



17 Gulf Bank announces cash dividend of 9 fils per share



16 Juventus stun Spurs, Man City reach last 8 despite Basel loss



UK rolls out red carpet for Saudi crown prince

MBS: Turkey part of 'triangle of evil' • Drama over Turkish soaps



LONDON: (Left) Britain's Queen Elizabeth II greets Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at Buckingham Palace yesterday. (Right) Britain's Prime Minister Theresa May poses with Prince Mohammed outside 10 Downing Street yesterday. — AFP photos

LONDON/CAIRO/ISTANBUL: Prime Minister Theresa May defended Britain's links to defense and security ally Saudi Arabia yesterday, as Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman met Britain's Queen Elizabeth for lunch at the start of a high profile state visit to London. Photographs posted online showed London taxis displaying advertising graphics welcoming Prince Mohammed, and electronic billboards promoted pro-Saudi messages with the hashtag #anevsaudiarabia.

May defended the invitation and Saudi involvement in Yemen when she was grilled in parliament over why Prince Mohammed was being afforded the red carpet treatment during his three-day visit. "The link with Saudi Arabia we have is historic, it is an important one and it has saved the lives of potentially hundreds of people in this country" due to anti-terrorism cooperation, she told MPs. "Their involvement in Yemen came at the request of the legitimate government of the Yemen, it is backed by the UN Security Council and as such we support it." May said she would raise humanitarian concerns, saying: "We are all concerned about the appalling humanitarian situation in Yemen and the effect that it is having on people, particularly women and children."

Continued on Page 11

Police break up rally over jailed cleric

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: The interior ministry broke up a protest in front of the Iranian Embassy yesterday, where Kuwaiti Shiites had gathered to demand the release of cleric Hussein Al-Shirazi, who was arrested in the Iranian Shiite

holy city of Qom a month earlier. The interior ministry warned that the gathering was not licensed as security men surrounded the embassy. The ministry also denied that permission was given to gather for an hour, adding expats must comply with law and not heed any call to protest.



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Shiites gather outside the Iranian embassy yesterday calling for the release of Iranian Shiite cleric Hussein Al-Shirazi. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Grilling ends in whimper; Amir applauds Khorafi

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: In one of the most lackluster grillings in the history of the National Assembly, the debate of the quiz of State Minister for National Assembly Affairs Adel Al-Khorafi ended without filing a no-confidence motion or even making recommendations. It took only a few hours to finish the questioning, perhaps the fastest in the Assembly, and it centered around two accusations made without any proof or evidence. In a cable he sent to the minister, HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah applauded Khorafi for his professional responses in the grilling. The Amir added the parliamentary procedure epitomized true democracy, wishing the nation success and prosperity.

The grillers - opposition MPs Riyadh Al-Adasani and Adel Al-Damkhi - charged that



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, State Minister for National Assembly Affairs Adel Al-Khorafi, opposition MPs Riyadh Al-Adasani and Adel Al-Damkhi, Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and other MPs are seen during a session of the National Assembly yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Khorafi became minister through a political deal with Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem. They showed tweets on social media saying that Khorafi withdrew from the

National Assembly elections last November in favor of Ghanem, as both were supposed to run from the same second constituency.

Continued on Page 11

Air India gets Saudi nod to fly to Israel; El Al wants the same

NEW DELHI: Saudi Arabia has given Air India permission to fly between New Delhi and Tel Aviv over Saudi airspace, the airline's spokesman told Reuters yesterday, ending a 70-year ban and marking a diplomatic shift. Saudi Arabia does not recognize Israel and lifting the airspace ban would reflect what appears to be thawing ties between Israel and the kingdom. Both are US allies with a shared concern over Iranian influence in the region.

India and Israel have built close ties over the years away from the public eye, largely centered on arms purchases. But under Narendra Modi economic ties have flourished and last

year he made a first-ever visit to Israel by an Indian prime minister. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited India last month, the first such trip in 15 years. Air India plans to operate flights three days a week, and the flight would save two hours of travel time as a result of flying over the Saudi airspace, an Air India spokesman said.

Netanyahu said on Monday that Saudi Arabia had granted Air India permission to fly over its territory on its new routes to and from Tel Aviv, but there was no confirmation from either Saudi Arabia or Air India. Saudi's General Authority of Civil

Continued on Page 11

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Amir attends officers' graduation at Ali Al-Sabah Military College

'Armed forces unbreakable shield that protects Kuwait'



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and top state officials attend Kuwait army's annual graduation ceremony for the 21st batch of officers and 45th group of cadet officers at Ali Al-Sabah Military College.— Amiri Diwan and Defense Ministry photos



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

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday patronized and attended Kuwait army's annual graduation ceremony for the 21st batch of officers and 45th group of cadet officers at Ali Al-Sabah Military College.

His Highness the Amir, also the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, arrived in his motorcade at the ceremony venue where he was welcomed by First Deputy Prime and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant Mohammad Al-Khuder, Defense

Undersecretary Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Commander of Ali Al-Sabah Military College, Major General Badr Al-Awadhi and college chiefs.

The ceremony was attended by Their Highnesses the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, respectively Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, senior state officials, graduates' families and common citizens. After it kicked off with the National Anthem, the college commander, Maj Gen Awadhi, addressed the attending top leaders, namely His Highness the Amir, noting that the

recently feted national days coincided with the 50th anniversary of establishing the military college.

Maj Gen Awadhi expressed gratitude for the college progress to the minister of defense, the chief of staff and other ranking officials who have contributed to developing it. He urged the graduates to maintain allegiance to His Highness the Amir, the homeland, Kuwait, and the military establishment.

The major general pledged to His Highness the Amir that the armed forces would remain the unbreakable shield for protecting dear Kuwait and His Highness.

After the speech conclusion, the activity proceeded with the graduation procedures, followed by a military anthem, then officer Mezaal Al-Shemmari recited poetry of praise for His Highness the Amir, saying in part, "O Sabah the sagacious, we are your men... death for us is something ordinary and we are ready to sacrifice our souls for the homeland." In the end, His Highness the Amir distributed awards to the graduates before the National Anthem was played again. Memorial gifts were also granted to Their Highnesses the Amir and the Crown Prince.—KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is welcomed by top military officials.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah honors a graduate.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is seen with First Deputy Prime and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.



Officer Mezaal Al-Shemmari recites poetry of praise for His Highness the Amir.



Officers perform during the graduation ceremony.



First Deputy Prime and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and top ministry officials pose for a group photo with graduates of the 21st batch of officers and 45th group of cadet officers.



The army's marching band performs during the ceremony.

Local

Kuwaiti women overcame many challenges throughout country's history: Minister

Kuwait marks International Women's Day today

By Meshaal Al-Enezi and Agencies

KUWAIT: The history of women in Kuwait has been full of challenges that they managed to overcome since the inception of women's education in 1937, a government official said yesterday in a statement marking the International Women's Day, which falls today.

Kuwait has been giving women a great deal of care, Minister of Social Affairs and Minister of State for Economic Development Hind Al-Sabeeh indicated. The minister added that despite the obstacles that they faced, Kuwaiti women managed to take the lead regionally and reach considerable positions beyond winning suffrage and the right to run for parliamentary elections, to include economic, cultural and social rights stipulated in the state's constitution.

"Kuwait has manifested its constitution into real life by equally protecting citizens' rights in education, housing, employment, personal freedom, justice and equality," Sabeeh added, noting that Kuwaiti citizens are equal in rights and duties regardless of gender. Sabeeh said Kuwait took the lead in applying the goals of sustainable development and international women-related regulations. She added Kuwait also established the supreme council for family affairs to take special



Minister of State for Housing Affairs and Minister of State for Services Affairs Dr Jenan Boushehri attends a parliament session at the National Assembly in Kuwait City on January 31, 2018.

aspirations, much more remains to be accomplished, especially in terms of eliminating all forms of gender segregation, an activist said yesterday. "Although Kuwaiti women succeeded in various senior positions as ministers, lawmakers, undersecretaries and directors, chances to attain leading positions are still low and have not yet reached the 50/50 percentage recommended by the UN," Wa'ad Al-Kandari, head of the women's committee affairs and board member at Kuwait Public Relations Society, said in a statement yesterday marking International Women's Day. Kandari further called for allocating more parliamentary positions for women to allow at least 10 to become lawmakers, adding that women's organizations used to be more active before Kuwaiti women won their political rights.



Women make up 45 percent of workforce

Salem Al-Sabah expressed her appreciation of Kuwaiti women great achievements in various fields at the local and international levels. Kuwaiti women have always been proactive in achieving extraordinary achievements, which are topped by history with pride and appreciation, Sheikha Latifa said. The strong presence of Kuwaiti women in various fields of work and their many successes reflects the great trust that society has given them, she added. Sheikha Latifa praised the continuous support provided by the State of Kuwait to its citizens without distinction or discrimination and the constant concern to women empower in society.

She stressed Kuwait's keenness to support women in all international events and forums, pointing to the crucial role played by Kuwaiti women in the United Nations Commission on the status of women, especially after the membership of this important committee dealing with women's issues in the world.

She expressed her sincere congratulations to the Kuwaiti women on this occasion, stressing the importance of investing the gains and successes in strengthening efforts and work to confirm their presence in international forums.

According to the latest data released by the Public Authority for Civil Information, the Director General of the Authority, MUSAED AL-ASSOUSI, said that the percentage of female employment among Kuwaiti workers in the public and private sectors rose to 45 percent in 2017, 38 percent in the government sector and seven percent in the private sector, compared to 44.6 percent at the end of 2012, 33.9 percent in the government sector and 10.7 percent in the private sector. Director of Capital Educational Zone at the Ministry of Education Badriya Al-Khalidi stressed Kuwait's interest in educating Kuwait women and elimi-



KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs and Minister of State for Economic Affairs Hind Al-Sabeeh attends a parliament session at the National Assembly in Kuwait City on January 31, 2018. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

nate illiteracy. In the last 10 years, Kuwait marked decline in illiteracy rates among women thanks to the educational policy followed by the State of Kuwait, she said. The role of Kuwaiti women increased during the last two decades, in addition to the great attention given by the government by encouraging them to progress, develop and participate in all aspects of life, especially taking scientific thinking as a way of life to support development plans.



Mai Ibrahim Al-Mesad, Project Manager of the maritime section of the Jaber Al-Ahmad Causeway, poses for a picture at the construction site in Kuwait City on March 4, 2018.

care of families in general and women in particular. "Kuwait also established special centers to discuss the problems of women subjected to family violence," she concluded.

Women's rights

National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem meanwhile urged the legislative and executive authorities to work harder to complete the architecture of women's rights in all fields. The path of Kuwaiti women's rights has not come to an end in May 2005, when they gained their political rights, Ghanem said in a press statement marking the International Women's Day. The date must act as a take-off point to complete the women's rights system on all scenes, he noted.

The Speaker revealed that the parliamentary Women



Shaimaa Othman Al-Najdi, access network and rollout senior director at Ooredoo Kuwait and the first female engineering to work in Kuwait's telecommunications industry, poses for a picture in her office in Kuwait City yesterday.

and Family Affairs Committee is working on a host of legislations related to women's rights. He stressed the leading role of countrywomen through decades, since the pre-oil era to the present, saying that together with youth, they are the cornerstone of any development vision in the country.

More remains

While Kuwaiti women have achieved many of their



Kuwaiti female chef, 'Chef Meshael', poses for a picture at her restaurant 'LaMeSho' in Mahboula, about 30 kilometers south of the capital Kuwait City, on March 6, 2018.

Remarkable achievements

Kuwaiti women, side by side with Kuwaiti men, fulfilled remarkable achievements "during the distinguished leaps in our country's renaissance," Minister of State for Housing Affairs and Minister of State for Services Affairs Dr Jenan Boushehri said.

Observers of Kuwait modern history recognize great care offered by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Kuwaiti women. Boushehri said in remarks marking International Women's Day (IWD). Upon His Highness's support, women gained some political rights in 2005, namely parliamentary voting, as His Highness was serving as the country's Prime Minister by then, she added.

Women were also named as Municipality Council members and were elected as MPs in parliament in 2009 for the first time in the Kuwaiti history, she affirmed. The women later joined police and judicial sector as they were appointed as deputy general attorneys, beside occupying ranking posts in many other fields, she said. Women also gained further rights in field of housing through Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) as they were allowed to get loans from Kuwait Credit Bank (KCB) according to certain conditions, Boushehri said.

IWD is a great chance for "all of us to recall achievements of the Kuwaiti women and to cherish great support and opportunities offered by our country to women to better serve their nation and contribute to its prosperity and development," she said. Kuwaiti women greatly sacrificed for the homeland, especially during Iraq's of invasion of Kuwait in 1990 as they bravely defended the country, she said.

Women's achievements

Kuwait marks the International Women's Day by highlighting women achievements, under the wise leadership that supported women in various forums. Kuwaiti women's road to recognition was not as easy, when women won full recognition to participate in the country's legislative and political decision. In 2009, Kuwaiti women made a significant breakthrough in their access to the parliament when four women won in the parliamentary elections at the time and became members of the National Assembly.

In this regard, Chairperson of Women's Affairs Committee at the Cabinet Sheikha Latifa Fahad Al-

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Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: The Super Blue Blood Moon rising in the sky in Kuwait City. —KUNA photo

Zain hosts SME customers at its main headquarters in Shuwaikh

Company keen on supporting and nurturing SME/SoHo customers

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading telecommunications company in Kuwait, hosted its Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) and Small Office/Home Office (SoHo) customers from the food and restaurant industry at its main headquarters in Shuwaikh for a whole week. The event witnessed the attendance of the company's Chief Executive Officer Eaman Al-Roudhan and Chief Enterprise Business Officer Hamad Al-Marzouq.

The initiative came as part of Zain's recently launched campaign 'Your Path to Success' for Small and Medium Enterprises and Small Office/Home Office businesses, through which it offers various packages, features and solutions to facilitate and enrich the business market. The company offered its new SME/SoHo customers from the food and restaurant industry the opportunity to present their services and products to Zain employees at the company's main headquarters for a whole week.

Marzouq commented: "our direction today is centered around supporting Small and Medium Enterprises owners, which is an important segment within the Kuwaiti community. Our support as a leading national company comes in line with the overall efforts exerted by both the public and private sectors to support and nurture this segment."

Marzouq added: "we chose this slogan (Your Path to Success) to send an important message; that we are well aware of the important role that Small and Medium Enterprises play in achieving economic and social development, and we want to be their partners in success. For this reason, we were keen on supporting our SME customers through such an initiative to further enrich the sense of innovation within their businesses."

Marzouq further explained: "we organized this initiative to introduce our SME customers who we serve as part of

Zain Business in the food and restaurant industry to our employees. We wish them all the best of luck in their path to success, and we plan to have similar events for our customers from other industries as well in the near future."

The new services Zain recently launched provide many advantages that suit the needs of Small and Medium Enterprises owners, including postpaid voice and Internet packages with devices, international and roaming features, Hosted Collaboration Solution powered by Cisco, Wireless Fixed Broadband powered by Mada, and Google Street View.

Small and Medium Enterprises owners can choose from a wide range of postpaid voice packages that offer free calling within the company, easy control of the company's expenses with the hybrid feature, international and roaming services, as well as access to the latest smart devices, including Samsung DeX, which offers the advantages of the desktop computer through selected Samsung devices with freedom of movement. The company also offers postpaid data packages with Internet devices and smart tablets.

Small and Medium Enterprises and Small Office/Home Office businesses owners can now connect through the unified voice communications (Hosted Collaboration Solution) which enables voice and video communications via cloud based services, enhanced communications and interactions between employees with flexibility and ease through Cisco's industry-leading devices.

Zain also offers the Wireless Fixed Broadband Service, a Point to Multipoint (P2MP) internet connectivity solution for Business and Enterprise customers, which is one of the most popular approaches of wireless communications for companies with multiple destinations and locations.

Google Street View provides a virtual tour of business locations through 360-degree panoramic images stitched



KUWAIT: Eaman Al-Roudhan and Hamad Al-Marzouq are seen during the event.

together, allowing customers to easily take a virtual tour, doubling interest and visits to the desired location.

Zain is aware of the important role private sector companies play in supporting the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), especially that Zain is one of the lead-

ing national companies in the private sector. The new campaign mainly aims at encouraging Small and Medium Enterprises to enhance their businesses by offering them services and solution from the biggest service providers around the world.

AUB organized Omrah trip for employees

KUWAIT: For the third consecutive year, Ahli United Bank (AUB) organized an Omrah trip for employees and their families. The initiative is in line with the bank's wide range of programs that have been developed to reinforce a stronger and more integrated work culture amid a joyful environment.

Naqeeb Amin, General Manager of AUB's Human Resources, said, "The bank's initiative of organizing and sponsoring an Omrah trip for employees is part of our overall commitment towards driving and encouraging more social and religious activities for all employees, whilst

also promoting a strong corporate culture internally." Naqeeb congratulated all employees who have performed their Omrah and promised them with more activities to promote further engagement amongst staff.

Mariam Al-Mudhaf, Head of Employee Relations at AUB said, "This year's Omrah trip included a visit to Madinah as well as a visit to the Qubaa Mosque and Mount Uhud. From the beginning we provided all the necessary facilities and services to ensure the comfort of all participants while performing their religious rituals."

Participating employees thanked AUB's senior management for the overall commitment towards the bank's staff and their families. In addition, they expressed their gratitude and appreciation for all the efforts that went into organizing the Omrah trip, which helped in increasing the number of people wanting to take part in the bank's initiative, especially after the success of the previous Omrah trips organized by the bank.



Local

Kuwait requests maid murder suspects' extradition

By A Saleh and Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Lebanese authorities received on Friday a formal request from Kuwaiti authorities to hand over to Kuwait a Lebanese man and his Syrian wife, who are accused of murdering their Filipina housemaid, a Lebanese judicial source said. The request was delivered to Lebanon's foreign ministry pending referring it to the Lebanese judiciary to decide whether the suspect Essam Assaf and his wife Mona would be handed over to Kuwait or tried in Lebanon as stipulated by Lebanese laws, the sources added.

Oil sector staff

The total number of job vacancies in the oil sector was 1,980 by the end of 2017, high-ranking oil sources said, adding that actual number of jobs in the oil sector would be 17,750 in the 2017-2018 fiscal year budget. The total payroll of oil sector employees in the period of April-December 2017 was KD 980 million, the sources said, adding that Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) managed to save KD 130 million in payrolls, in addition to saving KD 275 million in total operational costs. Moreover, the sources said Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) has exerted many efforts to facilitate the employment of 1,031 employees including 729 newly-graduated citizens to take the company's total employees to 10,402. The sources added that 80.29 percent of KOC's medical staff and 87.6 percent of non-medical staff are Kuwaitis.

