract a large audience. But while "Wonder Woman" did well in theaters, the film's toys—made by Mattel—were not especially hot sellers. "There's been a



"Black Panther" items are displayed for attendees at the Hasbro showroom during the annual New York Toy Fair. — AFP photos

trend around movie franchises and not all of them are seeing the uptick in toy sales that they used to see," said Michelle Chidoni, vice president of global brand communications at Mattel.

Chidoni said the Wonder Woman offerings in its "Super Hero Girls" series performed well. The character's long-term value had been enhanced by the movie and fur-

ther boosted by the availability of the movie on streaming services. "The toy doesn't always perform with the theatrical release like it used to," she said. "Sometimes it's now performing better when it goes on Netflix, or when it streams, when it's more available to the mass consumer."

Hasbro came under scrutiny in the most recent quarter after reporting a steep drop



An exhibitor shows "Black Panther" items to attendees at the Hasbro showroom.

in fourth-quarter revenues connected to its movie licensing business that raised questions about whether the "Star Wars" juggernaut was losing its luster. But Frascotti said the figures for merchandise linked to last year's "The Last Jedi" looked worse by comparison because the company launched the tie-in products early. That strategy had made sense in 2015 with "The Force

Awakens," given the significant anticipation for the first big release in the franchise in many years. Frascotti said "Star Wars" nevertheless remains "very strong," and the most sought after franchise in entertainment, and that the company would release toys with a shorter lead time ahead of future movies. — AFP



An exhibitor organizes "Black Panther" items at the Hasbro showroom.



Black Panther toys are displayed to attendees at the Hasbro showroom.

Sheeran and rising star Dua Lipa set to shine at Brits

Folk-pop hit machine Ed Sheeran went head-to-head with rising R'n'B star Dua Lipa at the Brit Awards in London yesterday, the country's showpiece pop-music ceremony. The ceremony at the cavernous O2 Arena is expected to have a political edge, with many stars due to wear small white roses to highlight sexual harassment in the industry, and to show solidarity with its victims.

Sheeran's album "Divide", a global chart-topper, is on the shortlist for the "British Album of the Year", along with Dua Lipa, grime artist Stormzy, singer Rag'n'Bone Man and hip-hop artist J Hus. In the "British Male Solo Artist" category, Sheeran is also up against Stormzy and Rag'n'Bone Man as well as former Oasis frontman Liam Gallagher and hip-hop singer Loyle Carner.

He is also running against Dua Lipa for the best video award. Singer-guitarist Sheeran, 27, has already been honored in 2018, winning the Grammy Awards for "Best Pop Vocal Album" ahead of Lady Gaga and Coldplay, and "Best Pop Solo Performance" for single "Shape of You". His latest album "Divide" has smashed many records, including on streaming App Spotify, where it received 57 million listens on the day of its release. Dua Lipa, 22, is the latest artist to break through on YouTube, and her single "New Rules" has surpassed one billion views on the video-sharing platform. She is nominated in five cate-

gories, including "British Female Solo artist", along with Paloma Faith, who won the award in 2015, Kate Tempest, Jessie Ware and Laura Marling.

History of controversies

Born in London to Kosovo-Albanian parents, Dua Lipa tried modeling as a teenager before launching her musical career with a series of covers published on YouTube. Her eponymous debut album, released in mid-2017, received rave reviews, with influential magazine NME praising her voice and a sound mature beyond her years. Other categories include "British Group", where the nominees are Gorillaz, London Grammar, Royal Blood, Wolf Alice and The xx and "International Group", which will be fought out between the Foo Fighters, Haim, The Killers, LCD Soundsystem and Arcade Fire.

Budding soul sensation Sampha, who won the coveted Mercury Prize in 2017, is nominated alongside Dua Lipa, J Hus, Loyle Carner and Dave in the "Breakthrough" category. Taylor Swift, Lorde, Bjork, Pink and Alicia Keys have all received nominations for the "International Female Solo Artist" award, with Childish Gambino, Beck, DJ Khaled, Drake and Kendrick Lamar all in the running for the male equivalent.