Military spending

Statistics published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) about military spending in the Middle East showed that \$148.5 billion was spent in 2017 compared to \$153.9 billion spent in 2016. Informed sources said some countries spend covertly, which might increase the total spending on arms to \$200 billion. IISS added that the abovementioned figures do not cover the entire region, as purchases made by some major buyers such as Qatar and UAE are still unknown. It added that despite cutting its military spending in 2017 to \$76.7 billion, Saudi Arabia remains the largest defense market in the Middle East. According to IISS, Kuwait, Algeria, Bahrain, Oman and Tunisia had to cut military spending and that Kuwait only spent \$5.71 billion, compared to \$9 billion spent by Oman and \$1 billion spent by Bahrain.

Touristic projects

The government has allocated KD 4.3 million for

touristic projects in its 2018-2019 budget, according to official documents. The documents showed that the national tourism development project includes four major projects - a recreational center in Egaila, the Grand Zoo and developing Jahra and Sulaibikhat seafronts and the beaches. The documents said the projects would help the government achieve sustainable development and diversify its sources of income.

Water conservation campaign

The Environment Public Authority (EPA) is preparing to launch a national water conservation campaign at all government facilities such as ministries, mosques, schools, hospitals and clinics by installing special water-conserving fixtures and having them regularly maintained, then comparing consumption rates a month later to those before launching the campaign. Notably, Kuwait is ranked third worldwide in per capita water consumption at 500 liters a day, which is twice the rate in Europe despite the scarcity of water resources, and the fourth worldwide in water desalination as a main source of freshwater.

Safety licenses

Kuwait Municipality Director Ahmed Al-Manfouhi announced cancelling the financial deposit paid by citizens to get safety licenses in private residences. Speaking to reporters after chairing a meeting of the municipality's supreme coordination committee, Manfouhi also praised the new e-construction license system, noting that it had helped accelerate issuance of licenses after digitalizing survey studies. Speaking about the GCC railway project, Manfouhi said technical teams are currently preparing to report to the Cabinet, adding that the municipality has completed adjusting some farm boundaries and contacted relevant authorities to remove two farms obstructing the railway route.

Food authority's budget

Food and Nutrition Authority's Chairman Essa Al-Kandari said the authority requested increasing its budget and that the request is still being considered by the finance ministry. Speaking to reporters after an inspection tour of Ahmadi and the Thaher slaughterhouse, Kandari stressed that the increase of fees collected for services provided in the slaughterhouse were out of the authority's jurisdiction and explained that the authority is only responsible for hygiene conditions, examining livestock and how the animals are slaughtered.

KFSD kicks off 5th Int'l Fire, Safety Conference

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) is holding its 5th International Fire and Safety Conference and Expo titled 'Studies and Researches' at the Kuwait Regency Hotel from March 6 to 8, 2018. The conference includes workshops on firefighting, fire prevention, training, marine, administrative and other studies presented by local and international experts.

Lt Gen Khaled Al-Mikrad, Director of KFSD, said the conference aims to boost the knowledge of staff. "We have chosen the title 'Studies and Researches' due to the importance of science and the academic role in dealing with disasters and crises, especially with the changes and development of dangers," he said during the opening ceremony on Tuesday.

The event is attended by representatives of firefighting departments from GCC countries and international organizations. "As in previous conferences, we invited top experts, academics and decision makers in the firefighting and civil protection fields from various countries to present the workshops and lectures. The attendees will have a chance to exchange experiences and witness the latest international technical solutions. Also, latest studies and scientific researches will be presented during the event," added Mikrad.

As part of the conference, KFSD is holding the Shamel 4 training. "Various institutions and authorities are participating in this training, which aims to strengthen their collaboration when dealing with crises and disasters. This training highlights the strategic cooperation between all the participating public

and private institutions and dealing with disasters with minimum losses," he concluded.

Maj Gen Khaled Al-Tarkait, deputy director general for human resources and development affairs at KFSD and head of the organizing committee, noted that the conference is a great opportunity to review the studies and researches of firefighting and strengthen relations between researchers and scientists from all over the world.

"This conference includes two days of intensive workshops on various certified studies by academic institutions in four fields - firefighting, fire prevention, marine training and administrative studies. Also, the accompanying exhibition displays the latest developments from the field," Tarkait said. Deputy Prime Minister and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh praised the great role and efforts of the KFSD in organizing this event. "We appreciate the work of the firefighters, who risk their lives to save people and properties. We are proud of them for their hard job," he pointed out.

Col Dr Peter Wagner of the Berlin Fire Protection Association, Dr Alexis Konstantopoulos, United Nations Coordinator, Drew Azzara, Dubai Executive Director, Middle East and North Africa of the National Fire Protection Association, Dr Sarah Hahn from the University of Magdeburg, Germany, and Dr Hani Al-Hababi, Head of the Reception Department at the Vehicles and Equipment Department at KFSD spoke during the inaugural session of the conference.

KFSD organized the Shamel 4 drill in Julaiah yesterday, with participation of 12 state departments. Participants trained on how to deal with multiple fires and explosions in oil facilities. The exercise was carried under the patronage of Deputy Premier and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh, and in the presence of Ahmadi Governor Sheikh Fawaz Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, KFSD Director General Lt Gen Khaled Mikrad, as well as members from GCC and Jordanian delegations participating in the conference and exhibition.



KUWAIT: Firefighters participate in the Shamel 4 drill organized in Julaiah yesterday.



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International

THURSDAY, MARCH 8, 2018



Asia giants China, India flex muscles over tiny Maldives

Page 9

Page 9

IS urges Muslims to immigrate to Afghanistan



HAMOURIA: Volunteers from the Syrian civil defense help a man in Hamouria during Syrian government shelling on rebel-held areas in the Eastern Ghouta region on the outskirts of the capital Damascus. — AFP

UN decries 'apocalypse' in Syria

Strikes hit battered Ghouta as death toll hits 800

DOUMA: Syria's regime sent reinforcements to Eastern Ghouta yesterday, tightening the noose around the shrinking rebel enclave hours before a top-level UN meeting on the escalating violence. The blistering onslaught has prompted outrage against the regime, with the United Nations' human rights chief saying the government was orchestrating an "apocalypse" in Syria. The Russia-backed Syrian army and allied militia launched an offensive on February 18 to retake the last opposition bastion near Damascus. They have since taken more than 40 percent of the enclave, waging a devastating bombing campaign that has killed more than 800 civilians. Heavy air strikes battered several key towns in the zone yesterday, as Syria's government dispatched hundreds of pro-government militiamen to the front.

"At least 700 Afghan, Palestinian, and Syrian loyalist militiamen came from Aleppo and were sent late Tuesday to Ghouta," said Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The Britain-based war monitor said the reinforcements were deployed to two main battlefronts on the western side of the enclave, including the town of Harasta.

Government troops yesterday were within firing range of the key towns of Misraba and Beit Sawa, and had taken up positions at the edges of Jisreen and Hammuriyeh. Three civilians including one child were

killed in heavy air strikes on Jisreen yesterday, the Observatory said. That brought the toll in more than two weeks of bombing to 810 civilians, including 179 children. Syria's state television yesterday morning showed a live broadcast of farmland adjacent to Misraba, with columns of smoke emerging from the town's skyline.

'Apocalypse' in Syria

The bombardment has continued despite a one-month ceasefire demanded by the United Nations Security Council more than a week ago. The council will meet behind closed doors yesterday afternoon to discuss the failed truce, after France and Britain requested urgent talks. UN human rights chief Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said the Syrian regime and its foreign allies were already planning their next "apocalypse."

"This month, it is Eastern Ghouta which is, in the words of the Secretary General, hell on earth; next month or the month after, it will be somewhere else

where people face an apocalypse—an apocalypse intended, planned and executed by individuals within the government, apparently with the full backing of some of their foreign supporters," said Hussein. Eastern Ghouta's roughly 400,000 residents have

lived under government siege since 2013, facing severe shortages of food and medicines even before the latest offensive began.

Forty-six aid trucks entered the area on Monday for the first time since the offensive, but had to cut short their deliveries and leave due to heavy bombardment. Nearly half of the food aid could not be delivered and Syrian authorities removed some medical and health supplies from the trucks, the UN said.

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged all warring sides to allow aid trucks to return for a planned second delivery to the enclave's main town of Douma yesterday. Linda Tom, spokesperson for the UN's humanitarian coordination office OCHA in Syria, said the aid

would aim to reach 70,000 people in Douma and would include medical supplies not allowed in Monday's delivery.

Rebels deny talks with Russia

Inside Eastern Ghouta yesterday, AFP correspondents heard warplanes carrying out a barrage of strikes on the battleground towns. Residents in Douma were driving frantically through the streets to escape from bombing zones, with cars brushing by each other in close calls. Yesterday's raids came despite a daily "humanitarian pause" announced by Russia last week that is meant to bring calm to Eastern Ghouta between 9:00 am and 2:00 pm each day.

During that pause, Moscow said, it would guarantee safe passage to civilians and rebels wishing to flee the enclave. No Syrian civilians are known to have used the "humanitarian corridor". The two main rebel groups in Eastern Ghouta—Jaish Al-Islam and Faylaq Al-Rahman—deny that the exit routes or the pauses have been coordinated with them. "There is no communication with the Russians, directly or indirectly," said Wael Alwan, spokesman for Faylaq Al-Rahman. More than 340,000 people have been killed and millions displaced in Syria since the civil war started in 2011 with the brutal repression of anti-government protests.—AFP



Syrian regime sends more forces to Ghouta

Porn star sues US president

LOS ANGELES: The lawyer for porn star Stormy Daniels said yesterday that she had a sexual relationship with Donald Trump and wants to nullify a "hush agreement" so the public can decide "who's telling the truth." Los Angeles lawyer Michael Avenatti filed a lawsuit on behalf of Daniels on Tuesday seeking to toss out the confidential settlement she signed just days before the November 2016 election. Avenatti made the rounds of the morning talk shows yesterday to explain the legal move by Daniels, whose real name is Stephanie Clifford.

Asked on NBC's "Today" show if Daniels had a sexual relationship with Trump, Avenatti immediately replied "Yes." "She believes it's important that the public learn the truth about what happened," he said. "I think it's time for her to tell her story and for the public to decide who's telling the truth." The White House has dodged questions about whether allegations of the affair are true, claiming the matter was dealt with during the campaign. As part of the lawsuit filed with a California court seeking to declare the non-disclosure agreement null and void, Avenatti released a copy of the settlement. It shows that Daniels received a \$130,000 payment from a company known as Essential Consultants LLC in return for her silence.

Using the pseudonyms Peggy Peterson and David Dennison, Clifford and Trump were to sign the agreement, along with Essential Consultants. But Trump never signed it, providing the basis for Avenatti's attempt to have it



WASHINGTON: This combination of file pictures shows adult film actress/director Stormy Daniels (left) and US President Donald Trump in Washington, DC.—AFP

thrown out and release Daniels from her obligations. "It's our position that the entire agreement is null and void because he did not sign it," the lawyer told the "Today" show. He said Daniels would return the \$130,000 if need be. "I think she may have to and she's prepared to do that," Avenatti said. The lawsuit alleges that Daniels began an "intimate relationship" with Trump in the summer of 2006 and that it continued well into 2007.

After Trump won the Republican Party nomination for president in 2016, Clifford sought to share details of her relationship with him with

the media, it said. Trump's attorney Michael Cohen "aggressively" sought to "silence Ms Clifford as part of an effort to avoid her telling the truth, thus helping to ensure he won the presidential election," the document says. On October 28, 2016 - two weeks before the November 8 presidential election—Daniels and Essential Consultants signed the confidential settlement agreement but not Trump. Cohen claimed last month he had paid Daniels \$130,000 from his personal funds but declined to explain why he made the payment or if Trump was aware of it.—AFP

Indonesia Islamic university bans burqas on campus

JAKARTA: An Indonesian state Islamic university faced criticism from Muslim groups and activists yesterday after it banned female students from wearing full-face veils citing fears over the spread of radical ideology on the campus. Indonesia is home to the world's largest Muslim population, the majority of whom practice a moderate form of Islam. But the country has seen a recent rise in more conservative interpretations of the religion, which many see as a threat to its long-standing reputation for religious tolerance and diversity.

The State Islamic University (UIN) in Yogyakarta city, on Java island, said it had 41 students using the full veil, or burqa, who would be offered counseling sessions and ultimately be asked to take off the veil if they wanted to graduate. The Islamic Defenders Front, a conser-

vative group that campaigns against activities it deems un-Islamic, said in a statement the policy "did not make sense" and was in conflict with the country's efforts to preserve diversity.

A women's rights activist decried what she described as a limitation on the freedom of women to wear what they want. "Using full-face veils is a choice and we cannot interfere in their choice and their freedom," said the activist, Lathiefah Widuri Retyaningtyas. University rector Yudian Wahyudi said radicalization, as exemplified by the burqas, undermined learning. "Female students wearing the burqa, and radical groups, they are disturbing the teaching process," Wahyudi said.

"We are putting moderate Islam forward," he said, adding that the policy was a "preventive action to save the students". Students would be allowed to continue using regular headscarves that do not cover the face, he said. A recent survey showed that nearly a fifth of high school and university students support the establishment of a caliphate over the current secular government. The data has alarmed authorities already struggling to contain the growing influence of both peaceful and militant Islamist groups in the world's

International

Jamming of Sinai militants' phones causes outages in Israel and Gaza

Israel, Egypt cooperate quietly against Sinai insurgency

JERUSALEM: Israel and Egypt were working to halt disruptions to mobile phone service after Egyptian jamming against Sinai insurgents caused outages in neighboring Israel and the Gaza Strip, Israeli officials said yesterday. Under President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, Egypt has quietly cooperated with Israel on security in the Sinai, a desert peninsula demilitarized as part of their US-sponsored 1979 peace treaty but where Cairo's forces now operate freely. The jamming appeared to catch Israel by surprise, however, prompting what its communications minister said were talks across the border to resolve what he called a "crisis".

Egypt's military did not immediately comment. Cairo launched a major sweep of Sinai jihadis loyal to Islamic State on Feb 9. Israeli officials said that on Feb 21 Egyptian forces began jamming a range of cellphone frequencies in Sinai, disrupting reception in Israel and Gaza. "We've never seen anything this intensive or protracted. Even the Palestinians have been coming to us, appealing to make it stop," one Israeli official told Reuters on condition of anonymity. Phones had been disrupted as far away as Jerusalem and northern Israel, depending on weather, the official said.

An Egyptian official who also asked not to be identified confirmed electronic warfare was being waged in the Sinai. "Obviously, we want to stop terrorists from communicating," he said. The official denied that Israel was the intended target of the jamming, but he said

some Sinai insurgents were suspected of using smuggled Israeli SIM cards, close enough to the border to link up with Israeli cellphone reception, "which means that we may need to work against a wide range of frequencies". Several Palestinian residents of Gaza, the densely populated enclave on the Egyptian border, told Reuters they had been experiencing problems with phone service.

A source at one of the two Palestinian mobile phone companies said its services were disrupted for a day in the past week in southern Gaza but that the problem had been resolved. Israeli cellphone provider Partner said several hundred of its customers had complained about reception problems, but that its 4G network was working well. Other leading Israeli providers, Cellcom and Pelephone, did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Interviewed by Israel's Army Radio, Communications Minister Ayoub Kara said: "Without getting into details, for the first time in the south we have been experiencing an uncomfortable situation".

But he said understandings were reached "after a very important meeting across the border" on Tuesday, and he believed the disruptions would end within the next three days. Gadi Yarkoni, a mayor representing Israeli communities near Gaza, criticized the Communications Ministry and threatened to sue the

phone companies, saying the failure to fix disruptions "shows disrespect for the residents of the Gaza periphery". The Multinational Force & Observers

(MFO), an international body set up under the Israel-Egypt peace agreement to monitor the Sinai, declined to comment.—Reuters



Some Sinai militants use Israeli SIMs

Kurdish, Arab fighters drop IS fight to defend Syria's Afrin

QAMISHLI: Hundreds of miles away from family and friends facing an attack by Turkey, Kurdish and Arab forces deployed in the eastern Syrian desert against jihadists have become increasingly frustrated. Six weeks into the Turkey-led assault on the Kurdish enclave of Afrin, young men and women are leaving the fight against the Islamic State group in droves to head west to help.

Kurdish militia have formed the backbone of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), an alliance that has successfully expelled IS from much of Syria with the backing of a US-led military coalition. But as news of the battle in Afrin reaches them, the fighters have become reluctant to hunt down jihadists in their last hideouts in Deir Ezzor province. "We're preparing to head to Afrin," SDF fighter Roshavam Qamishlo told AFP on Saturday. The enclave "needs us now more than ever".

He spoke at the funeral of three comrades-in-arms in the northeastern town of Qamishli, where dozens came to pay their respects to those killed in Deir Ezzor. "They should have died in Afrin," he said, as their coffins were displayed in the middle of the crowd, draped in the Kurdish colors of yellow, red and green. Arab fighters, too, have opted to ditch battlefronts against IS to shore up lines of defense in Afrin. On Tuesday, SDF commander Abu Omar al-Idlibi said 1,700 of his fighters—mostly Arabs from northern Syria whose families had sought refuge in Afrin—would be sent to defend the enclave in the coming week.

'All want to go'

Afrin, which is controlled by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) militia, is one of three regions Syria's Kurds hope will be part of a self-ruled federal region in the country's north. Turkey sees the YPG as a "terrorist" group and has bombarded the region with airstrikes and artillery fire since January 20. More than 170 civilians have died in the assault, says the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitor.

Iraq force that beat IS turns to reconstruction

AL QURNAH: Three months ago, Ibrahim Ali was using his digger to smash down defensive embankments built by Islamic State group jihadists in northern Iraq. But after years of digging for victory, he and his comrades have now turned their skills to civilian use: gouging out irrigation channels for farmers in the southern province of Basra. "What I'm doing makes me happy," he said, gelled hair glimmering above his sun-browned face. In 2014, Ali and tens of thousands of others mobilized against IS, in response to a call by Iraq's top Shiite authority, Ayatollah Ali Sistani. They joined the Hashed Al-Shaabi, or Popular Mobilization Units, a paramilitary umbrella organization set up to fight IS. Aged 23 at the time, Ali left his parents and his work as a day laborer in the province of Babylon, south of Baghdad.

As he knew how to operate bulldozers and other heavy equipment, he was assigned to the Hashed's engineering corps, with its slogan: "build and fight". In December, Iraq announced victory over the Sunni extremists of IS, but the Shiite-dominated Hashed was not disbanded. Having proved itself as a formidable force

on the battlefield, the coalition has become popular across the country, including among many Sunnis. It now seeks to become a key political player, putting forward candidates in May elections and playing more of a role in the country's civilian affairs.