The Brit Awards have recognized the cream of British pop music since they were first held in



1977, but often attract controversy. Pulp singer Jarvis Cocker invaded a performance by Michael Jackson in 1996 and then-deputy prime minister John Prescott was doused by a bucket of ice water in 1998. This year's nominations have attracted criticism from the Daily Telegraph, which lamented the triumph of the "popular over the interesting, the successful over the plucky, and the beige over the bold." — AFP

Spanish rapper jailed over glorifying terror

The Spanish Supreme Court has upheld a three-and-a-half-year jail sentence for a rapper for a series of lyrics that glorified terrorism and insulted the crown. The court decision on Tuesday left the country split over whether Jose Miguel Arenas Beltran—better known as Valtornyc—was exercising his right to free expression, or whether his lyrics were harmful enough to warrant prison. Supreme Court judges upheld Valtornyc's sentence, saying: "It is enough to read the facts (of the case) to understand the gravity of the expressions used, and appreciate their criminal nature."

Among the lyrics deemed criminal by the court were lines like: "Let them be as frightened as a police officer in the Basque Country" and "the king has a rendez-vous at the village square, with a noose around his neck". The reference to the Basque Country hinted at violence by ETA, the separatist group that for decades staged scores of attacks across Spain that left hundreds of officials and civilians dead. Several people have faced charges and jail terms in Spain in recent years because of song lyrics and tweets, particularly over glorifying terrorism.

Leftwing figures have branded the prosecutions an attack on freedom of expression. But terror victim groups do not want to see violence trivialized. "In a democracy, a song should never lead to three-and-a-half years in prison," said hard-left party Podemos's deputy Irene Montero. Writers' association Pen International also condemned the court's decision. "Freedom of expression can be restricted only in limited circumstances and under strict conditions, which we believe were not met in this case," the group said in a statement.—AFP

Delhi's 'lost' Mughal garden reopens as public park



This photo shows the renovated Sunderwala Burj tomb in Sunder Nursery, a 16th-century heritage garden complex adjacent to Indian UNESCO site Humayun's Tomb, in New Delhi. — AFP photos



The renovated fountain area in Sunder Nursery.



The renovated Sunderwala Burj tomb in Sunder Nursery.

Once-forgotten Mughal garden in the heart of New Delhi reopened yesterday after years of painstaking conservation work, creating a new public park in India's sprawling and smog-choked capital. The 90-acre (36-hectare) garden will be formally opened by the Aga Khan, whose Trust for Culture has helped recreate the classical garden and restore its crumbling 16th-century monuments. Some of the ancient tombs it contains were close to ruin before conservation efforts began around a decade ago, but have now been given UNESCO World Heritage status.

The park is part of the historic complex that surrounds Humayun's Tomb, the recently restored grave of a Mughal emperor that is widely seen as the inspiration for the Taj Mahal. The Mughal dynasty ruled most of northern India from the early 16th to the mid-18th century and were famed for their architectural splendors. Known as the Sunder Nursery, it was used in the early 20th century to propagate trees and flowers for the grand new city built when India's British rulers moved the capital to Delhi from Kolkata.

It remained in use as a government nursery, but the gardens themselves had become sub-

sumed by jungle. When the Aga Khan Trust for Culture first opened offices, they had to contend with cobras nesting in the half-ruined buildings, said general manager Luis Monral. Over the last decade, hundreds of truckloads of construction rubble were removed and 20,000 saplings planted on the site.

Now it combines lakes and pristine tree-studded lawns with Mughal-inspired formal gardens featuring marble fountains and geometric beds of brightly coloured poppies, marigolds and pansies. Project director Ratish Nanda said he hoped the Sunder Nursery would become a green lung for the city and could eventually rival New York's Central Park. "The idea would be eventually to create the largest park in Asia, linking the Sunder Nursery with the Humayun's Tomb complex and the Delhi Zoo," he said.