'Continuing the fight'

Ali joined other Hashed engineers and drivers heading to Basra—an overwhelmingly Shiite province with more oil resources but poorer infrastructure than any other province. "We started fighting, now we're building, which is also a way to continue the fight," said Kazem Akram, the engineer in charge of Ibrahim's team in the Al-Qurnah district. Further east, along the Iranian border, other Hashed teams are clearing mines, while elsewhere their excavators are building or grading roads. Basra was the first province to see the Hashed launch such projects, but senior officials have said others may be rolled out across the country soon. "The Hashed has a long-term strategy, relying on its personnel: engineers like me, but also doctors, lawyers, all the professionals who joined it," Akram, a father of three said.

Mohammad Karim, 24, joined the Hashed in 2015 after graduating as an engineer in Baghdad in 2015. Unlike many young Iraqis suffering high unemployment, he says he received job offers. But he preferred to enlist in the Hashed. After more than two years on the front, he is now overseeing the renovation of the edges of a



QAMISHLI: Members of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and Women's Protection Units (YPJ) attend the funeral of Kurdish fighters from the Syrian Democratic Forces that were killed in combat against Islamic State (IS) group in Deir Ezzor. —AFP

Ankara however denies the claim and says it takes the "utmost care" to avoid civilian casualties. The offensive has prompted a call-to-arms for the YPG and SDF, and one senior SDF official says "hundreds of fighters from Afrin and who have relatives there have returned to defend" their people. As a result, the US-led coalition declared an "operational pause" to its anti-IS fight in eastern Syria on Monday. US and coalition officials have said they will not get involved in the Afrin fighting and expressed concern it would detract from the SDF's operations against IS.

In addition to reinforcements from IS battlefronts, other fighters have streamed into Afrin from Qamishli, Hasakeh in the northeast and Kobane further west, says Rezan Hedo, an adviser to the YPG in Afrin. Others even travelled from the Kurdish neighborhood of Sheikh Maqsood in the northern city of Aleppo, Hedo said. In Qamishli, another fighter who gave his nom de guerre as Nushin Qamishlo said he would also join the fight on the Turkish border. "We all want to go," said the 25-year-old, who sported a thick beard and whose head was wrapped in a bright blue scarf.



AL QURNAH: A member of the Hashed Al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilization Forces) operates an excavator marked with camouflage paint and the group's insignia in the southern town of Al-Qurnah. —AFP

school in Basra, a port city with more than two million residents. "With the rain, the dirt road was muddy, there was no sewage system and the children had to wade to get to class," he said. The Hashed has stepped into the breach, agreeing with the municipality to take over the job of rebuilding.

Hashed 'here for us'

From his workshop in front of the school, Abou Raed, in his 40s and in charge of 11 people, observes the machines in action. "Basra is Iraq's cash cow; we call it



CAIRO: Photo shows giant election campaign posters supporting Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi in the upcoming presidential election in central Cairo. —AFP

the Mother of Oil, but we don't even get the most basic services," he said. "The authorities never come here, but the Hashed, which has already spilled its blood for Iraq, is here for us."

Basra prides itself on having given up more "martyrs" in the fight against IS than any other province. Posters line the roads and monuments stand in the villages to commemorate those who have fallen in battle. And despite the fact that the battle is over, the Hashed still has tens of thousands of members.—AFP

UN-backed tribunal rejects bid to acquit Hezbollah suspect

LEIDSCHENDAM: Judges at a UN-backed tribunal yesterday threw out a bid to acquit an alleged Hezbollah member of any role in the 2005 assassination of ex-Lebanese prime minister Rafi Hariri. The chamber at the Special Tribunal for Lebanon "finds that the prosecution has provided a sufficiency of evidence upon which it could convict" Hussein Oneissi, presiding judge David Re said. "Application for his acquittal is therefore dismissed," Re added. The judge stressed though the court "could still acquit Mr Oneissi at the end of the trial" if the prosecution has not proved the charges "beyond reasonable doubt".

The prosecution last month concluded its case against Oneissi, and three other suspected Hezbollah members, all being tried in absentia in the court in the Netherlands. Before opening the defense case, lawyers for Oneissi, 44, had argued the five charges against him should be dropped as the prosecution had failed to provide sufficient evidence. The judges agreed much of the evidence against Oneissi, much of which is based on records from mobile phone networks and SIM cards used in the attack, was circumstantial.

But "the number of coincidental actions is such that the trial chamber has sufficient evidence from which it could convict Mr Oneissi of his involvement in the attack on Mr Hariri," judge Janet Nosworthy said. Hariri, who was Lebanon's Sunni Muslim prime minister until his resignation in October 2004, was killed in February 2005, when a suicide bomber detonated a van packed with tons of explosives next to his armored convoy on the Beirut seafloor.

Another 21 people were killed and 226 injured in the assassination, with fingers pointing at Syria which had long been a power-broker in the country. "The assassination of Mr Hariri was obviously a carefully planned and rehearsed event requiring ... military precision," said Re. —AFP

A record number of women register to run in Lebanon poll

BEIRUT: A record number of women are among nearly 1,000 candidates who have registered to stand in Lebanon's first legislative elections in nine years, state media reported yesterday. A total of 976 people announced their candidacies for 128 parliamentary seats before registration for the May 6 poll closed late Tuesday, the state-run National News Agency said. They include 111 women, the NNA reported, citing the interior ministry which manages elections.

That marks a sharp increase compared with the previous legislative election in 2009 when just 12 women were among 706 candidates who took part. Among the female candidates are high-profile journalist Paula Yaacoubian, civil society activist and first-time candidate Nayla Geagea, and lawyer and one-time presidential candidate Nadine Moussa.

Lebanon's political scene has long been divided between a bloc led by Iran-backed Shiite movement Hezbollah and another Saudi-aligned camp headed by Prime Minister Saad Hariri, a Sunni politician. Lebanon recognizes 18 official religious sects and its parliamentary seats are divided equally between Muslims and Christians, an arrangement unique in the region. The May 6 vote will be the first test of Lebanon's new proportional electoral law which was agreed on in 2017 after years of wrangling among Lebanon's various political factions.

It replaces the existing plurality voting system with proportional representation and reduces the number of electoral districts to 15. In each district, seats are distributed among the different religious communities living there.—AFP

International

US Secretary of State focuses on security on his first African trip

China, Turkey ramping up trade, influence

NAIROBI: US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson flew to Ethiopia at the start of his first diplomatic trip to Africa yesterday, seeking to bolster security alliances on a continent increasingly turning to China for aid and trade. He was due to visit the African Union where many officials are still smarting from US President Donald Trump's reported dismissal of member states as "sh*hole" countries in January. Trump later denied making the comment.

US officials said Tillerson would focus on discussing ways of fighting terrorism and promoting stability, trade and investment on the week-long tour. "The long reach of terrorism threatens to steal the future of countless individuals," Tillerson said in a speech at Virginia's George Mason University shortly before departing on Tuesday. Militant attacks in Africa had risen to more than 1,500 per year from around 300 in 2009, he said. "A growing population of young people, if left without jobs and a hope for the future, will create new ways for terrorists to exploit the next generation, subverting stability and derailing democratic governments."

Tillerson then announced an additional \$533 million in aid for countries hit by drought and conflict. The US Secretary of State was due to visit Ethiopia, the home of the African Union, and Kenya – both key US allies in the fight against al Shabaab Islamist militants

in Somalia. He was also scheduled to visit tiny Djibouti, host to sprawling US, French and Chinese military bases. In West Africa, Tillerson will visit Chad and Nigeria, both major oil-producers struggling to contain the Islamist Boko Haram insurgency. Analysts say Trump has focused mainly on security concerns in Africa at a time when China, Turkey and other nations are ramping up diplomatic and business links.

Posts unfilled

Trump has authorized the use of more aggressive US military operations in Somalia and the deaths of four US soldiers in Niger last year shone a spotlight on increasing US counter-terrorism engagement in West Africa. At the same time, key ambassadorships in South Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo and other nations remain unfilled, along with the continent's top diplomatic position, the assistant

Officials are still smarting from offensive comment

secretary of state for Africa. Trump has said he wants to cut the budgets for foreign aid and the State Department by a third. "Africa is ready and open for business. And the Chinese have understood it and have been more proactive and aggressive in a way that it's benefiting them," Brahim Coulibaly, the director of the Africa Growth Initiative at Brookings Institution, said, commenting on the trip.

Acting Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Don Yamamoto told journalists on Monday that US diplo-



ADDIS ABABA: US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson alights from Air Force One on arrival at Addis Ababa International Airport in Addis Ababa yesterday – the first of a six day African tour. —AFP

mats were becoming concerned about the high levels of Chinese debt some nations were incurring. "The United States was concerned that some Chinese loans were pushing countries back into heavy debt not long after they received debt relief from international

financial institutions," he said. "We're seeing countries at 50 percent, 100 percent, and in one case 200 percent of GDP debt based on concessionary loans from China." China surpassed the United States to become Africa's largest trading partner in 2009. —Reuters

News in brief

'Besieged chief justice'

MANILA: The Philippines' Supreme Court chief justice warned yesterday that the country's civil rights were under grave threat as she faces all-but-certain impeachment by allies of President Rodrigo Duterte. Maria Lourdes Sereno spoke out as the Philippine House of Representatives prepared to vote today on whether to proceed with her impeachment following a threat by Duterte that she would be forced out. Sereno has clashed with the president on issues like the independence of the judiciary as well as rights issues linked to Duterte's centerpiece "war on drugs" which has left thousands dead at the hands of police or shadowy vigilantes. Duterte in turn vowed last year to impeach Sereno, accusing her of excessive spending and other abuses of power – a move slammed by critics as the latest in a series of measures by the president to muzzle his critics. —AFP

Women march in Guinea

CONAKRY: Thousands of women, clad in white, marched in the Guinean capital of Conakry yesterday in protest at a violent crackdown on political demonstrations following elections last month. Around 5,000 women, dressed in the local color of mourning, took part in the three-kilometer march, according to an AFP estimate. The organizers put the turnout at 10,000. They carried banners reading, "Too many deaths – the state is still asleep" and "Alpha rhymes with crime," a reference to the president of the West African state, Alpha Conde. Around a dozen people have died in political unrest since early February, some of whom were shot dead by police. Protests erupted after elections on February 4, the country's first at local level since 2005. —AFP

'Explosive' eruptions

TOKYO: Powerful eruptions at a volcano in southern Japan spewed ash thousands of meters into the air yesterday, as authorities warned locals not to approach the mountain. "The plume reached the height of 3,000 meters for the first time since April 3, 2011" following a total of 29 eruptions at Mount Shinmoedake, Japan's weather agency said in a statement. The volcano, which featured in the 1967 James Bond film "You Only Live Twice", has been grumbling since Thursday. But yesterday and the previous day, the volcano produced so-called "explosive" eruptions, which also feature air blasts. Footage captured by the Meteorological Agency showed lava and thick grey smoke rising from the mountain around midnight yesterday. People were ordered to stay away from the volcano as major ash deposits spread from the crater, the agency said. —AFP

Far-right 'terrorists' jailed

DRESDEN: Eight members of a German far-right group were sentenced to jail yesterday on terrorism and attempted murder charges for a series of explosives attacks targeting refugees and anti-fascist activists. Based in Germany's ex-communist east, the so-called "Freital group" had sought to create "a climate of fear" at the height of Germany's refugee and migrant influx in 2015, the court was told. Its leaders Timo Schulz and Patrick Festing were sentenced to 10 and nine-and-a-half years prison respectively. The other six received custodial terms of between four and eight-and-a-half years. The seven men and one woman, now aged between 20 and 40, modified pyrotechnics they had bought in the neighboring Czech Republic for five explosives attacks. One Syrian refugee was injured in a blast, and prosecutors argued that the group had casually accepted the risk of more victims and possible deaths in their attacks. —AFP

UK urges 'cool heads' over spy poisoning as Moscow tensions rise

LONDON: A senior British minister yesterday called for "cool heads" over the suspected poisoning of a former Russian double agent, as Moscow accused politicians and journalists of whipping up anti-Russian sentiment. After chairing an emergency government meeting to discuss the situation of Sergei Skripal, interior minister Amber Rudd said police were closer to identifying the substance that he was exposed to. The 66-year-old Russian, who moved to Britain in a 2010 spy swap, is in a critical condition in hospital along with his daughter Yulia after they collapsed on a bench outside a shopping centre in the southwestern English city of Salisbury on Sunday.

"We do know more about the substance and the police will be making a further statement this afternoon," Rudd said. "We need to keep a cool head," she stressed, adding that investigation would "respond to evidence, not to rumour". Police say they are keeping an open mind about what happened, but Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson on Tuesday pointed the finger at Russia. He noted the "echoes" with the 2006 poisoning in London of former Russian spy and Kremlin critic Alexander Litvinenko, which Britain has blamed on Moscow.

The Kremlin hit back yesterday, with foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova telling reporters the story "was straight away used to boost an anti-Russian campaign in the media". Zakharova earlier said Johnson's comments were "wild" and "words of savagery". National counter-terrorism police have taken control of the case, citing the "unusual circumstances", and opened up a new crime scene yesterday in the nearby town of Amesbury. "The focus at this time is to establish what has caused these people to become critically ill," said the head of the unit, assistant commissioner Mark Rowley.

Radiation unlikely

Skripal and his 33-year-old daughter had lunch at a nearby restaurant before walking to the shopping centre, where witnesses said they appeared "out of it". Experts said the circumstances appeared to rule out radiation poisoning, as in Litvinenko's case. "Radiation poisoning tends to take tens of hours to several days to show symptoms

Kenya can't account for \$400 million of public money

NAIROBI: Kenya's government cannot account for \$400 million in public funds, according to a damning report from the auditor general highlighting the country's failure to crack down on graft and misuse of state resources. The report for the 2015/2016 financial year describes a litany of misspending and poor accounting under President Uhuru Kenyatta, who is several months into a second term after an election in which he again vowed to tackle graft.

Less than a third of financial statements of ministries, departments and agencies that were scrutinized were clean, according to the report presented to parliament last week. Auditor general Edward Ouko noted that this was however an improvement, with only six percent of financial statements declared clean five years ago. "Accounting for public funds is still wanting," wrote Ouko. Of \$12.4 billion (10 billion euros) in recurrent and development spending, only 3.45 percent was spent "lawfully and in an effective way", according to the report. While some entities failed to submit statements at all, others were unable to explain transfers of millions of dollars, unlawful cash withdrawals or "fraudulent" double payment of bills. The defense ministry came under fire over the purchase of seven aircraft from the Royal Jordanian Airforce for \$15 million in 2007, which were never



SALISBURY: British Police Community Support Officers stand on duty outside a residential property in Salisbury, southern England, believed to have been cordoned off in connection with the major incident which started at The Maltings shopping centre in Salisbury. —AFP

after exposure," said Professor Malcolm Sperrin, a medical physics expert with the state-run National Health Service (NHS). "This may have been chemical, but we can't be sure." Police reportedly took away the table and chairs where Skripal and his daughter were sitting in Zizzi's restaurant for analysis.

Some emergency services personnel who treated the pair required medical treatment, and The Sun tabloid reported that two police officers had itchy eyes, wheezing and rashes. Newspaper reports speculated on the use of thallium, which dissolves in water and is odorless and tasteless, or the banned VX nerve agent used on the half brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. The BBC reported that without knowing the cause, the hospital treating Skripal and his daughter could only treat their symptoms, citing one source as saying that he "is not in a good way at all".

used due to defects and, the report found, are now being used as "sources for spare parts". The ministry also paid five times the market price for two hydraulic excavators, and spent some \$8 million on projects and equipment which never materialized. Meanwhile the interior ministry could not account for 51,500 pairs of shoes worth \$1.7 million allegedly destined for police officers, who were found in worn-out footwear or having resorted to buy their own.

'Post-mortem of grand theft'

"Our concern is that every year, the auditor general prepares such reports detailing loss of huge sums of money and presents them to parliament but they are never acted upon," read an editorial by the Daily Nation newspaper. In 2017 Kenya fell to 143rd out of 180 countries in Transparency International's annual corruption index. While Kenyatta has vowed to tackle corruption, veteran activist John Githongo is sceptical. "Theft has created Kenya's elite. That's our history. Stopping the theft would mean restructuring our economy and politics," he said.

"That we've always had auditor generals who do these essentially post-mortem audits of grand theft is an interesting quirk of Kenyan political economy," Ouko has battled to remain in his position, with a lawmakers' attempt to remove him over alleged abuse of office blocked by the high court in 2017. His report also highlighted soaring debt that has raised alarm in East Africa's richest and most diverse economy, after rampant borrowing in recent years. Moody's last month cut Kenya's credit rating from B1 to B2 – assigning a stable outlook – warning it expected government debt to rise to 61 percent of GDP in the 2018/19 financial year from 41 percent in 2011/12. —AFP

PM withholds comment

Prime Minister Theresa May was updated on the situation at a meeting of her national security council on Tuesday afternoon, but she has declined to publicly comment on an ongoing police investigation. But in an address to the House of Commons on Tuesday, Johnson made several references to Russia, and said Britain would respond "appropriately and robustly" if a government was found responsible. Skripal was a former colonel in Russian military intelligence who was jailed in his country for betraying agents to Britain's MI6 secret service. He was pardoned before being flown to Britain as part of a high-profile spy swap involving Russia and the United States in 2010, and has kept a low profile since. The Times newspaper reported that police would look into the 2012 death of Skripal's wife from cancer, and that of his 44-year-old son last year in St Petersburg, reportedly from liver problems. —AFP



KIBERA: A man drives a motorbike in flooded street by heavy rain in Kibera slum, Nairobi. —AFP

International

Asia giants China, India flex muscles over tiny Maldives

India moves planes, ships for possible intervention

NEW DELHI: A Chinese naval combat force that entered the Indian Ocean for the first time in four years may have helped deter an Indian intervention in the Maldives after its pro-China president imposed a state of emergency, according to military and diplomatic sources and analysts. India has traditionally been the biggest player in the tiny island chain 400 km to its south, and faced calls from Maldives' opposition leaders last month to use force against President Abdulla Yameen to restore democracy.

After the state of emergency was declared India - which sent troops to foil a coup in the Maldives three decades ago - moved aircraft and ships to its southern bases and put special forces on standby, two military sources in New Delhi said. But in the end, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held off from hard action, unwilling to entangle the military in a foreign country of 400,000 people, the sources said. Beijing's signals it would not look kindly on any foreign involvement in the Maldives - where it is investing millions of dollars as part of its Belt and Road Initiative - backed up by its naval presence in the eastern Indian Ocean, may also have weighed against an intervention, security analysts said.

China's defense ministry said the ships carried out routine exercises. "These drills were normal exercises for this year and not aimed at any third party," the ministry said in a statement to Reuters, when asked whether the maneuvers were linked to the crisis in Maldives. It did not elaborate. Beijing's foreign ministry said it was paying close attention to events in the Maldives and had asked the government in Male to protect Chinese interests there.

India's defense ministry did not respond to a request for comment. A naval official confirmed the Chinese ships

entered the Indian Ocean, but said they were thousands of miles away from the Maldives. "The Indian navy has a robust maritime domain awareness and we have a clear picture of the happenings in the Indian Ocean Region," the official said. Details of the deployments by India and China as well as diplomatic messages from Beijing that have not previously been reported, show how the Asian giants flexed military muscles as the crisis in the strategically located archipelago unfolded.

Both militaries have since backed off and last week Vijay Gokhale, India's top diplomat, made an unscheduled visit to Beijing where the two sides discussed ways to address their "differences on the basis of mutual respect and sensitivity to each other's concerns, interests and aspirations," the Indian foreign ministry said. It did not give more details. Liu Zongyi, a South Asia expert at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, told the People's Daily in January that Yameen's tilt towards China had caused unhappiness in New Delhi. India had been infuriated with the signing of a free trade deal with China last December, he said, adding: "The political unrest in the Maldives in actual fact is a power struggle with international factors."

Chinese naval task force entered Indian Ocean



Chinese flotilla

At the end of January, a Chinese navy "surface action group", which included an amphibious Type 071 vessel for troops to make a marine landing, quietly crossed into the Indian Ocean through Indonesia's Sunda Straits. It was the first time such a force entered the area since an exercise by a similar group in 2014 in the eastern Indian Ocean that raised concern in India about Chinese motives behind conducting amphibious drills. "Thousands of miles away in the Maldives, Yameen, long criticized for running his Muslim



MALE: Maldivian police arrest a man at a protest appealing for the release of opposition leaders held in jail in the Maldives capital Male. Maldives President Abdulla Yameen is embroiled in a bitter power struggle with his opposition that has plunged the Maldives, a popular holiday destination, into crisis. — AFP

majority nation with an iron fist, rejected a surprise Supreme Court decision on Feb. 1 to free political dissidents. Instead, the Maldives' leader threw the judges too into prison and imposed a state of emergency, saying he was acting to thwart a coup. Beijing said events in the Maldives were an internal matter and the international community

should play "a constructive role" and avoid "further complicating the situation". Meanwhile, the People's Liberation Army posted photos of the warships, whose number had by then swelled to 11, taking part in rescue training exercises, according to Chinese state media. Some analysts saw a carefully calibrated message from China.—Reuters

IS urges Muslims to immigrate to Afghanistan

KABUL: The Islamic State group in Afghanistan is inviting Muslims worldwide to come to the war-torn country if they cannot reach Syria or Iraq, as it seeks to expand its foothold. A 25-minute propaganda film released by the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-K) on March 4 promotes IS strongholds in Afghanistan's north and east as an "option for immigration", the SITE Intelligence Group said Tuesday. "O you Muslims in every corner of the world! Immigrate to Khorasan! If you are incapable of immigrating to Iraq and Sham (Syria), come to Khorasan," a fighter said on the video.

The name Khorasan refers to a historic region which includes parts of modern-day Afghanistan, Pakistan and neighboring countries. The video comes amid growing concerns that IS fighters fleeing battlefields in Syria and Iraq are finding their way to Afghanistan, where the group has a small but potent presence. AFP recently reported that French and Algerian fighters, some arriving from Syria, had joined IS in the northern Afghan province of Jowzjan.

A German national was also recently arrested with the Taliban in the restive southern province of Helmand, Afghan officials said last week. He is one of the only Europeans found among the militants throughout the 16-year war. The IS video published with an Arabic narration showed some fighters delivering messages in Pashto, Persian and Uzbek languages. It opens with a narration mocking US President Donald Trump's vow to destroy the group in Afghanistan and goes on to show executions of prisoners and the training of child soldiers.

IS-K was attempting to turn "rumours" of foreign fighters moving to Afghanistan from Syria "into reality", Borhan



JALALABAD: Alleged Taliban fighters and other militants stand handcuffed while being presented to the media at a police headquarters in Jalalabad. — AFP

Osman, a senior analyst at International Crisis Group said. But the group would struggle to persuade fighters to travel as far as Afghanistan, said Emily Winterbotham, a senior research fellow at the UK-based Royal United Services Institute for Defense and Security Studies. "It's trying to keep IS-K viable and the IS-K brand going, but the reality is Afghanistan is still a long way away from Syria and Iraq-it's not an easy journey," she said.

The Islamic State group, or Daesh as it is locally known, first emerged in Afghanistan in 2014 as NATO combat

troops withdrew from the country and handed over responsibility to Afghan security forces.

Since then, the group has carried out multiple attacks mostly in urban areas, killing hundreds of people across the country despite a US-led bombing campaign against their known hideouts. Since 2016 it has dramatically escalated its attacks in Kabul, adding to the dangers already faced by civilians, with the UN citing the capital as one of the deadliest places in the country.—AFP

Wary Taiwan eyes growing shadow of China's leader

TAIPEI: President Xi Jinping's vision of a resurgent Chinese nation raises a huge red flag for democratic rival Taiwan, with the pressure set to rise now Xi has a lifetime to realize his ambitions. China sees Taiwan as a renegade province and has long stated its desire for reunification, an ambition strongly opposed by the self-ruling island, which has an elected government, freedom of speech and a deep-seated sense of its own identity. But with plans to abolish China's presidential term limits, paving the way for a decades-long rule by Xi and making him the most powerful leader since Mao Zedong, analysts predict Taiwan will face a squeeze on multiple fronts, from the economy to defense and diplomatic ties.

"Taiwan is Xi Jinping's major ambition. He is obsessed by reunification because it will be his place in history, his claim to immortality," said Hong Kong-based political analyst Willy Lam. Bringing Taiwan back into the fold is key to Xi's vision of China as a global superpower and by doing so he would achieve something even Mao had not, Lam added, describing the island as a symbol of colonial humiliation for China. Taiwan was ruled for 50 years by the Japanese until the end of World

War II and is protected by the United States, its major ally.

Carrot and stick

China's rubber-stamp parliament is expected to approve a constitutional amendment to scrap the two-term limit for the presidency on Sunday. In a report to the opening session of the annual National People's Congress in Beijing on Monday, Premier Li Keqiang warned China would not tolerate any "separatist schemes" in Taiwan and would "advance China's peaceful reunification". Solving what he calls the "Taiwan issue" is every Chinese leader's wish, said Beijing-based political commentator Hua Po, although he believes Xi will turn his attentions to domestic issues first. "After he has achieved internal stability, he will take more tough and efficient measures against Taiwan," said Hua, who said those could include armed force.

However, most observers believe China will stop short of military intervention, which would prompt a reaction from the US and damage its international image. Instead they predict Beijing will continue its aggressive military posturing—in the past year it has upped drills around the island and Taiwan has pledged to boost its defense force against the rising threat. There will also be renewed diplomatic and economic pressure. China has wooed more of Taiwan's dwindling number of global allies in the past two years.

Jonathan Sullivan, director of the China Policy Institute at Nottingham University, says Beijing will combine tough measures with a charm offensive, nurturing relationships with Taiwanese politicians and busi-



BEIJING: A Chinese hostess reacts at Tiananmen Square during the opening session of the National People's Congress, China's legislature, in Beijing. — AFP

nesses, as well as launching an "information campaign" to show Taiwanese people their vulnerabilities. "China has more leverage than it has thus far chosen to use—although Taiwan is by no means helpless and simply waiting to be annexed," Sullivan said. "It will continue to be carrot and stick."

Entrenched divide

Xi's rhetoric against challenges to Chinese sovereignty has also targeted semi-autonomous Hong Kong, where the emergence of activists calling for independence from the mainland has incensed Beijing. Monday's NPC report skipped key phrases on the extent to which Hong Kong governs itself, terms which have traditionally been included. Political freedoms are increasingly under threat in the city with candidates linked to calls for independence or self-determination barred from standing for office. Taiwan has never formally declared independence from the mainland

despite being self-ruling since 1949 and China has said it would respond with force to any attempted split.

Relations have soured in the past two years under President Tsai Ing-wen, who has refused to acknowledge the island is part of "one China" and whose party traditionally supports independence. Beijing unilaterally cut off official communications with Taiwan shortly after she took office in 2016.

Taiwan will continue to look to its traditional partner the US for backing, but analysts characterize President Donald Trump's policymaking as unpredictable. Some on the island are concerned it will be used as a pawn as he negotiates with Beijing on issues from trade to North Korea. But there are signs of moves towards further support—the US Senate last week passed a bill to encourage visits between Washington and Taipei "at all levels", angering Beijing. —AFP

War-scarred Sierra Leone picks leader

FREETOWN: Sierra Leoneans voted in a general election yesterday to pick a new president in the impoverished West African country scarred by the Ebola crisis and the legacy of a brutal civil war. Dozens of people joined queues at a polling station in the capital Freetown as early as 3 am, four hours before the vote kicked off, amid frustration with the two parties that have alternated since independence. "I'm going to share my vote," said Harolda Forbes, 27, before casting her ballot for ruling party candidate Samura Kamara as president but the opposition's lineup for parliament in a country still recovering from a horrific 1991-2002 civil war.

President Ernest Bai Koroma, who cannot run again after consecutive five-year terms, has anointed Kamara as his successor for the ruling All Peoples Party (APP). "Kamara will come and do something good. There will be a change in our country," said Forbes, who is unemployed, while adding that she appreciated the work of the opposition Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) in her local community. The export-dependent economy of the mineral-rich but impoverished country is in a dire state following the 2014-16 Ebola crisis and a commodity price slump that drove away foreign investors.

Police constable Tejan Sia said voting began smoothly in the capital. "Everything is in order. I haven't heard of any problems in Freetown." Mohamed Conteh, chief commissioner of the National Election Commission (NEC), had said Tuesday that electoral authorities were "committed to conduct credible elections." More than 3.1 million voters are registered for the polls, which were set to close at 6 pm (1800 GMT) with partial tallies expected within 48 hours and complete results within two weeks.

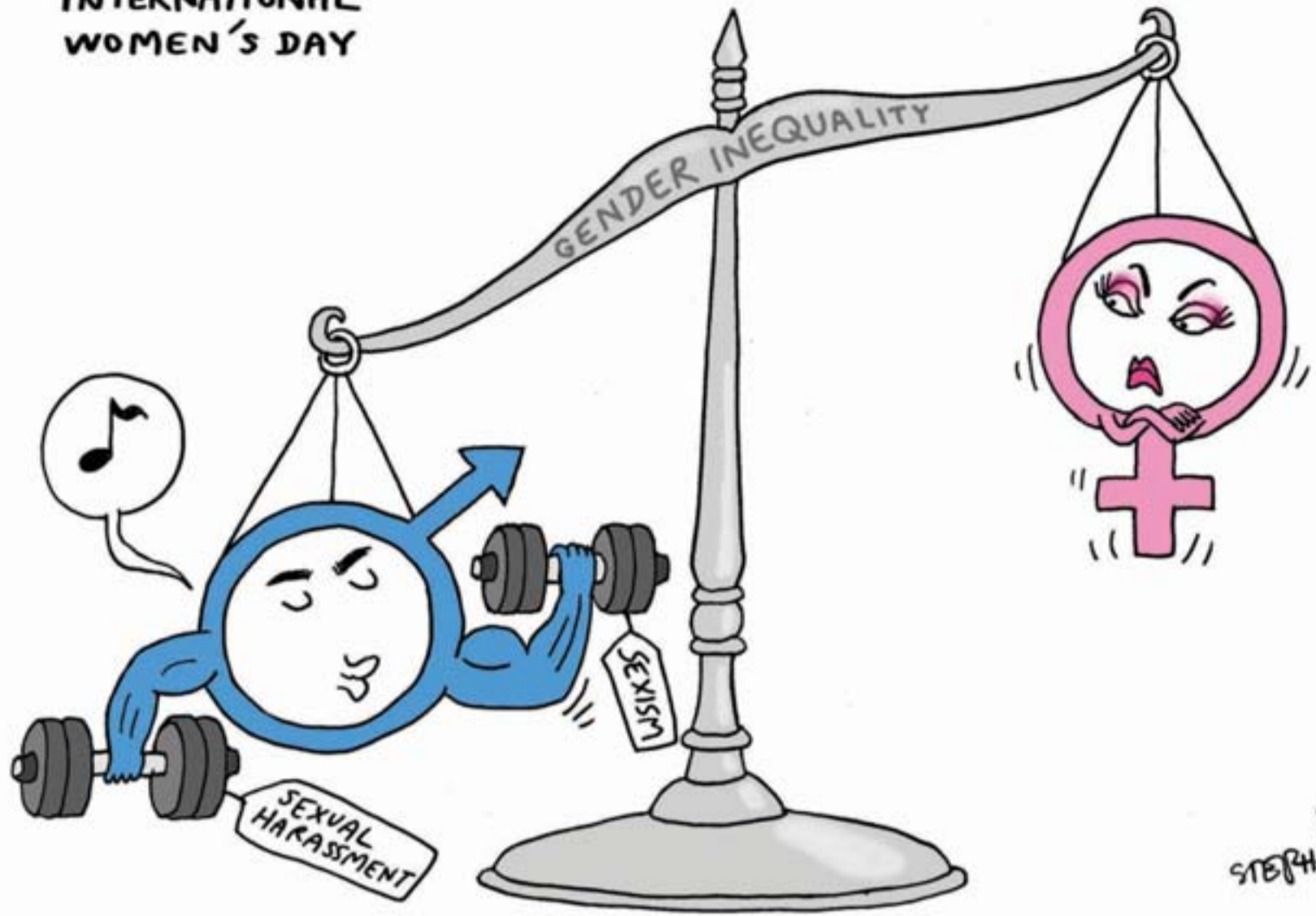
Kamara campaigned on continuity rather than change. "I am (Koroma's) biggest legacy," he told AFP at the final APP rally on Monday. "I need to sustain what he has achieved... and build on it." The SLPP has retained the same candidate, Julius Maada Bio, who lost to Koroma in 2012. The National Grand Coalition (NGC), headed by former UN diplomat Kandeh Yumkella, is challenging the two-party system by appealing to young and better educated urban voters who are less likely to vote along regional and ethnic lines. "(Voters) are yearning for real change," said Julius Spencer, the NGC's communications chief. "We have been able to draw people from across the religious, ethnic and regional spectrum."

Regional divide

Sierra Leone is sharply divided along regional lines that overlap with ethnicity. The APC broadly relies on the Temne and Limba people in its northern strongholds, while the SLPP is more popular in the south with the Mende ethnic group. "They have huge resources compared to us but we have connected to the people better," Spencer said. The Institute for Governance Reform (IGR), a Freetown-based think tank, said in a report that voters were showing a "growing willingness... to consider policy proposals over ethnic considerations." Observers from the African Union, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the European Union and the British Commonwealth are all overseeing voting. Isolated clashes have been reported between APC and SLPP supporters during the month-long campaign, with minor injuries and material damage.

Some fear a lack of transport to polling stations in rural areas, as Sierra Leone's high court this week upheld a ban on private vehicles circulating on election day, citing national security concerns. The SLPP has refused to sign a memorandum agreeing to the move, saying it could disenfranchise voters, but Bio told crowds at a final rally on Monday he was "ready for a peaceful election". —AFP

Analysis

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The First Daily in The Arabian GulfTHE LEADING INDEPENDENT
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WOMEN'S DAY

N Korea overture seen as tiny step on unpromising road

In floating the possibility of nuclear talks with the United States, North Korea took a first step on a road likely to be long, more arduous and just as prone to failure as past efforts. Former US officials who have dealt with the North reacted with deep skepticism to Pyongyang's offer, made public by South Korea, to hold talks with the United States on denuclearization and to halt nuclear and missile tests while negotiating. While arguing it is worth testing the waters to see if North Korea is willing to give up its nuclear program, and to glean intelligence from dealing with the secretive nation's officials, they see virtually no chance Pyongyang will actually do so.

"For the past three decades, (administrations) of both political parties have tried every single option ... except the use of military force and none of these have halted the North," said Mitchell Reiss, a senior US diplomat under Republican former President George W. Bush who has negotiated with North Korea. North Korea is likely to make demands that the United States would find anathema following Pyongyang's reported statement that it has no need for a nuclear program "if military threats against the North are resolved and its regime is secure," former US officials said.

North Korea in the past has sought the withdrawal of US forces in South Korea and the wider region, effectively meaning an end to the US-South Korean alliance, something Washington could not accept. "This is the sort of rhetoric that one encounters at the bare beginnings of a process that can last years, and of course the only processes that have been run with North Korea on the nuclear issue have come a cropper," said a former US official involved in talks with North Korea who spoke on condition of anonymity, using an idiom meaning failed.

Fresh memories of failure

Under the 1994 "Agreed Framework" negotiated under Democratic former US President Bill Clinton, North Korea committed to freeze and dismantle its nuclear facilities in return for two lightwater reactors and fuel oil while the nuclear power plants were built. That pact unraveled after Bush took office in 2001, with relations souring when he called North Korea part of an "axis of evil" and accused it of running a uranium enrichment program in violation of the 1994 deal.

The Bush administration ultimately engaged in "six-party" talks that achieved a deal in September 2005 under which North Korea agreed to give up its nuclear program in return for economic and energy aid and an end to its diplomatic isolation. Those talks included the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia and the United States. Relations again deteriorated when the United States froze North Korean accounts at a Macau bank in late 2005 and accused it of money laundering and when Pyongyang conducted its first nuclear test in October 2006.

In 2007, a new deal was struck under which North Korea would get a million tons of heavy fuel oil in return for steps to shut down and seal its main Yongbyon nuclear plant that produces weapons-grade plutonium and to invite inspectors to oversee them. That agreement unraveled in 2009.

'Peace has not broken out'

North Korea has conducted six nuclear weapons tests and pushed ahead on trying to develop intercontinental ballistic missiles that, if mated to a nuclear warhead, could threaten the US mainland. Current and former US officials said as a practical matter it is far more difficult to get a country to give up a weapons system it already possesses rather than one it is still developing. "It's much harder to get the North Koreans to undo something they have done in terms of missile development and nuclear development," said Daniel Russel, a former US assistant secretary of state for East Asia and the Pacific.