A Mughal-era Caravanserai that once catered to travellers on the Grand Trunk Road, which ran all the way from Chittagong on the Bangladesh coast to Kabul, abuts the site and could also one day be part of the park, he said. New Delhi already has large amounts of green space but much of it is off-limits to the public—such as an exclusive golf course that takes up swathes of the city center. — AFP



The garden area in Sunder Nursery.



The renovated Lakkarwala Burj tomb in Sunder Nursery.

Bailey out, balloons on top: London Fashion Week wraps up



Burberry's outgoing chief creative officer and president Christopher Bailey greets guests at the end of the Burberry catwalk show on the second day of London Fashion Week Autumn/Winter 2018 in London. — AFP



A model presents a creation from designer Emilia Wickstead.



A model presents a creation from the Roksanda collection.

Christopher Bailey's goodbye as the head of Burberry, Christopher Kane's prints of women having orgasms and flamboyant balloon headdresses were among the highlights of London Fashion Week, which wrapped up on Tuesday.

Bye Bye Bailey

Burberry embarks on a new chapter in its history following Bailey's final catwalk for the quintessential British brand. The 46-year-old, who helped boost the historic company's fortunes, is leaving at the end of the year. He presented a very personal collection—a homage to the LGBT community with designs inspired by the internationally recognized gay pride flag. The favorites to succeed him are Phoebe Philo, who was at Celine, and Kim Jones, formerly at Louis Vuitton, according to trade publications.

Paisley and stamps

Shirts in the collection of J.W. Anderson, Jonathan Anderson's label, were adorned with paisley motifs. Paisley was also a feature for Mary Katrantzou, covering coats and pink-and-gold trousers. Margaret Howell also carried the pattern on vintage-style robes flowing down to the knee, worn with black socks and town shoes. Other motifs included still-life flowers for Preen by Thornton Bregazzi, abstract and minimalist figures for Roksanda and stamps for Temperley London.

All in Pink

Pink triumphed on London's catwalks. The color of the season, peach-coloured "Millennial pink", was on show in the collections of J.W. Anderson, Emilia Wickstead and Molly Goddard. At Nicopanda's show, the pink was more candy-like

and used for racy miniskirts. Roksanda and Jasper Conran opted for a yellow theme—vibrant in the former and with more of an ochre hue in the latter.

So sexy

The women of Fashion Week were independent and willful, proud of their femininity and sensuality... and sometimes super-sexy. Christopher Kane stole the show with a femme fatale little red dress—ultra-short and transparent. The Scottish designer also used prints depicting women having orgasms from the 1972 bestseller "The Joy of Sex".

Frenchman Roland Mouret showed off a range of colorful lingerie and there were plenty of see-throughs and subtle sensuality in the designs of Supriya Lele, Charlotte Knowles and Mulberry.

Unusual accessories

Donut keyrings were spotted at J.W. Anderson, who also had pom-pom like rabbit ears sticking out of jumpers. Britain's Mally Bovan, who was making his fashion week debut, had a particularly eye-catching headdress design composed of red, gold, silver or tiger-skin balloons. Gothic-punk Turkish designer Dilara Findikoglu adorned her belts with antique objects including mini-statues and black-and-white photos. Less fun but more provocative was a creation by Gareth Pugh, a mask made entirely of construction nails.

Clothes you wouldn't wear

Edwin Mohny, a young New York designer and graduate of London's Central Saint Martins school, showed off a giant pink dress in the form of a pink condom entirely covering the top half of the model's body. He is also the man behind "Trumpettes"—stilettos covered in masks of US President Donald Trump. — AFP



Models present creations from the Jasper Conran collection.

Britain's Queen makes surprise visit to London Fashion Week



Britain's Queen Elizabeth II, accompanied by Chief Executive of the British Fashion Council (BFC), Caroline Rush (left) and British-American journalist and editor, Anna Wintour (right), views British designer Richard Quinn's runway show before presenting him with the inaugural Queen Elizabeth II Award for British Design, during her visit to London Fashion Week's BFC Show Space in central London.—AFP Photos

Queen Elizabeth II and fashion matriarch Anna Wintour sat side-by-side on the front row of the catwalk on Tuesday as the British ruler paid her first visit to London Fashion Week. The Queen watched a show by young British designer Richard Quinn, whom she presented with the inaugural "Elizabeth II Fashion Award", which will be presented annually to a new talent in the sector.

Dressed in a duck-egg blue dress and jacket, the sovereign appeared to be occasionally taken aback Quinn's collection, which included intriguing combinations of flowing garments with bright motifs and biker helmets, and leather

dressers with fishnet stockings. "As a tribute to the industry, and as my legacy to all those who have contributed to British fashion, I would like to present this award for new, young talent," said the Queen.

"From the tweed of the Hebrides to Nottingham lace, and of course Carnaby Street, our fashion industry has been renowned for outstanding craftsmanship for many years, and continues to produce world-class textiles and cutting edge, practical designs," she added. Quinn described the occasion as "a bit surreal", adding that he would like to dress future royal family member Meghan Markle, who will marry Prince Harry in May.—AFP



Britain's Queen Elizabeth II presents the inaugural Queen Elizabeth II Award for British Design to British fashion designer Richard Quinn during her visit to London Fashion Week.

Guess co-founder steps aside after groping claims from top model

Paul Marciano, co-founder of fashion giant Guess, is relinquishing his day-to-day responsibilities after model Kate Upton accused him of grabbing her breasts and aggressively kissing her, the company said Tuesday. The 65-year-old Guess co-founder and creative director denies the allegations, but the company's board of directors has commissioned an investigation by outside lawyers into the claims of improper conduct.

"The board of directors and Mr Marciano have agreed that Mr Marciano will relinquish his day-to-day responsibilities at the company, on an unpaid basis, pending the completion of the investigation," Guess said in a statement. Marciano said the company would have his "full cooperation." Following the announcement, Guess shares were down 3.8 percent on Wall Street. Upton, who was once the face of the label, first accused Marciano on Twitter, before detailing her allegations in an interview with Time magazine as the #MeToo campaign against sexual misconduct widens within the fashion industry.

The 25-year-old told Time that after a July 2010 lingerie shoot, Marciano

"forcibly grabbed my breasts and started feeling them—playing with them actually." After she pushed him away, she said he continued to touch her "in a very dominating and aggressive way" and at one point "forcibly grabbed the back of my head so that I could not move and started kissing my face and my neck." A month later on another shoot, she said Marciano repeatedly asked to come up to her hotel room, but that she turned off her phone, locked the door and tried to sleep.

"I was terrified. All I could think was if he was able to get into my room, it would not be good," she said. "The next day, I learned that I had been fired from the shoot. Someone had called my agency to say I had gotten fat and would not be needed on set." Marciano co-founded Guess in 1981 and has been its executive chairman and chief creative officer since 2015. Upton is married to star Houston Astros pitcher Justin Verlander, and is known for appearing on the cover of Sports Illustrated swimsuit editions.—AFP

MONCLER TO UNVEIL MONTHLY 'GENIUS' SERIES AT MILAN FASHION WEEK

Italian outerwear maker Moncler will unveil his strategy for shaking up the world fashion calendar at the Milan Fashion Week opening Tuesday with his high-powered monthly "Genius" series. The brainchild of Moncler, CEO and creative director Remo Ruffini aims to disrupt the traditional twice-yearly rhythm by rolling out collections once a month from a team of eight headlined by Valentino's Pierpaolo Piccioli. All eight, who include Simone Rocha, Craig Green and Kei Ninomiya, will present previews of their collections in Milan, before rolling them out one per month starting in the summer.