"Peace has not broken out on the Korean peninsula," Russel said, adding that North Korea so far has done nothing to signal a willingness to concede on denuclearization. Russel said he saw the latest North Korean move as fitting a well-established pattern in which "the North Korean game has been to offer to rent some peace and quiet to the West." "What traditionally comes next is that they move up a ladder of escalating demands without offering significant or irreversible commitments or concessions, and finally, when they hit the limit and the US or South Koreans put their foot down, that becomes the pretext to revert to the cycle of provocations."

Nevertheless, said Chris Hill, the key US negotiator with North Korea from 2005 to 2009, it is important for the Americans not to look stubborn or churlish about the prospects. "We need to be responsive and not miss the moment," Hill said, if only to show the people of American allies South Korea and Japan that the United States is willing to talk. "That said, I don't think we have peace in our times." —Reuters

Bumpy path ahead to North Korea talks

Sanctions, threats and engagement have all played a part in bringing North Korea to the negotiating table, but it is likely to demand an unacceptably high price to abandon its weapons programs, analysts say. Seoul announced Tuesday that the North's leader Kim Jong Un was ready to open talks with the United States and willing to consider giving up his nuclear bombs and ballistic missiles in exchange for security guarantees.

It is a stunning turnaround after a decades-long military buildup that has seen Pyongyang subjected to multiple rounds of sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council, the US, the European Union, the South and others. Even the frequently bellicose US President Donald Trump welcomed the announcement as "very positive" and apparently sincere - although he noted: "We'll soon find out" whether that is the case.

Previous negotiations and agreements have ultimately come to naught and the shape of any final deal is far from clear, with both sides holding deeply entrenched positions. In recent months Trump had threatened to rain "fire and fury" on the North and "completely destroy" it, while administration officials have repeatedly described military action as "an option on the table." "North Korea is opening up because the pressure from the US was too much," said Go Myong-Hyun, an analyst at the Asan Institute of Policy Studies.

For years, as Pyongyang developed its weapons and missiles to the point where it last year detonated a device it said was an H-bomb and launched rockets capable of reaching the US mainland, the UN sanctions against it were confined largely to asset freezes and travel bans. That has changed more recently, with broad-based bans on its coal and seafood exports, textile trade and new contracts for overseas workers, along with limits on oil imports, threatening to impact the wider economy.

"Sanctions are biting," former US representative to the Six Party talks Joseph DeTrani told the online journal The Cipher Brief. "North Korea is more isolated now than they've ever

been, to include with their key ally, China. "It's a combination of the sanctions, the joint military exercises, and a Moon government that is very willing to have a dialogue with the North that made a significant impact."

The South's Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang provided a window of opportunity to engage the North, with Kim sending his athletes to take part and his sister to attend the opening ceremony. The flurry of cross-border trips gave South Korean President Moon Jae-in a chance to try to broker talks between Pyongyang and Washington, and he will hold a summit with Kim next month in the Demilitarized Zone that divides the peninsula.

Ulterior motives?

The North itself has yet to make any public confirmation

“

Sanctions are biting

”

of the concessions Seoul says it has offered. Exactly what it might mean by the "security guarantees" it wants in exchange for denuclearization remains unclear - and crucial. "At one end of the spectrum would be their acceptance of a statement by the United States that it has no intention of attacking North Korea," wrote Mark Tokola, vice president of the Korea Economic Institute of America. "At the other end

would be a demand that US forces leave the Korean Peninsula and that the US-ROK military alliance be scrapped," he added, using the abbreviation for the South's official name.

That would amount to a redrawing of the strategic map of northeast Asia - which is likely to be unpalatable to Washington. It would also leave the South dependent on its own resources and forces in the event of any future conflict with the North, which constantly expresses its desire to reunify the peninsula - a prospect that many South Koreans would oppose. And Pyongyang could yet have ulterior motives. "It seems most likely that North Korea may be trying to drive a wedge between Washington and Seoul by trying to lure South Korea into weakening the alliance," Tokola added.

Annual joint military exercises are due soon which Pyongyang regularly condemns as preparations for invasion. Kim is said to have told Seoul's officials that he will be "understanding" about the Foal Eagle and Key Resolve drills, but Koo Kab-woo, a professor at the University of North Korea Studies, expects them to be scaled down. "What that means is that adjustments are being made to the South Korea-US alliance," he told AFP.

And the decades-old alliance could be further strained once Pyongyang and Washington sit down for talks, analysts said. "The negotiations between the US and North Korea won't be easy, given the Trump administration's firm stance about complete denuclearization," said Kim Hyun-wook, a professor at the Korea National Diplomatic Academy. South Korea could find itself in an awkward position with its key ally if the talks fall apart.

"There are so many things to iron out before actual denuclearisation talks begin and frankly, South Korea's summit with the North in April seems a bit hasty," Kim said. "What's worrisome is that Seoul and Washington will not be able to coordinate their North Korea policies and go in opposite directions." —AFP

Familiar pattern

Former officials in Washington and Tokyo reacted with skepticism to the North's offer of talks on denuclearization, seeing a familiar pattern of threats followed by talks that fail to win significant concessions. Chief among the disagreements that have scuttled past efforts to defuse the standoff is North Korea's requests for security guarantees in return for abandoning its nuclear weapons. During talks with Moon's envoys this week, the North expressed its willingness to denuclearize if military threats against it are eliminated, and the security of its regime is guaranteed, without presenting precise conditions.

"(North Korea) has never said what they mean by the guarantee of regime security," one former senior South Korean official told Reuters. "That means it's up to them to decide whether the security is guaranteed or not, and that means they have full control." Pyongyang has protested South Korea-US joint military drills as a rehearsal of war. It has also called the roughly 28,000 American troops stationed in South Korea a potential invasion force that can only be countered by a robust nuclear deterrent.

The North's official KCNA news agency said yesterday the United States is "getting frantic" with the deployment of US troops on the Korean peninsula and their drills to get "familiar with its terrain and arms buildup there". Moon's special advisor Moon Chung-in has raised the possibility for a possible pullout of US forces, saying the president has the right to "let them out". Moon declined to comment on the summit, saying: "We will see."

Any discussion of a US troop withdrawal will be fraught, however, as both Seoul and Washington see them as a bulwark against North Korean provocations. "For the North, a peace treaty and denuclearization means the removal of US forces from not only the peninsula but also Japan and other bases in the Pacific theatre," said Kim Young-mok, a former South Korean diplomat who was involved in the making of a 1994 freeze-for-aid framework deal between Pyongyang and Washington. "We responded by pledging non-aggression, but I guess it wasn't enough." —Reuters

Detente stirs diplomatic angst in Japan

An agreement between North and South Korea to hold a summit and signals about possible talks between North Korea and the United States are stirring concern in Japan about its diplomatic nightmare - being left out in the cold. Signs of easing tension over North Korea's nuclear and missile threats, greeted in Tokyo with skepticism, come as Japan faces a possible trade feud with the United States over steel and rocky ties with South Korea over their bitter history, including Japan's 1910-1945 colonization of the peninsula.

"The main concern is that South Korea may have jumped too easily to a proposal by North Korea for a bilateral meeting," said a former senior Japanese diplomat who declined to be identified because of the sensitivity of the topic. A South Korean delegation returned home on Tuesday from a first-ever meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, to announce the agreement on a North-South summit next month, the first since 2007.

The South Koreans also announced that Kim had offered to hold talks with the United States on denuclearization and to halt nuclear and missile tests while negotiating. North Korea's recent missile tests have included two fired over Japan. US President Donald Trump said North Korea seemed "sincere". The former diplomat said Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe faced uncertain times. "As for Washington, Trump is such an unpredictable guy. If anything will help elevate his approval domestically, he'll jump," he said. "If North Korea sits down with Washington, it will have absolutely no interest whatsoever in sitting down with Japan. That will make Abe's position very difficult."

Japan has maintained its call for "maximum pressure" on North Korea amid signs of easing tension that began during the Winter Olympics in South Korea last month, warning that "talks for the sake of talks" were unacceptable. Abe has

stressed that Washington shares that stance. "In order for there to be meaningful talks with North Korea, it must commit to compete, verifiable and irreversible abandonment of its nuclear and missile programs and take concrete steps toward denuclearization," Defence Minister Itsunori Onodera told reporters yesterday. "Our country will continue cooperation with the United States, and among the United States, Japan and South Korea, and there is no change in our stance of putting maximum pressure by all means to get North Korea to change its policies," he added.

Fear of abandonment

Abe has called the North Korean crisis the toughest security crisis faced by Japan since World War Two and his stern stance has generally won him support at home. Despite the long-standing security alliance between the United States and Japan, worries that the United States may cut a deal to protect its cities from nuclear attack by the North, while leaving Japan vulnerable, have simmered. "Japan's eternal fear is that it will be cut out of negotiations over the state of relations with North Korea," said Brad Glosserman, a visiting professor at Tama University.

"The concern is that Trump is prepared to cut a deal and show the world that the 'special relationship' between Shinzo and Donald', and America and Japan, is empty and that he will rip it up in a heartbeat," Glosserman said. Katsuyuki Kawai, an adviser to Abe, is in Washington this week seeking, he told Reuters before departure, to reinforce the alliance and talk up the need for trilateral coordination among the United States, Japan and South Korea. "Japan is not an observer, Japan is one of the important actors," Kawai said.

However, ties between Japan and America's other key Asian ally, South Korea, have been frayed since President Moon Jae-in took office last May and cast doubts over a 2015 agreement meant to lay to rest a feud over "comfort women", a euphemism for women forced to work in Japanese wartime military brothels. Both sides have said that dispute should not snarl coordination over North Korea, but the chill is real and any sign Trump was favoring South Korea's softer approach could fan Japan's angst. —Reuters

South Korea sees familiar hurdles ahead

With the specter of two past summits that failed to blunt North Korea's nuclear ambitions, South Korea officials planning talks next month now face the thorny task of overcoming familiar sticking points with the threat of war looming over any failure. A South Korean delegation returned home on Tuesday from a first-ever meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, to announce the agreement on a North-South summit next month, the first since 2007.

Seoul officials see the talks as the starting point of President Moon Jae-in's initiative to denuclearize and build lasting peace on the peninsula, beginning with a freeze in the North's nuclear program and ending in its complete abolishment. "While pursuing a fundamental resolution of the standoff, we need to take some initial denuclearization steps, putting a halt to further testing and returning to dialogue," a senior South Korean government official said on condition of anonymity. "One could argue we would be deceived by the North as we have been for the last 20 years, but that's the past - we have different people and different programs now," the official said.

Moon said on Wednesday he had suggested to the North a rough roadmap progressing from a nuclear freeze to denuclearization, an opposition party chair told reporters after meeting with him. But Moon said there won't be "many agreements" to come out of the summit, according to a ruling party lawmaker who took part in the meeting. Moon also called a 2005 deal of six-nation nuclear talks, under which Pyongyang agreed to give up its nuclear program in return for economic and energy aid and an end to its diplomatic isolation, a "failed model", the first politician said.

News

Air India gets nod to fly to Israel over...

Continued from Page 1

Aviation was not immediately available for comment yesterday. Air India's website showed options to book flights to Tel Aviv from New Delhi starting March 22, with fares starting at 24,124 Indian rupees (\$371.94). The national carrier, which has also received approval from the country's aviation regulator to fly to Israel over Saudi Arabia, would operate a 7 hour 5 minute flight between the two cities, its spokesman said. El Al Israel Airlines, the country's flag carrier, flies four weekly flights to Mumbai but these take seven hours rather than five as they take a route south towards Ethiopia and then east to India, avoiding Saudi airspace. Yesterday, El Al appealed to the United Nations over

a bid to also reroute its services between Tel Aviv and India through Saudi Arabian airspace. The Israeli flag carrier's CEO Gonen Usishkin said in a letter to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), a UN body, it would be discriminatory for the Saudis to allow Air India to enter its airspace and not El Al. In his letter, Usishkin told ICAO head Olumuyiwa Benard Aliu that would give Air India "a significant and unfair advantage" over El Al that would clearly violate equality in aviation. Usishkin said giving Air India preference would also violate the Chicago Convention, under which countries may not impose restrictions on flying over their territory or discriminate against airlines based on nationality. Israel, Saudi Arabia and India are parties to the convention. "I am requesting that the ICAO, which has the power to enforce the provisions of the Chicago Convention, take action ...to procure equal permission for El Al to fly above Saudi Arabia," Usishkin said. Last week, El Al sought help over the issue from industry lobby group the International Air Transport Association. — Reuters

UK rolls out red carpet for Saudi...

Continued from Page 1

Downing Street earlier said it hopes the visit, part of the crown prince's maiden foreign tour as heir to the throne, "will usher in a new era in bilateral relations". After lunch with the Queen, Prince Mohammed jointly hosted with May the inaugural meeting of the UK-Saudi strategic partnership council, including ministers from both countries. The meeting focused on support for reforms in Saudi Arabia, trade and investment relations and defense and security cooperation. In the evening, the heir-to-the throne Prince Charles held a dinner for the crown prince with Prince William among the guests. Opposition Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn had accused May's government of "colluding" in war crimes by selling arms to Saudi Arabia, and even suggested that British military advisers were "directing the war". May responded that her relationship with Prince Mohammed had already helped alleviate the humanitarian crisis by convincing him to ease Saudi blockades of ports in Yemen during a meeting in December. "This vindicates the engagement that we have with Saudi Arabia, to be able to sit down with them," she said. Responding to an emergency question in parliament about the visit, junior foreign minister Alistair Burt defended Britain's arms deals with Saudi, saying the regulations were "as strict as anywhere in the world". He also praised the crown prince's reform measures, saying: "The engagement of women in business and government makes a real difference. "In a Saudi context, these changes have immense significance."

Arabia later this month. Separately, criticism mounted in Turkey yesterday over a decision by Saudi-owned broadcaster MBC to stop airing Turkish soap operas, stoking tensions between Ankara and Riyadh. Viewers in the Arab world have in recent years become voracious consumers of Turkish soaps ranging from modern romances to historic dramas, enthralled by cliffhanger plots and strong production values. But the move by the Dubai-based MBC comes with tensions between Turkey and Saudi Arabia and Riyadh's chief regional ally the UAE soaring over issues ranging from Qatar to Israel. MBC said it would replace Turkish soaps with "premium quality Arabic dramas that embody the values and traditions of the region". Turkish Culture Minister Numan Kurtulmus replied it was not up to politicians to "decide... who watches what film. Those times have passed." He was quoted by the state-run Anadolu news agency as saying that Turkish soap operas had made "rapid progress" in recent years and were now popular "all over the world". Istanbul Chamber of Commerce (ITC) head Ozturk Oran said Turkey would look for private alternatives to defy the satellite network's ban because Turkish soaps were "making serious business". "As long as Turkish series keep their good quality, nobody can ban Turkish productions," he said, quoted by Anadolu, adding that producers could use carriers other than MBC to promote Turkish series. Mevlut Tezel, columnist in the pro-government daily Sabah, called the ban a "blow to Turkey's soft power" as well as its influence and popularity in the Middle East. Some Turkish soap operas have achieved phenomenal success in the Arab world, turning stars like actress Serenay Sarikaya and actor Kivanc Taltug into household names. Actor Engin Altan, who stars in Ertugrul, a hit series on the earliest period of Ottoman history, told Al-Jazeera the decision would "surely have an impact on the Turkish series industry" although viewers could find other means to watch shows.

Meanwhile, Egypt's Al-Shorouk newspaper reported yesterday Prince Mohammed has described Turkey as part of a "triangle of evil" along with Iran and hardline Islamist groups. The Saudi prince also accused Turkey of trying to reinstate the Islamic caliphate, abolished nearly a century ago when the Ottoman Empire collapsed. His reported comments reflect Saudi Arabia's deep suspicion of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, whose ruling AK Party has its roots in Islamist politics and who has allied his country with Qatar in its dispute with Saudi Arabia and some other Gulf states.

Turkey has repeatedly bickered with the UAE over the last months, even to the point of naming the street where Abu Dhabi's embassy is located in Ankara after an Ottoman governor. While Turkish officials have taken the gloves off in verbal onslaughts against Abu Dhabi - in particular Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed - Ankara has been more circumspect in comments on Saudi Arabia. But pro-government media have adopted an increasingly strident tone against Riyadh in recent weeks, reaching a new peak with an angry editorial yesterday by a columnist close to Erdogan.

Turkey has also worked with Iran. Saudi Arabia's archival in the Middle East, to try to reduce fighting in northern Syria in recent months, and Iranian and Turkish military chiefs exchanged visits last year. Al-Shorouk quoted Prince Mohammed as saying "the contemporary triangle of evil comprises Iran, Turkey and extremist religious groups". The prince spoke to Egyptian newspaper editors during a visit to Cairo, on his first foreign trip since becoming heir to the oil exporting giant last year. He said the dispute with Qatar could be long-lasting, comparing it to the US embargo of Cuba imposed 60 years ago, but played down its impact, dismissing the Gulf emirate as "smaller than a Cairo street". Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain cut diplomatic and trade links with Qatar last June, suspending air and shipping routes with the world's biggest exporter of liquefied natural gas, which is home to the region's biggest US military base. However, Prince Mohammed said Qatar would not be barred from attending an Arab summit hosted by Saudi

Yeni Safak daily editor in chief Ibrahim Karagul warned Mohammed bin Salman against any alliance with the UAE and, in particular, its pro-Washington crown prince. "Standing against Turkey, taking an anti-Turkey attitude on behalf of the US and Israel, targeting Turkey on behalf of Mohammed bin Zayed is going to win you nothing, but it will make you lose a lot," said Karagul. The Hurriyet daily linked the soap ban on MBC to Mohammad bin Salman, with a headline saying: "The prince's trouble - Turkish soap operas." MBC is controlled by Saudi businessman Walid Al-Ibrahim, who was held for nearly three months in a sweeping anti-corruption drive targeting Saudi Arabia's elite. The Financial Times reported that authorities ordered him to hand over his controlling stake in MBC to secure his release. Hurriyet claimed Ibrahim's "first job" after his release was to impose the ban on the Turkish soaps. — Agencies



GENEVA: The "Pop.up next" concept flying car is seen during the first press day of the Geneva International Motor Show on Tuesday.— AFP

Flying cars eye takeoff at Geneva Motor Show

GENEVA: After gracing our screens for decades, flying cars are about to shift gears from dream to reality, with the unveiling of a commercial model in Geneva this week. From James Bond to The Jetsons, flying cars have long captured our imaginations, but now a Dutch company says they are almost ready to take to the streets, and the skies. Pal-V unveiled its Liberty Flying Car - a sleek, red three-wheeled gyrocopter-type vehicle - at the Geneva Motor Show and vowed that client deliveries could start next year.