For five days after each show, the collections will be sold exclusively by a selected partner online retailer before going on sale at Moncler's network of stores and wholesalers, according to Vogue magazine. Milan Fashion Week, a glamorous pause in the midst of campaigning ahead of Italy's March 4 general elections, will bring together media, buyers and fashionistas led by Armani, Fendi, Versace, Prada and Dolce & Gabbana.

The 64-show extravaganza runs until February 26. Prada promises a star turn on Thursday evening with a show at its new venue in a former distillery converted by architect Rem Koolhaas. Only a select few will attend, as the venue is not yet open to the public. Among designers returning to Milan after an absence will be American Tommy Hilfiger, who will be clos-

ing the week with the final stage of his "TommyNow" series after Los Angeles, New York and London. The revolution that has seen fashion houses present men's and women's collections together is gaining steam, with Salvatore Ferragamo and Roberto Cavalli joining the trend already embraced by Gucci, Missoni, Jil Sander and Antonio Marras.

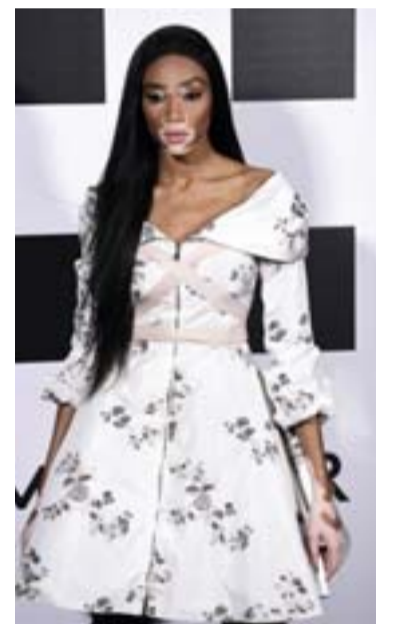
Italy's fashion sector booming

Talent scouts will be on the lookout as up-and-comers Marco de Vincenzo, Arthur Arbesser and Erika Cavallini unveil their collections. Italy's big fashion guns are center stage in the week's exhibition covering the three decades spanning 1971 to 2001 that saw "Made in Italy" conquer the world. The expo, which runs through May 6, explores how Italian fashion was inspired by art, culture and politics over the years.

Last year confirmed the robust health of Italy's fashion sector, which saw growth of 2.5 percent. Turnover for textiles, clothing, leather goods and shoes totaled 64.8 billion euros (\$80.3 billion). Exports were also up 4.3 percent driven by spikes in demand from Asia, with China up 13.5 percent and South Korea up 12.8 percent. Russian demand also surged 12.8 percent.—AFP



British model Naomi Campbell poses upon her arrival to the women's Fall/Winter 2018/2019 collection.—AFP photos



Canadian model Winnie Harlow poses upon her arrival to the women's Fall/Winter 2018/2019 collection fashion show by Moncler.—AFP photos



Japanese musician, producer and designer Hiroshi Fujiwara.



A view of fashion mannequins are seen at a Guess store in San Francisco, California.—AFP photos



In this file photo model Kate Upton walks the runway for the Michael Kors Collection Spring 2018 Runway Show at Spring Studios during New York Fashion Week in New York.

Q-Store: First mega lifestyle department store in Kuwait

By Ben Garcia

Q-Store - located next to City Center in Shuwaikh - is the first mega lifestyle department store in Kuwait with a vast col-

lection of electronics and home appliances, furniture, home decor, carpets, toys and much more. Q-Store is the exclusive distributor and partner of Sedar Curtains in Kuwait, the market leader of curtains and furnishings in the Middle East with an amazing range of curtains, wallpapers, blinds and accessories. Q-Store also has its own brands such as a German bakery (Bäckerei Koln), coffee shops known as Kahve Dunyasi and Bayara Kiosk or Q-Express, which supplies all 16 branches of the Sultan Center with fresh premium dried fruits, nuts and spices.