This kind of transportation, which allows drivers to both zip through traffic on the ground or simply fly above it, has never ceased to inspire engineers. As a sign that this technology is not only being toyed with in the start-up realm, an alliance between Airbus, Audi and Italdesign also presented a concept flying vehicle, "Pop.Up Next", at the Geneva show. That modular system, made up of an electric car with a huge quadcopter fastened to the roof, is expected to be commercialized starting in 2025, the companies said.

For Pal-V (Personal Air and Land Vehicle), it was "frustration" that sparked the idea for Liberty. In a plane, "you start at a point where you don't want to start and you end up in a place where you don't want to be," company chief Robert Dingemans told AFP. "The Pal-V is the perfect product for city-to-city mobility,"

he said, pointing out that "outside the cities you fly, inside the city you drive."

The vehicle, which seats two, has retractable helicopter blades and is powered by a gasoline-fuelled engine. It can fly for 500 km, or can drive for nearly four times that distance without refueling, reaching a maximum speed of 160 km per hour. Buyers are already lining up: For now the expected waiting time for delivery is around two years. For take-off, "you can use the 10,000 strips available in Europe, and because you can drive, that's already enough," Dingemans said, adding that "every German will have a small airport within 10 or 20 kilometres of his home".

But Pal-V's Liberty will not be a vehicle for everyone: Future drivers should expect to dish out between €10,000 and €20,000 (\$12,000-\$25,000) for pilot training, in addition to the anticipated €300,000-€500,000 cost for the machine itself, Dingemans said. That is the same price range as a small helicopter, he said, stressing though that Pal-V's flying car is "easier, maintenance costs are much lower, (and) it's much more useful than a normal plane or helicopter."

While also falling into the flying vehicle category, the modular Pop.Up Next is based on a radically different design. The passenger capsule looks like a futuristic gondola lift, with a giant quadcopter attached to the roof. The motorized base of the vehicle, which drives, and the upper part, which flies, can be detached and can move autonomously. The Pop.Up Next is fully electric and was conceived for mass transport in an urban setting. "This vehicle was not conceived to be sold to individuals, (but) as a shared means of transport," Mark Cousin, the project chief at Airbus, which developed the flying portion of Pop.Up Next.

Grilling ends in whimper; Amir...

Continued from Page 1

Khorafi was a member of the previous Assembly which was dissolved in October, but he surprisingly opted out of the race without providing any reason. At that time, activists said a deal was made with Ghanem under which Khorafi would become a minister in the new Cabinet.

The two MPs also accused him of failing to carry out his constitutional duties specified in his appointment and also failing to do his job as a coordinator between the Assembly and the government. They charged that he sent a reply to a question signed by the former defense minister instead of the present minister, which is a constitutional violation. The two lawmakers also called on the minister to step down and urged the prime minister to dismiss him.

Khorafi however strongly denied the lawmakers' accusations, saying that he was offered the Cabinet job

and the premier told him he will have sufficient authorities to carry out his duties. He recounted the achievements he has made in completing certain issues to be debated by the Assembly and speeding up the process of ministers answering questions by MPs.

Speaking in the defense of the minister, MP Faisal Al-Kandari said the allegations were not based on solid evidence but only tweets, which are unsubstantiated and cannot be accepted. He said the grilling was entirely for personal reasons and for settling political scores, which is a waste of the Assembly's time.

MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari, speaking in support of the grilling, said the quiz should have been submitted immediately after the appointment of Khorafi in the Cabinet, and that it was delayed. He said Khorafi said the prime minister had called him and offered him the ministerial job, and "we say that you have been forcibly imposed" on the premier, charging that what the minister had done was not patriotic but only strengthened suspected political deals. Kandari also charged that Khorafi had effectively and publicly bought his ministerial post and the prime minister should have been held accountable for appointing Khorafi. Ghanem then declared that the grilling had ended and adjourned the session till March 20.

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Sports

Marchand completes third career hat trick as Boston past Detroit 6-5

New Jersey Devils score four times in opening frame

BOSTON: Brad Marchand completed his third career hat trick 34 seconds into overtime and finished with five points on the evening to send the Boston Bruins past the Detroit Red Wings 6-5 on Tuesday night in Boston. Marchand now leads the team with 28 goals on the season and recorded his 11th career regular-season overtime goal, moving him into first all-time in Bruins history. Torey Krug (13 goals) scored twice, Jake DeBrusk (14) added a goal and Anton Khudobin made 30 saves as Boston earned its fourth straight victory. Anthony Mantha (23 goals) lit the lamp twice and Frans Nielsen (14), Martin Frk (11) and Mike Green (7) each had goals for Detroit, which lost its fourth straight.



Marc-Andre Fleury finished with 17 saves

six assists during the streak. Laine also recorded his 14th multi-point game this season and eighth during this streak.

DEVILS 6, CANADIENS 4

Travis Zajac scored a pair of first-period power-play goals in a three-point game and Taylor Hall continued his torrid scoring streak as the New Jersey Devils scored four times in the opening frame en route to a 6-4 victory over the Montreal Canadiens on Tuesday night in New Jersey. Hall collected two assists, which officially gives him a 19-game point streak. He's hit the scoresheet in 26 straight games played - a three-game hiatus due to a knee injury breaking up the run - in which he's collected 18 goals and 38 points. Goalie Keith Kinkaid made 29 saves in the win at Prudential Center, which snaps New Jersey's three-game losing skid, on a night his teammates provided an offensive onslaught.

JETS 3, RANGERS 0

Patrik Laine recorded his fourth career hat trick as Winnipeg blanked New York at Madison Square Garden. He surpassed his total from his rookie season by upping his season total to 38 goals. He also extended his points streak to nine games. He has 13 goals and

NHL results/standings

Boston 6, Detroit 5 (OT); New Jersey 6, Montreal 4; Winnipeg 3, NY Rangers 0; Columbus 4, Las Vegas 1; Tampa Bay 5, Florida 4 (OT); Nashville 2, Dallas 0; Minnesota 6, Carolina 2; Chicago 2, Colorado 1 (OT); Anaheim 4, Washington 0.

Eastern Conference						
Atlantic Division						
	W	L	OTL	GF	GA	PTS
Tampa Bay	46	17	4	245	186	96
Boston	41	15	8	215	163	90
Toronto	39	22	7	223	195	85
Florida	32	25	7	193	204	71
Detroit	26	29	11	175	199	63
Montreal	25	30	11	171	206	61
Ottawa	23	32	10	177	227	56
Buffalo	21	34	11	159	214	53
Metropolitan Division						
Washington	37	22	7	203	197	81
Pittsburgh	38	25	4	219	203	80
Philadelphia	34	21	11	197	193	79
New Jersey	34	25	8	199	203	76
Columbus	34	28	5	180	187	73
Carolina	29	27	11	178	204	69
NY Islanders	29	29	9	216	241	67
NY Rangers	30	31	6	189	212	66

Western Conference						
Central Division						
	W	L	OTL	GF	GA	PTS
Nashville	43	14	9	216	168	95
Winnipeg	40	17	9	223	175	89
Minnesota	38	22	7	210	192	83
Dallas	37	24	6	195	176	80
Colorado	35	24	7	206	195	77
St. Louis	35	26	5	180	176	75
Chicago	29	30	8	190	196	66
Pacific Division						
Las Vegas	42	19	5	226	184	89
Anaheim	34	21	12	190	183	80
San Jose	35	22	9	196	184	79
Los Angeles	36	25	5	192	165	77
Calgary	32	25	10	188	199	74
Edmonton	28	34	4	187	219	60
Vancouver	25	32	9	180	217	59
Arizona	20	34	11	158	213	51

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



NEWARK: Nico Hischier #13 of the New Jersey Devils skates against the Montreal Canadiens at the Prudential Center on Tuesday in Newark, New Jersey. — AFP

BLUE JACKETS 4, GOLDEN KNIGHTS 1

Joonas Korpisalo had 37 saves and Pierre-Luc Dubois and Artemi Panarin each had a goal and two assists to lead host Columbus over Pacific Division-leading Vegas. Defensemen Zach Werenski and Ian Cole also scored for Columbus, which won despite getting outshot, 38-21. Korpisalo, filling in for starter Sergei Bobrovsky who was ill, snapped a personal three-game losing streak. Erik Haula scored for the lone goal for Vegas, which lost for the fourth time in five games. Marc-Andre Fleury finished with 17 saves, suffering just his ninth loss in 34 games (22-9-3).

Bay's win spoiled a heroic effort by Florida's Nick Bjugstad, who scored three goals for his first career hat trick. He has 16 points in his past 16 games.

WILD 6, HURRICANES 2

Eric Staal's second goal of the game capped a franchise record-breaking four-goal outburst early in the second period and host Minnesota routed Carolina. Goalie Devan Dubnyk made 29 saves at Xcel Energy Center and had a front-row seat to his team's seventh wins in nine games. Already up 1-0 after the first period, the Wild went on a scoring spree after the intermission, with Nino Niederreiter kicking things off just 23 seconds into the middle period. Niederreiter was parked in the slot and deflected a Jared Spurgeon point shot to snap a nine-game goal drought. — Reuters

LIGHTNING 5, PANTHERS 4 (OT)

Brayden Point scored with 2:11 left in overtime as host Tampa Bay edged Florida. The loss snapped Florida's season-best six-game win streak. Tampa

Scotland stick with Calcutta Cup winning formula

MURRAYFIELD: Blair Kinghorn will make a first start for Scotland as he was chosen yesterday to replace the injured Tommy Seymour at wing in coach Gregor Townsend's only change to his side to take on Ireland in the Six Nations on Saturday.

Seymour has not recovered from a back injury suffered in Scotland's Calcutta Cup success over England at Murrayfield two weeks ago when they beat the auld enemy 25-13.

The 21-year-old Kinghorn debuted as a substitute in the match. It was no surprise that Townsend stuck with a winning combination after Scotland scored a second successive win in this year's competition and are now looking to derail Ireland's hopes of a Grand Slam when they play in Dublin.

Scotland added 10 players to their squad on Monday including the return from injury of a number of stalwarts like Richie Gray and Zander Fagerson, but only hooker Fraser Brown made it into the match 23. "We were delighted with the result against England and backing up our win against France with an improved performance," said Townsend in a statement.

"The intent we showed in attack and defence in the first half was very encouraging and we continued to work hard in the second-half. The effort that went into denying England a second try in the closing minutes was great to see.

"Our players had prepared very well for the challenge of taking on England and there has been a similar focus and commitment this week at training. "There are a few areas of our game that we are working to improve and we are aware that we will have to be better if we are to beat a very good Ireland side in Dublin."

Team: 15-Stuart Hogg, 14-Blair Kinghorn, 13-Huw Jones, 12-Pete Horne, 11-Sean Maitland, 10-Finn Russell, 9-Greig Laidlaw, 8-Ryan Wilson, 7-Hamish Watson, 6-John Barclay (captain), 5-Jonny Gray, 4-Grant Gilchrist, 3-Simon Berghan, 2-Stuart McInally, 1-Gordon Reid.

Replacements: 16-Fraser Brown, 17-Jamie Bhatti, 18-WP Nel, 19-Tim Swinson, 20-David Denton, 21-Ali Price, 22-Nick Grigg, 23-Lee Jones. — Reuters

England's Hughes seeks 'big start' in France Six Nations clash

LONDON: Nathan Hughes says England will be looking for a "big start" against France in the Six Nations on Saturday, desperate to bounce back from the defeat to Scotland that ended their Grand Slam hopes.

The Wasps No.8, who returned from injury in the loss in Edinburgh, believes England need to come out of the blocks strongly against Les Bleus if they are to secure back-to-back wins in the French capital following their 2016 victory.

The defending Six Nations champions are second in the table after their shock 25-13 defeat against Scotland, with Grand Slam-chasing Ireland favourites to win the tournament.

Captain Dylan Hartley is a doubt for the game in Paris while Jack Nowell and Sam Underhill have been ruled out. "Our mentality this week is to have a big start," said the 26-year-old Hughes, who was born in Fiji.

"With France they've got big boys so if we can move them around in the early part of the game then that'll be a big bonus for us, and (if we can) keep the scoreboard ticking. "If we can create that big mountain for them to climb I think it will be quite hard for them to get back."

There is rain forecast at the Stade de France this weekend for the clash between England and fifth-placed France, which Hughes said could be a factor. "The weather is going to dictate the game so if it's going to be a wet one then our forwards need to muscle up on their forwards and carry us around.

"We're not going to make the weather change the way we want to play, we still want to play expansive, running rugby and for us to do that we need to be connected. "We don't want to change too much of our game-that's why we've been doing heaps of skills and stuff like that to cope with whatever weather that comes."

Although Hughes is not taking his selection for granted, he says the whole team are motivated to put things right after their defeat. "I've got a lot of minutes into the



Nathan Hughes

legs so I'm ready to go if I get the nod to play this weekend," he said. "I'll be raring to go really because of the performance when we lost in Scotland. We want to turn that around and go back to winning ways." — AFP

PAS holds sports media course

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Abdallah Al-Salem Leaders Preparation Center in Khaldiya received Secretary General of Electronic Media Mohammad Al-Aradah, and Former Director General of Political Media Hussein Jamal, during the fourth day of sports media course being held under the patronage of Public Authority for Sports (PAS). Both men spoke about the openness of electronic media, the increase of newspapers electronic sites and forming an association to protect freedom of opinion. Al-Aradah spoke about the development of social media, and the emergence of some electronic papers, and having a law by the government. He said we met former Information Minister Sheikh Salman Al-Humoud, and Members of Parliament, and the "electronic association" was declared by electronic papers owners. There are more than 200 electronic papers as competition is on the increase. He said that lawyers were referred to defend electronic media owners and writers whenever any case came up.

Meanwhile, former Director General of Political News at the Information Ministry Hussein Jamal spoke



about his experience at the ministry and the opening of the largest political, social and sports media office in Kuwait and benefiting from his experiences, adding that the media became important such as education

and health. Director of Abdallah Al-Salem Center Mahmoud Abul lauded both speakers and their new information, and conveyed greetings to PAS Director General Dr Humoud Fulaiteh.

Sports

Paul, Harden fire as Houston Rockets extend winning streak to 16 games

New Orleans win its ninth consecutive game

LOS ANGELES: Chris Paul scored a team-high 25 points and James Harden added a double-double as the Houston Rockets extended their winning streak to 16 games with a 122-112 victory over the Oklahoma City Thunder on Tuesday at Chesapeake Energy Arena. Paul made 5 of 6 3-point attempts and added five assists plus three steals to help the Rockets stave off a late Thunder rally. Oklahoma City fell into a 19-point hole midway through the fourth quarter before cutting the deficit to eight with a late flurry, a byproduct of aggressive forays to the rim. Harden chipped in 23 points and 11 assists and Houston overcame his 10 turnovers to extend its winning streak, the second-longest in franchise his-



Philadelphia sizzled from perimeter to defeat Charlotte

The Rockets did so again via their 3-point proficiency, connecting on 17 of 33 attempted treys while shooting a robust 53.5 percent overall. Russell Westbrook paced the Thunder with 32 points but needed 27 shots to reach that total while also committing nine turnovers. Carmelo Anthony added 23 points for the Thunder, who entered play fighting to remain in the postseason picture in the congested Western Conference.

Anthony passed Jerry West for 20th on the all-time NBA scoring list in the loss.

WARRIORS 114, NETS 101

Andre Iguodala threw down dunks on consecutive possessions to cap a 28-9 burst bridging the third and fourth quarters and



OAKLAND: Spencer Dinwiddie #8 of the Brooklyn Nets goes to the basket against the Golden State Warriors yesterday at ORACLE Arena in Oakland, California. — AFP

NBA results/standings

Philadelphia 128, Charlotte 114; Toronto 106, Atlanta 90; Washington 117, Miami 113 (OT); Houston 122, Oklahoma City 112; Dallas 118, Denver 107; Portland 111, New York 87; Golden State 114, Brooklyn 101.

Eastern Conference					Western Conference				
Atlantic Division					Northwest Division				
	W	L	PCT	GB		W	L	PCT	GB
Toronto	46	17	.730	-	Portland	39	26	.600	-
Boston	45	20	.692	2	Minnesota	38	28	.576	1.5
Philadelphia	35	28	.556	11	Oklahoma City	37	29	.561	2.5
New York	24	41	.369	23	Denver	35	29	.547	3.5
Brooklyn	20	45	.308	27	Utah	34	30	.531	4.5
Central Division					Pacific Division				
Cleveland	37	26	.587	-	Golden State	50	14	.781	-
Indiana	37	27	.578	0.5	LA Clippers	34	29	.540	15.5
Milwaukee	34	30	.531	3.5	LA Lakers	28	35	.444	21.5
Detroit	29	35	.453	8.5	Sacramento	20	44	.313	30
Chicago	21	42	.333	16	Phoenix	19	47	.288	32
Southeast Division					Southwest Division				
Washington	37	28	.569	-	Houston	50	13	.794	-
Miami	34	31	.523	3	New Orleans	37	26	.587	13
Charlotte	28	37	.431	9	San Antonio	37	27	.578	13.5
Orlando	20	44	.313	16.5	Dallas	20	45	.308	31
Atlanta	20	45	.308	17	Memphis	18	45	.286	32

Golden State pulled away from pesky Brooklyn for a victory in Oakland. Stephen Curry had a game-high 34 points, Kevin Durant chipped in with 19 points, Klay Thompson had 18 and Draymond Green had 16 for Golden State, which reached 50 wins for the fifth straight season. D'Angelo Russell had a team-high 22 points for the Nets, whose streak of 10 straight games with 12 or more 3-pointers ended on a 9-for-34 night.

PELICANS 121, CLIPPERS 116

Anthony Davis recorded 41 points, 13 rebounds, three steals and three blocked shots and New Orleans won its ninth consecutive game with a narrow victory over host Los Angeles. Jrue Holiday contributed 19 points and a career-best 17 assists as the Pelicans continued their winning ways with their best streak since a 10-game run during the 2010-11 campaign. Rajon Rondo added 13 points and nine assists, Nikola Mirotic scored 13 and E'Twaun Moore added 10

points and nine rebounds. Lou Williams had 27 points and 11 assists and Tobias Harris added 27 points and 11 rebounds for the Clippers, who lost for just the third time in nine games. Montrezl Harrell scored 26 points and DeAndre Jordan collected 20 rebounds to go with 10 points.

RAPTORS 106, HAWKS 90

DeMar DeRozan scored 25 points, and Toronto stayed hot with a win over visiting Atlanta. Kyle Lowry and DeRozan stayed on the sideline for much of the fourth quarter. C.J. Miles and Delon Wright stepped up in their place and fueled a fourth-quarter spurt for the Raptors, who have won five in a row and 12 of 13 overall. Kent Bazemore and John Collins each scored 14 points, and Dewayne Dedmon had 12 points and 10 rebounds for the Hawks, who lost all four meetings with the Raptors this season.

76ERS 128, HORNETS 114

Robert Covington scored 22 points, aid-

ed by five 3-point baskets, as Philadelphia sizzled from the perimeter to defeat host Charlotte. Dario Saric added 19 points with four 3s, and Joel Embiid poured in 18 points. Dwight Howard scored 30 points for the Hornets, hitting 12 of 17 shots from the field.

WIZARDS 117, HEAT 113 (OT)

Bradley Beal scored 30 points to lead host Washington past Miami in overtime, but he missed an open two-foot shot in the lane. Teammate Kelly Olynyk missed a put-back, and Miami was forced to foul. Kelly Oubre made two free throws with 1.8 seconds left to ice the game. The Wizards snapped a three-game losing streak, their longest of the season. Wizards forward Markieff Morris had a double-double with 16 points and 13 rebounds. He had four straight points in overtime, snapping what had been a tie score at 109. — Reuters

Injured Olympic Champion Hanyu out of Worlds

TOKYO: Figure skating Olympic champion Yuzuru Hanyu will not compete in this month's World Championships in Italy due to injury, Japan's Skating Federation said yesterday. Hanyu requires "two weeks of rest and three months of rehabilitation" for damaged ligaments in his right ankle, as well as other injuries, the federation said in a statement.

"As the result of medical diagnosis, I am not able to compete in the World Championships, but I will focus on treatment and rehabilitation so that I can return to full health as soon as possible," Hanyu said in the same statement. "I will continue to do what I can little-by-little." The 23-year-old, who originally suffered the injury in November, grabbed gold in Pyeongchang, becoming the first man to capture back-to-back Olympic figure skating gold medals in 66 years.

Hanyu revealed on his return from the Winter Olympics that he had won gold despite his ankle being at barely one quarter of full fitness. "To be honest, if I compare the situation of my ankle now from the worst time, the pain has only improved by 20-30 percent," said Hanyu. But he has also expressed a wish to continue competing at the top level, with his eye on the quadruple Axel.



Yuzuru Hanyu

It is a jump requiring four-and-a-half rotations which is so technically difficult that no skater has yet managed to execute it. Japan was distraught when Hanyu fell and twisted his ankle attempting the ultra-tough quadruple Lutz jump during practice on the eve of the NHK Trophy in November, threatening his Olympic participation. Then the nation erupted in euphoria as the injured celebrity soared to take gold in South Korea after staying out of the media for weeks and

training in Canada.

His gold-winning feats in Sochi in 2014 and Pyeongchang last month prompted the government to consider him for the People's Honour Award, one of the highest accolades offered by the prime minister. The World Championships take place in Milan between March 21 and 25.

At last year's event in Helsinki, Hanyu led a Japanese one-two with Shoma Uno, who clinched silver in Pyeongchang. — AFP

N Korean athletes arrive in South for Paralympics

PYEONGCHANG: North Korean athletes and delegates arrived in the South yesterday to take part in the Winter Paralympics, as part of an Olympics-driven detente between the two neighbours. Two competitors-both of them taking part in cross-country skiing-along with four observer athletes and 18 officials crossed the land border north of Seoul before heading for the venues.

Their journey came a day after Seoul announced plans to hold a historic summit between the North's leader Kim Jong Un and the South's President Moon Jae-in-the latest fruit of their Olympics-fuelled diplomacy. Moon sought to use the February 9-25 Pyeongchang Winter Games to try to broker dialogue between Washington and Pyongyang in a bid to ease the nuclear standoff between them.

The North mounted a charm offensive by sending hundreds of cheerleaders and Kim's sister to the opening ceremony of the Games, during which athletes from the two Koreas marched together under a neutral "unification flag". Seoul responded by sending Moon's special envoys-including his spy chief-to Pyongyang this week, where leader Kim told them he was willing to discuss denuclearisation with the US.

The North Korean athletes-Kim Jong Hyon and Ma Yu Chol-may march with their

counterparts from the South during Friday's opening ceremony for the Paralympics, which run until March 18. The pair made their international debuts in a tournament in January in Oberried, Germany.

It is the first time the North, which has often faced criticism for its cruel treatment of disabled people, has taken part in the Winter Paralympics. Pyeongyang had previously sent athletes to the 2012 Summer Paralympics in London and the 2016 edition of the games in Rio. Craig Spence, a spokesman for the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), said the athletes had been given "bipartite" slots for the games, meaning they had not been able to meet the full qualification criteria.

"They have bipartite invitations from us due to their circumstances. They have not been travelling around the world and have not been able to take part in all the qualifying events," he said. — AFP

Ex-Sky coach urges Wiggins to explain use of medication

LONDON: Bradley Wiggins' former coach has urged the five-time Olympic champion and former Team Sky doctor Richard Freeman to explain their use of therapeutic use exemptions for banned medication.

British lawmakers on Monday admitted that Wiggins, Team Sky and their principal Dave Brailsford were not guilty of "a violation" of doping rules, but said their actions in applying for TUEs for triamcinolone did "cross an ethical line". All have categorically denied cheating.

Triamcinolone, used to treat asthma, is an anti-inflammatory steroid that can also help cyclists shed weight without losing power. Shane Sutton, the former Team Sky head coach and British cycling technical director, stuck by what he told the Commons digital, culture, media and sport committee that he felt "what Brad was doing was unethical but not against the rules" in applying for TUEs for banned drugs.

The Australian, however, says

others still have questions to answer. "I have no axe to grind with Brad," he told Sky Sports News. "My axe to grind here is Brad and the doc (Freeman) had a chance to come forward."

"They had a chance to defend Dave Brailsford and it should have been them in front of the committee. I am calling for him and the doc to come forward now and tell the truth." "The report is that he (Wiggins) didn't cheat, so come forward and tell everybody what you went through, how many times you administered this particular corticosteroid or whatever to combat what you were going through, and then let's just put it to bed," he added.

Sutton took exception to claims from an anonymous source stating to the committee that Wiggins and a group of riders trained separately and used triamcinolone to "lean down" (lose weight). "I know what training camps I was on with Brad, and for me that is a total lie and (is from) someone that very much, I would say, has an axe to grind with Team Sky," he said.

Sutton also described as "laughable" claims he had bullied Freeman over the use of TUEs. "The doctor needs to go in front of the camera and put everyone's mind to rest. The doctor was never bullied into anything... for people to turn around to say (that) is utter nonsense," he said. — AFP



PARIS: File photo taken on July 22, 2012, Tour de France 2012 winner Bradley Wiggins, (C), wrapped in a national flag, celebrates with teammates during a parade on the Champs-Elysees Avenue at the end of the 120 km and last stage of the 2012 Tour de France in Paris. — AFP

Sports

Hobbling Taylor gives NZ thrilling win over England

Deciding game is at Hagley Oval in Christchurch on Saturday

DUNEDIN: A hobbling Ross Taylor scored an unbeaten 181 to guide New Zealand to a thrilling five-wicket victory over England yesterday at University Oval and level their five-match series 2-2.

Taylor, who missed the third game in Wellington with a quadriceps injury, was limping badly after he appeared to suffer a similar strain but still combined with Tom Latham (71) for 187 runs as New Zealand scored 339 for five in 49.3 overs to chase down England's 335 for nine.

“This is perfect, unbelievable”

“It was nice to be there at the end,” Taylor said. “There were a lot of little partnerships in there and ... we were able to get there. “We just had to give ourselves a chance. We knew that we wouldn't win it in the first 10 overs but you can lose it and we just tried to take it as deep as we can.”

England's big total was set up by a rollicking start between Jason Roy (42) and Jonny Bairstow, who were scoring at almost eight runs an over before Ish Sodhi broke the partnership at 77 in the 11th over.

Bairstow (138) and Root (102) then continued the attack as they put on an impressive 190-run partnership. Bairstow, who scored his third one-day century, was dismissed to leave the tourists on 267 for two with 12.2 overs remaining and well set for a score challenging 400.

England's high-powered batting lineup, however, then slumped to 288 for seven before Root completed his 12th century. The visitors had been in danger of not



DUNEDIN: New Zealand's Ross Taylor bats during the fourth ODI cricket Test match between New Zealand and England at University Oval in Dunedin yesterday. — AFP

seeing out their full allocation before Tom Curran scored an important 22 not out, which included four successive boundaries in the final over.

“We were in a really commanding position until the 37th over and then had that collapse,” England captain Eoin Morgan said. “But we thought 330 was still a reasonably competitive score.” The hosts' run chase had looked to be doomed at two for two in the third over after both Martin Gupthill and Colin Munro were dismissed for ducks before captain Kane Williamson (45) and Taylor combined for 84 runs.

Taylor and Latham, who had a 178-run partnership in the first match, then rebuilt New Zealand's run chase only for Taylor to hurt himself again while diving to make his ground after he had passed 100 for the 19th time.

He was then restricted from running anything other than easy singles and instead looked to hit the ball to the fence. Colin de Grandhomme added a quickfire 23 before Henry Nicholls hit a six in the final over to give the hosts a remarkable victory. The deciding game is at Hagley Oval in Christchurch on Saturday. — Reuters

SCOREBOARD

DUNEDIN, New Zealand: Final scoreboard in the fourth one-day international between New Zealand and England in Dunedin yesterday:

England	
J. Roy c Santner b Sodhi	42
J. Bairstow c Southee b Munro	138
J. Root c Latham b Southee	102
J. Buttler c and b Sodhi	0
E. Morgan c Munro b Boult	5
B. Stokes c Nicholls b Sodhi	1
M. Ali c Southee b Sodhi	3
C. Woakes c Boult b Munro	3
A. Rashid b Boult	11
T. Curran not out	22
M. Wood not out	3
Extras: (lb1, w4)	5
Total: (9 wickets: 50 overs)	335
Fall of wickets: 1-77 (Roy), 2-267 (Bairstow), 3-267 (Buttler), 4-274 (Morgan), 5-276 (Stokes), 6-280 (Ali), 7-288 (Woakes), 8-305 (Root), 9-313 (Rashid)	
Bowling: Southee 10-0-87-1 (1w), Boult 10-0-56-2 (1w), de Grandhomme 2-0-23-0 (1w), Santner 10-0-57-0, Sodhi 10-1-58-4 (1w), Munro 8-0-53-2.	

New Zealand:	
M. Gupthill c Stokes b Woakes	0
C. Munro lbw Wood	0
K. Williamson c Buttler b Stokes	45
R. Taylor not out	181
T. Latham c Ali b Curran	71
C. de Grandhomme c Woakes b Curran	23
H. Nicholls not out	13
Extras: (lb4, w2)	6
Total: (5 wickets: 49.3 overs)	339
Fall of wickets: 1-0 (Munro), 2-2 (Gupthill), 3-86 (Williamson), 4-273 (Latham), 5-303 (de Grandhomme)	
Bowling: Woakes 8-2-42-1, Wood 8-0-65-1 (1w), Rashid 10-0-74-0, Curran 8.3-0-57-2, Stokes 7-0-45-1 (1w), Ali 8-0-52-0.	
Result: New Zealand win by five wickets	
Series: 2-2	

India hands hike in player fees with new retainer structure

MUMBAI: The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has introduced a new A+ category in the retainer fee structure for its top players, who will receive a huge pay increase under the new Annual Contracts for the 2017-18 season. The retainer structure now features four categories - Grade A+, Grade A, Grade B and Grade C - compared to three in previous years. The uppermost category features five players - skipper Virat Kohli, opening batsmen Rohit Sharma and Shikhar Dhawan, pacemen Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Jasprit Bumrah - who have been put on a retainer worth 70 million Indian rupees (\$1.1 million).

The amount is a significant increase from last year, where players in the uppermost 'A' category were handed retainers of 20 million Indian rupees. “The CoA (Committee of Administrators) was of the view that the performance and position of Indian Cricket needs to be recognised with the fee structure comparable to the best in the world,” the BCCI said in a statement yesterday. Last year, senior players expressed dissatisfaction with the pay rises they received, leading Vinod Rai, head of the Supreme Court-appointed CoA, to announce that a further hike would be considered for the current season.

The world's richest cricket board handed seven players Grade A contracts this season, including former captain M.S. Dhoni, all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja and batsman Ajinkya Rahane, who will receive 50 million Indian rupees each. Top Indian cricketers also receive a match fee for each international appearance and many benefit from playing in the lucrative Indian Premier League (IPL). Grade B players, including fast bowler Ishant Sharma and all-rounder Hardik Pandya, will earn 30 million Indian rupees each while Grade C players will receive 10 million Indian rupees each.

The CoA, which supervises the operations of the BCCI, said that it had sanctioned the creation of a Players Revenue/ Compensation Equalization Fund (PR/CEF) to insulate player compensation. The BCCI will contribute approximately 1.25 billion Indian rupees per annum to the fund. — Reuters

Warner cleared for second Test, De Kock to contest charge

PORT ELIZABETH: Australian opening batsman David Warner has been cleared to play in the second Test against South Africa after accepting an International Cricket Council (ICC) charge of bringing the game into disrepute.

However, South African wicketkeeper Quinton de Kock, who was involved in an ugly verbal spat with Warner, will challenge his lesser level one charge and has a hearing scheduled for Wednesday, Cricket South Africa said.

The ICC stopped just short of banning Warner for the match that starts in Port Elizabeth on Friday. The vice-captain will be fined 75 percent of his match fee and handed three demerit points, Cricket Australia said yesterday.

Should a player receive four or more demerit points within a two-year period, these are converted into suspension points. A suspension point amounts to a ban from one test or two ODIs, or two T20s, whichever come first.

The incident between Warner and De Kock has sparked a war of words between the two camps, with each blaming the other for overstepping the boundaries of what is acceptable on-field banter.

CCTV footage from the players' tunnel on day four of the test in Durban showed Warner and De Kock involved in a fiery exchange as players climbed the stairwell to their dressing rooms during the tea break. Warner had to be restrained by team mates during the fracas. Another video from just before the incident surfaced yesterday showing

S Africa, Australia renew rivalry after tempestuous first Test

PORT ELIZABETH: South Africa and Australia resume their battle, while looking to temper hostilities and histrionics, in the second test of the four-match series at St George's Park tomorrow, just four days after the visitors won the opener by 118 runs.

It was a result that maintained Australia's long-standing test dominance on South African soil but was overshadowed by spats both on and off the field that have left the



DURBAN: File photo shows Australia batsman David Warner (L) is hit by the ball during day three of the first Sunfoil Test between South Africa and Australia at the Kingsmead Stadium in Durban. — AFP

Warner repeatedly calling De Kock a “sook”, which is Australian slang for somebody that is perceived to be soft. De Kock faces a level one charge that brings with it a maximum penalty of a fine and demerit points, but his participation in the second test is not in danger.

Warner is not the only Australian player to be punished

by the ICC following what was a tempestuous 118-run victory in Durban. Spinner Nathan Lyon was fined 15 percent of his match fee for breaching the ICC's code of conduct as he intentionally dropped the ball onto a sprawled AB de Villiers after the South African batsman had been run-out in his country's second innings. — Reuters

participation of Australian vice-captain David Warner in doubt. The feisty opener is to answer an International Cricket Council (ICC) charge for a staircase scuffle with wicketkeeper Quinton de Kock after they traded barbs out in the middle and continued the conflict on the way to the changing rooms. Warner faces a level two charge that could see him suspended for the second Test, while South Africa's De Kock faces a lesser offence. The outcome of the disciplinary proceedings is not likely to be known until the eve of the test and overshadows the build-up after a good Australian victory at Kingsmead.

The bowling of Mitchell Starc and a strong batting performance by the tail in their first innings proved the difference between the sides in Durban, where the wicket was slower than anticipated but made for a gripping contest.

Much the same is predicted for Port Elizabeth with Starc ominously warning that Australia's bowlers could do

better. “The reversing ball is going all right this season but there's maybe a little bit of work to do with the new ball and getting a few more early wickets,” he said.

South Africa were poor in the opening innings but put up a good fight in the second, where they were set a mammoth 417-run chase and fleetingly looked capable of achieving it before their resistance crumbled.

“We would have liked to start the series on a positive note. There are quite a bit of learning opportunities for us to take going forward,” South Africa captain Faf du Plessis said. “We will need to take a lot more responsibility with the bat. We didn't have a great start with the bat but saw great character from the young guys which started their series off well.”

The 23-year-old Aiden Markram was the only centurion in the test, his 143 confirming his potential at the top of the order for the home team. — Reuters

Afghan wicketkeeper Shahzad banned for two matches

HARARE: Big-hitting Afghanistan wicketkeeper Mohammad Shahzad has been suspended for two matches, just three months after returning from a one-year doping ban, the ICC announced yesterday. The 30-year-old slammed his bat against the pitch

next to the main wicket after being dismissed for 24 in Afghanistan's two-run defeat by Zimbabwe in World Cup qualifying on Tuesday.

Shahzad reached four demerit points over the last two years after being found guilty of “abuse of cricket equipment or clothing, ground equipment or fixtures and fittings” by cricket's governing body. The opening batsman will now miss Afghanistan's next two Group B matches against Hong Kong on Thursday and Nepal on Saturday. It is a big blow for the Rashid Khan-led side, who were expected to qualify for next year's tournament in England and Wales, but now look set to miss out after consecutive losses to Scotland and hosts Zimbabwe. Shahzad only returned to action last December after serving a ban

for taking a weight-loss product.

Teenage leg-spinner Mujeeb Ur Rahman was fined 50 percent of his match fee and given three demerit points for throwing the ball “in a dangerous manner” towards Zimbabwe batsman Brendan Taylor in Tuesday's game. The 16-year-old contested the charge, but was found guilty on Wednesday morning.