Group CEO Shahid Khan said Q-Store has everything from home to office needs. "Everything is here! Some products are exclusive to us, like Sedar - we are the exclusive distributor of this brand. We have brought together all the best brands in the world and are distributing them here exclusively. The showroom is all about lifestyle. We

have electronics, we have furniture, but it's not just about having the best products - it's a lifestyle concept, complete with solutions," he said.

For the first time in Kuwait, Q-Store is raffling a Tesla electric car. It is considered to be the safest and most exhilarating all-electric sedan on the road. "For every KD 5 spent at Q-Store, customers get a chance to enter the draw for a Tesla," he said.

Khan also explained the business range and concept of Q-Store. The company has three main businesses - food, non-food and BMC. "BMC provides security solutions, like at universities and airports," Khan said. The food division includes restaurants like Kahve Dunyasi (Coffee of the World) from Turkey, with eight branches now in Kuwait. "We also have Mai Dubai, bottled water that is distributed all over Kuwait. Fruiti Juice is also owned by Q-Store. We brought a bakery concept from Germany and created our own brand -

Bäckerei Koln (Bakery of Cologne). We are now the trusted bakery product provider for all the 16 branches of the Sultan Center in Kuwait, and we are happy to serve our customers," he said.

"For non-food, we have electronics - this concept is known to many now in Kuwait, thanks to other companies that introduced it, but the best thing about our electronics division is that we have the latest technology that is not available in their stores. So, we are different - we have unique products here that are not available there. We look for quality; we want something special and unique for our customers," he said. A levitating stereo speaker, the thinnest TV screens and camera drones are a few of the unique products available at Q-Store.



Lifestyle | Feature



This photo shows people walking into a mosque in Taipei. — AFP photos



Photo shows clocks showing the daily prayer schedule for Muslims at a mosque in Taipei.



Muslims praying during Friday prayers at a mosque in Taipei.

TAIWAN LOOKS SOUTH FOR MUSLIM TOURIST DOLLARS

From halal fried chicken to hot springs hotels with prayer facilities, Taiwan is adapting its traditional tourist draws to woo Muslim visitors as Chinese arrivals dwindle. Mainland tourist numbers have slid dramatically as China relations deteriorate, with speculation authorities there are turning off the taps to pressure Taiwan's Beijing-skeptical government. Taiwan is now looking to boost relations with 16 south and southeast Asian countries, as well as Australia and New Zealand—what it calls its “southbound policy”—and is seeking more visitors from the region.

“I learned that Taiwan, Taipei especially, is actually Muslim-friendly,” he told AFP outside a mosque in the capital, where he had gone to pray.

“I learned that Taiwan, Taipei especially, is actually Muslim-friendly”

Cultural pride

Thailand, South Korea and Japan are among Asian nations that have been tapping into the Muslim travel market, which has been fuelled by growth in cheap flights and a booming middle class in countries such as Indonesia. Fried Chicken Master, a small shop not far from Taipei's Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall—one of its most famous landmarks—has adapted to the trend, selling a halal version of the snack, which is also a Taiwanese favorite.

“We hope to be able to serve tourists, exchange students, or Muslims living in Taiwan. As Taiwanese we are proud of our food,” said Louis Tsai, a spokesman for Super Qin Group, which owns the shop. A trip to one of Taiwan's hot springs resorts tops most tourists' to-do lists and Gaia Hotel in mountainous Beitou, best-known for its natural pools, provides guest rooms with prayer direction signs and prayer schedules. Minibars there are alcohol-free and cakes do not include pork-based gelatin. To obtain its halal certification, the hotel kitchen created a separate cooking and dining area. “Since the number of Chinese tourists has decreased, and southeast Asia is quite a sizable market with many Muslims, this is an area we have to actively pursue,” Jack Chang, Gaia's operations manager, told AFP.

Fair comparison?

On a recent visit to Istanbul, Taipei mayor Ko Wen-je met with Turkish lawmakers who want to fund the building of a third mosque in Taipei, according to the city government. Taiwan is also trialling visa waivers for



A general view of the lobby at the Gaia Hotel, which caters to tourists from Muslim-dominant countries, in the Beitou district near Taipei.

Thailand, Brunei and the Philippines. It eased visa rules last June for six southbound countries, including Indonesia, India, and Cambodia. But some doubt whether the growth in Muslim tourism is enough to offset the lost income from the mainland. Chinese visitor numbers dropped by a fifth last year, dropping since Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen came to power in May 2016.

Beijing still sees self-ruling democratic Taiwan as part of its territory and relations have become increasingly tense as Tsai refuses to acknowledge it is part of “one China”. Salahuding Ma, secretary general of the Chinese Muslim Association, the largest halal certification body in Taiwan, says it is hard for the new wave of tourists to compete with their Chinese counterparts. “The Chinese have wealth and spend lavishly,” he told AFP. “If you are talking about southeast Asia, which countries can even compare?” he asked.

Ma says Taiwan would have greater success if it overcame the language barrier by encouraging students from “target countries” to work in the island's tourism sector. For Thai visitor Bunlapho, her lack of Chinese and limited English proved an obstacle when trying to find transportation to Taroko National Park on Taiwan's east coast, famous for its deep gorges and sweeping cliff faces. “I couldn't figure out how to get there,” she lamented. “Next time, I'll come back.” — AFP



Muslims praying during Friday prayers at a mosque in Taipei.

That has meant a growing number of tourists from Muslim-majority countries, such as Malaysia and Indonesia. Taiwan welcomed 30 percent more visitors from southeast Asia in 2017. Taoism is the prevalent religion in Taiwan, with Muslims making up less than two percent of the population, but tourists who spoke to AFP said they were surprised how welcome they felt. “I really like the natural scenery in Taiwan and the people are very nice,” said Ashma Bunlapho, 40, a Muslim tourist from Thailand on a five-day trip with her husband.

She found halal restaurants using Google Maps, including a shop selling beef noodle—a Taiwanese favorite—and felt free to pray where she chose, taking her mat with her to famous nature spots including Sun Moon Lake in central Taiwan. Malaysian tourist Dean Idris said halal eats were easily accessible as he visited Taipei with his two young children, taking in the zoo, a night market, and a historic district close to the city's best-known tem-



Two Halal certificates on display at the reception are at the Gaia Hotel.



A chef preparing a Halal meal at the Gaia Hotel, which caters to tourists from Muslim-dominant countries, in the Beitou district near Taipei.



Jack Chang, operations manager of the Gaia Hotel which caters to tourists from Muslim-dominant countries, speaking at the hotel in the Beitou district near Taipei.



A sign indicating the direction of Mecca at a Muslim prayer room at the Gaia Hotel in the Beitou district near Taipei.



A Halal meal on display at the Gaia Hotel.



Prayer facilities inside a room at the Gaia Hotel for visiting Muslim customers in the Beitou district near Taipei.

Lifestyle

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2018



People gather in the streets of Nice for the 134th edition of the Nice Carnival in Nice, southeastern France. The 134th carnival runs from February 17 until March 3, 2018, and celebrates this year the 'King of Space'. — AFP



Afro-Colombians dance 'Fuga' (Traditional dance) during the 'Adoraciones al Nino Dios' celebrations.

Have a merry *Afro-Colombian* Christmas, in February

Afro-Colombian communities in the southwest of the Latin American country are celebrating Christmas, like every year, a little later than the rest of the world. The mid-February festivities are a tradition that dates back to the days of slavery, when their ancestors were banned from marking Christmas at the same time as the country's white landed gentry. For 53-year-old teacher Balmores Viafara, December 25 is "any day," while the Adorations-to give the Christmas celebration its Afro-Colombian name-is the time that "we blacks celebrate by worshipping our God, our way".

At the center of the festivities in the village of Quinamayo is a doll representing the Baby Jesus, carried in a colorful procession through the town. After her mother died eight years ago, Mirna Rodriguez, a 55-year-old midwife, took on the "great responsibility" of looking after the black Jesus. Her job is to ensure it is in perfect condition for the day of the Adoration of the Baby Jesus-the third Saturday of February, when Christmas is celebrated-with music, fireworks, theatre, dance and colorful costumes. The rest of the year, it lies wrapped in several layers of protective cloth at the top of her wardrobe.

Dance of escape

One of the most popular dances is the traditional "fuga"-the dance of escape-which sees the townspeople commemorate their ancestors by imitating the shuffling of shackled slaves. "It's danced with the feet dragging, because the chains that bound their feet did not allow them to make other steps," said Olmes Larrahondo, a local choreographer. The entire town of Quinamayo, in the Pacific seaboard Valle de Cauca department, turns out for the annual procession through the streets, which moves from house to house in search of the Baby Jesus.

When the statue is finally discovered, it is ceremoniously carried the rest of the journey by elaborately dressed children and placed for adoration in a crib. "The children take part from when they are very young. And for that reason, I think the tradition will never disappear," said Rodriguez. The party is animated with drink and the rhythms of music and dance brought to the region by African slaves during

the Spanish conquest. Quinamayo, like other black communities in Valle del Cauca that celebrate the Adorations, became established as a town on the edges of old haciendas after the abolition of slavery in 1852.



The Afro-Colombian community, which makes up 20 percent of the population, has suffered exclusion and poverty throughout its history. "For some black communities (the Adorations) have increasingly become an element of resistance," said Manuel Sevilla, an anthropologist at Cali's Javeriana University. He said the Adorations "are a combination of Catholic beliefs and the fruit of evangelization, with rituals coming from Africa." "It's not just a spiritual celebration, but a sort of cultural banner, which is gaining strength," said Sevilla.—AFP

Afro-Colombians hold a basket with 'Nino Dios' (God Child) inside in Quinamayo, department of Valle del Cauca, Colombia. — AFP photos

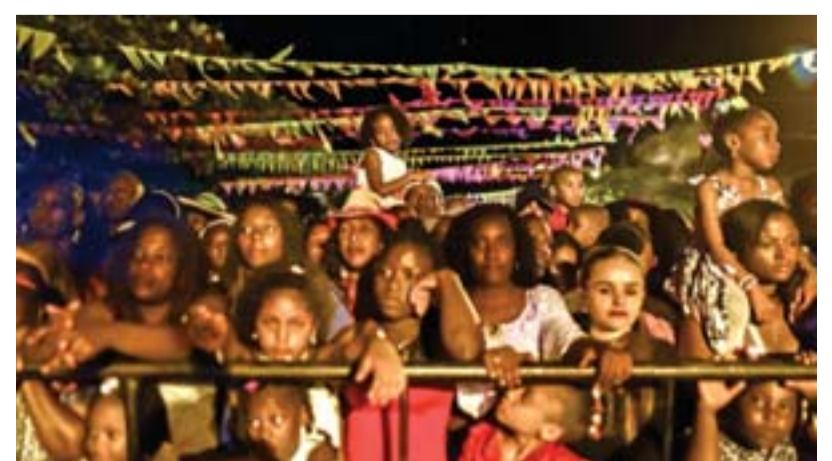
‘ I think the tradition will never disappear ’



A man records fireworks with his mobile phone during the 'Adoraciones al Nino Dios' celebrations.



Afro-Colombian children in costumes take part in the 'Adoraciones al Nino Dios' celebrations.



Afro-Colombians look at the 'Adoraciones al Nino Dios' celebrations.