Wicketkeeper Taylor, who made a crucial 89 in Zimbabwe's total of 196, was also fined 15 percent of his match fee for dissent after complaining about an lbw appeal that wasn't given late on in the tense encounter. Meanwhile, Hong Kong batsman Nizakat Khan was fined and handed three demerit points for barging into Scotland bowler Alasdair Evans during his side's four-wicket defeat. — AFP



Matches on TV (Local Timings)

UEFA EUROPA LEAGUE	
Atletico de Madrid v Lokomotiv Moscow	21:00
beIN SPORTS HD 3	
CSKA Moscow v Olympique Lyonnais	21:00
beIN SPORTS HD 5	
Borussia Dortmund v Red Bull Salzburg	21:00
beIN SPORTS HD 4	
Milan v Arsenal	21:00
beIN SPORTS HD 2	
Lazio v Dynamo Kyiv	23:05
beIN SPORTS HD 4	
Leipzig v Zenit St. Petersburg	23:05
beIN SPORTS	
Olympique Marseille v Athletic de Bilbao	23:05
beIN SPORTS HD 2	
Sporting v Viktoria Plzen	23:05
beIN SPORTS HD 5	

Sports

Oscar at the double to earn Asian Champions League point for SIPG

Qatar's Al Duhail maintain their perfect start as Group B leaders

HONG KONG: Brazilian Oscar scored twice to salvage a 2-2 draw for Shanghai SIPG against Ulsan Hyundai yesterday as the Chinese Super League side's perfect start to the Asian Champions League came to an end.

The former Chelsea playmaker twice levelled for SIPG after Richard Windbichler and Kim In-sung had scored for the South Koreans. Windbichler put his side in front in the 37th minute but Oscar levelled with a low, long-range strike into the bottom corner less than a minute later.

Two minutes after Kim restored Ulsan's advantage, the 26-year-old Oscar curled his second into the top corner from the edge of the area to keep Shanghai on top of Group F with seven points from three games.

"I'm quite satisfied with the performance today, even though the result wasn't ideal," said SIPG coach Vitor Pereira. "The players have shown great fighting spirit and mentality. We hit the bar three times."

"This is football. You might have a great process but have a less than ideal result." Ulsan are second in the group with Melbourne Victory in third after Leroy George's late penalty earned the Australian side a 2-2 draw with Kawasaki Frontale, who twice took the lead only to be pegged back.

Elsinho gave the Japanese champions the lead before Besart Berisha levelled the scores with a header,

only for Kyohei Noborizato to restore Kawasaki's lead with a close-range tap-in. George equalised from the penalty spot two minutes into injury time as Melbourne picked up their second point of the competition.

Shanghai Shenhua had Giovanni Moreno to thank for salvaging a 1-1 draw with the Suwon Bluewings in Group H as the Colombian struck from the penalty spot after the twice continental champions had taken the lead through Lee Ki-je.

The draw kept both teams in touch with leaders Kashima Antlers, who moved on to seven points after a 2-0 win over Sydney FC. Goals from Shoma Doi and Naomichi Ueda gave the Japanese side the win to leave Graham Arnold's Sydney sitting bottom of the group with just one point from their opening three games. Qatar's Al Duhail maintained their perfect start as Group B leaders with a 3-2 win over Lokomotiv Tashkent from Uzbekistan to remain three points clear of Iran's Zob Ahan, who defeated Al Wahda of the United Arab Emirates 2-0.

Former winners Al Ain of the UAE needed a last-minute penalty from Ahmad Khalil to draw 2-2 with Iran's Esteghlal in Group D. Al Ain, 2003 champions and 2016 runners-up, are third in the group, level on three points with Qatar's Al Rayyan, who drew 1-1 with last year's beaten finalists Al Hilal from Saudi Arabia. —Reuters



SYDNEY: Kashima Antlers player Yuma Suzuki (C) is tackled by Sydney FC players Adrian Mierzejewski (L) and Paulo Retre (R) during their AFC Champions League football match in Sydney yesterday. — AFP

“ We hit the bar three times ”

PSG defeat prompts questions over Qatar soft-power effort

DOHA: Paris Saint-Germain's latest bruising exit from the European football Champions League may have been particularly painful for two men watching among the almost 50,000-strong crowd at Parc des Princes.

High in the stands in the Paris stadium were Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani and the former ruler, his father Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani—who together have helped bankroll the French team's obsession with landing club football's biggest prize: the European Cup. Tuesday's limp defeat, even if by Real Madrid, seems scant return for the more than one billion euros poured into PSG since Qatar Sports Investments (QSI) bought the French club in 2011. This was meant to be the year the club—having signed Neymar and Kylian Mbappe for a combined 402 million euros (\$499 million)—joined European football's elite.

Instead, PSG has failed to realise its ambitions, crucially at a time when Qatar is at the centre of a bitter political conflict with neighbouring former allies in the Gulf. Even more galling for Qatar and PSG is that one of the favourites this year is Abu Dhabi-owned Manchester City.

HOW DOES QATAR RESPOND?

Those involved with PSG say there is no chance of Qatar turning its back on the club. "The project is not stopping," said a source close to the club. "The investment has been huge and is continuing." Nasser Al-Khelaifi, who simultaneously serves as chairman of QSI and president of PSG in addition to being a tennis buddy of the current emir-spoke immediately after the humbling defeat about taking time to reflect, despite being "upset". "Short-term, the club's Neymar-powered, Gulf feud-busting tactics would appear to be at an end," said Simon Chadwick, a professor of Sports Enterprise at Britain's Salford University and a member of a Qatari government sport think tank. "Longer term, however, one senses it will be a case of keep calm and carry on." Success "requires sus-



PARIS: Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani (L) speaks with his predecessor Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani (C) as they arrive to attend the UEFA Champions League round of 16 second leg football match between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Real Madrid on Tuesday, at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris. — AFP

tained investment in talent acquisition and development", he adds, not just the occasional big name signing. Patience, though, is not a highly regarded virtue in modern-day football, even though the experience of "nouveau-riche" clubs such as England's Chelsea and Manchester City demonstrate it takes time for a team to establish itself among Europe's traditional elite.

For those directly involved with the day-to-day running of PSG, reflection on the Real defeat is likely to take the form of what to do with coach Unai Emery and Neymar. Paris-based French football specialist Jonathon Johnson says the latest failure will see "heads roll" and even speculates that Khelaifi may be for "the chopping block".

'FEELING THE SQUEEZE'

For Qatar, what to do next with PSG seems to be a matter of broader considerations, including international poli-

tics, diplomacy and finance. The emirate has exploited sport to pursue a soft power approach to improving its global image. This effort has reached its height in football, through PSG and the country's winning bid to host the 2022 World Cup. "Overall, there's no doubt that Qatar's six-year involvement with PSG has been a soft power success," says Christopher Davidson, a professor in Middle East politics at Durham University.

Financing the PSG European dream though is key. One billion euros may sound a lot but is equal only to a fortnight's spending on World Cup preparations for Qatar. And despite its vast gas riches, the boycott by its regional rivals has hit Doha's economy.

"The economic blockade drags on and no real end is in sight," Davidson said. "Cutting through the extensive propaganda produced by both sides, there's no doubt that the Qatari economy is feeling the squeeze." —AFP

Ruthless Real's work is far from done

MADRID: Cristiano Ronaldo is setting records again and Zinedine Zidane is back in favour after Real Madrid brushed aside Paris Saint-Germain to reach their eighth consecutive Champions League quarter-final.

After a bruising few months, in which Real have limped out of the running for every domestic honour, they saved their best for the Parc des Princes and what defender Sergio Ramos described as the club's "favourite tournament". Certainly, their emphatic 5-2 aggregate victory over PSG was as convincing as it was comfortable, and an unprecedented third straight Champions League triumph, the fourth in five years, is now within reach. Ronaldo's form this season has, not coincidentally, matched that of his team.

Initially below his own high standards in La Liga, particularly at the Santiago Bernabeu, he has sustained his performances in Europe and hit a peak in recent weeks. The Portuguese's opener in Paris means he now has 15 goals in his last nine games overall and, in the Champions League, has scored in a remarkable nine consecutive matches, equalling the record of Ruud van Nistelrooy. Zidane, meanwhile, disregarded in February, is top dog in March, lauded in Spain for his tactical acumen against Unai Emery, and strength of character for picking a bench that included Gareth Bale and Isco, as well as Luka Modric and Toni Kroos, both available after injury.

But Real must now turn their revival into something

more concrete. Lose in the quarter-finals, or even the last four, and the success over PSG will quickly retreat from view, replaced by a likely third-place finish in La Liga and lack of silverware added in the equation. Perhaps a squad that won the league title last season, and owns three Champions League triumphs, has lacked edge in the campaign's early stages but is sharpening with a major prize in sight.

"We've had difficult moments in the Liga and Copa del Rey, but it's always difficult to maintain the same level while playing every three days," Zidane said on Tuesday. "You can't always win everything, but we're winning now in the Liga and we have to look ahead to our game with Eibar on Saturday." Zidane has begun treating domestic games almost like trials for Europe, rotating key players or trying other ones in unfamiliar positions. That strategy will be tested in April, given Real host city rivals Atletico Madrid in La Liga, the weekend before their quarter-final second leg. By then, Bale will hope to have played his way back into favour. The Welshman was left out of the starting line-up in France, just as he had been for the first leg in Madrid three weeks before.

Snubbed for Real's two biggest games of the season so far, Bale would appear to have reached a crossroads in his relationship with Zidane, whose explanation afterwards was brief but revealing.

"Today it was important to have two lines of four, to defend well against their wide players," the Frenchman said. "We did that very well." Fit again, and seemingly finding form, Bale faces a fight not to be deployed only in Real's throwaway fixtures.

"For sure Bale would prefer to play more," Zidane added. "All the players are important here, which is what I look at. Gareth is one of them. He did not start the home or away (games against PSG), but he will play games. He is an important player for us." —AFP

Arsenal test as murky finances threaten AC Milan

MILAN: AC Milan's superb recent run faces a stiff test against Arsenal in the Europa League last-16 first leg in Italy today amid a backdrop of murky finances which are threatening one of Italy's most successful clubs.

Former AC Milan midfielder Gennaro Gattuso has turned around the fortunes of the struggling former European power on the pitch, with his side unbeaten in 13 games, and back within reach of Champions League qualification. But behind the scenes European football's governing body UEFA have voiced concerns over the club's complicated financial situation under their new Chinese owners.

There have been questions about the financial stability of the Chinese-led consortium that purchased the club from Silvio Berlusconi for 740 million euros (\$918m) last April, spending more than 200 million euros on new players in the summer.

The seven-time European champions have a massive loan for repayment and are in trouble with Financial Fair Play restrictions, with Bank of America Merrill Lynch (BAML) given the mandate to refinance debts. AC Milan are working to refinance more than 300 million euros in high-interest loans from US hedge fund Elliott Management. If the club is not able to refinance by next October the US hedge fund will seize control of the club.

But limited information on the source of Chinese owner Li Yonghong's wealth is proving a barrier to refinancing with the 48-year-old businessman last month dismissing reports he was insolvent when he purchased the club. The club are also in the firing line with UEFA.

European football's governing body in December rejected AC Milan's offer of a voluntary agreement to restructure finances, stating "there are still uncertainties in relation to the refinancing of the loans to be paid back in October 2018 and the financial guarantees provided by the main shareholder". UEFA will assess Milan's finances again in the coming months with possible punishments including limits on transfer spending, player salaries, and squad sizes for UEFA competitions.

EUROPA LEAGUE BOOST

In the meantime a board meeting will be called to approve a capital increase to get the club through to the end of the season making the revenue generated by their Europa League run of increased importance. "I'm very optimistic about any potential refinancing of the club's debt," said Marco Fassone, AC Milan's managing director as the club announced losses for the first half of the season to December 31, 2017 were down to 22.3 million euros from 39.4 million for the same period in 2016. Gattuso's side can help lighten the financial burden by defeating Arsenal and keeping their Europa League campaign alive as long as possible, to move closer to a Champions League place for next season. A packed San Siro Stadium should certainly help with more than 70,000 fans expected in the stands, before the second leg in London on Sunday was postponed due to the death of Fiorentina captain Davide Astori, so the team will be rested for Arsenal as they will look to extend their winning run to seven games. Arsenal, meanwhile, are in crisis, having lost eight of their last 13 games in all competitions, to sit sixth in the Premier League, with the Europa League representing their only remaining chance of success this season. —AFP

Attackers attempt to saw off South African athlete's legs

DURBAN: Chainsaw-wielding assailants attempted to hack South African triathlete Mhlangi Gwala's legs off, police said yesterday, describing the unprovoked attack as a case of attempted murder.

Gwala, 26, is recovering in hospital following the attack in Durban in the early hours of Tuesday, and his injuries are not life threatening. Robbery appears to have been ruled out as a motive.

"The complainant alleged that on March 6, 2018 at about 03:20 in the morning whilst cycling in Rick Turner Road, Umbilo, he was dragged by three unknown men into a bush," said police spokeswoman Captain Nqobile Gwala, no relation to the athlete.

"One was armed with a firearm and they attempted to cut off his legs with a chainsaw. The suspects fled the scene when they noticed someone was coming and the victim was assisted by security guards in the vicinity." "A case of attempted murder was opened at Umbilo police station for investigation." Gwala competed at the 2017 International World Triathlon Grand Final in Rotterdam in September in the 25-29 male category, coming in 45th position. Sandile Shange, a training partner of the triathlete, told South Africa's Eye Witness News that Gwala was shaken and battling to make sense of the incident. "The doctors say they will save his leg, but it will be a long road to recovery. He will be able to walk and run again but it will take some time," Shange said.—Reuters

13 Injured Olympic Champion Hanyu out of Worlds

14 Hobbling Taylor gives NZ thrilling win over England

15 Oscar at the double to earn Asian Champions League point for SIPG



Man City reach last eight

City ease through despite rare home loss to Basel



MANCHESTER: Manchester City's Chilean goalkeeper Claudio Bravo (L) comes out of his area to clear the ball during the UEFA Champions League round of sixteen second leg football match between Manchester City and Basel at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, north west England, yesterday. — AFP

MANCHESTER: Manchester City secured their place in the Champions League quarter-finals yesterday but did little to enhance their tag as favourites to win the competition as a much-changed side suffered a shock 2-1 home defeat by Basel. Despite losing for just the fourth time all season, the runaway Premier League leaders still cruised through 5-2 on aggregate after doing the hard work in Switzerland three weeks ago.

City manager Pep Guardiola could afford the luxury of making six changes from Sunday's dominant 1-0 win over Chelsea, but still saw his side extend their aggregate advantage early on when Gabriel Jesus tapped home after just eight minutes.

However, Mohamed Elyounoussi exposed some slack City defending to smash in an equaliser for the Swiss champions nine minutes later before Michael Lang rocketed home a spectacular winner 19 minutes from time. City could have the Premier League mathematically wrapped up by the time they are next in Champions League action in early April. And on this evidence they will need the likes of Sergio Aguero, Kevin de Bruyne and David Silva to be well-rested and in-form if they are to deliver the dream of their Abu Dhabi owners by winning the European Cup for a first time as a number of youngsters and fringe players failed to impress. Leroy Sane was one of few regular

starters retained in Guardiola's starting XI and continued his supreme form by creating the opener. Jesus hadn't started since suffering knee ligament damage on New Year's Eve, but had the simplest of tasks to get back among the goals when Bernardo Silva latched onto Sane's pass to produce a inch-perfect low cross for the Brazilian.

City should have gone even further in front as Silva's shot from a dangerous Sane cut-back was blocked before Basel goalkeeper Tomas Vaclik made a fine block to deny Ilkay Gundogan his third goal of the tie. However, a minute later Basel were level as Blas Riveros burst down the left and his deflected cross was dis-

patched powerfully past Claudio Bravo by Elyounoussi.

The Norwegian then had a great chance to put Basel in front on the half hour mark when he miscued horribly wide with just Bravo to beat after outmuscling Danilo.

Guardiola grew visibly frustrated on the touchline as his side also started the second period slowly. And they were punished when Elyounoussi's low cross was blasted past Bravo at his near post from a narrow angle by Lang.

Substitute Brahim Diaz came closest to a reply but his low driven effort was turned behind by Vaclik to consign City to a first home defeat since December 2016. — AFP

Higuain, Dybala stun Spurs to send Juventus through

LONDON: Juventus produced a Champions League smash-and-grab raid as Paulo Dybala's goal earned them a 2-1 victory over Tottenham Hotspur at Wembley to send the Italians through to the quarter-finals 4-3 on aggregate yesterday. Son Heung-min's first-half effort had put Tottenham in control after they had drawn 2-2 in Turin last month and there was little sign of a Juve response until Gonzalo Higuain and Dybala struck in three second-half minutes.

Higuain poked in from close range to equalise in the 64th minute before fellow Argentine Dybala, who missed the first leg with an injury, curled past Hugo Lloris after bursting clear. It was tough on Tottenham, who will rue several missed chances in the opening period and hit the post with a Harry Kane header in the 90th minute, but proof that Massimiliano Allegri's experienced Juventus, runners-up in two of the last three seasons, remain one of Europe's toughest nuts to crack. Son was given the nod ahead of Erik Lamela on the left side of Tottenham's attack and fully justified manager Mauricio Pochettino's faith as he ran Juve's experienced but creaking defence ragged before half-time. His stinging shot tested Juve keeper Gianluigi Buffon in the third minute and another lightning burst

into the box ended with Giorgio Chiellini making a crucial block. Tottenham hounded Juventus as they did in the opening leg and Kane should have scored in the 14th minute when Dele Alli played him in but, after skipping around Buffon, the England striker fired his shot into the side-netting.

It was not one-way traffic though and the hosts had an enormous let-off shortly after Kane's miss when Douglas Costa drove into the area and was tripped by an out-paced Jan Vertonghen and sent sprawling to the turf. Vertonghen looked a picture of innocence as Juve's furious players surrounded Polish referee Szymon Marciniak who opted against pointing to the spot despite replays confirming the Tottenham defender had taken Costa's legs and not the ball.

CONFUSED BUFFON

Grizzled Juve defender Andrea Barzagli was lucky to escape a booking when he stood on Son's leg after a challenge. Son then drove a left-foot shot wide when he should have scored but his persistence finally saw him break the deadlock in the 39th minute courtesy of a slice of fortune.

Kieran Trippier picked out Son with a low cross and despite completely missing the ball with his right foot it cannoned off his standing left leg and dinked over the confused Buffon.

Not a classic, but neither Son, nor the Spurs fans cared. It was only the third goal Juve had conceded in 12 games-all against a vibrant Tottenham side-and left them needing to score twice to stay in the competition.

Dybala missed the first leg with injury and was largely anonymous at Wembley-his first sight of goal



LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur's English striker Harry Kane (L) shoots wide during the UEFA Champions League round of sixteen second leg football match between Tottenham Hotspur and Juventus at Wembley Stadium in London, yesterday. — AFP

not arriving until just past the hour when he drove wildly over. A minute later, however, his fellow Argentine Higuain sparked the tie back into life when he struck out a leg to touch home Sami Khedira's knockdown.

Two minutes later Tottenham's defence was caught square and Dybala was played through on goal and

calmly advanced before curling past Lloris to send the 4,000 travelling fans wild. A stunned Tottenham responded with Kane, who hit the post with a header that bounced up off the turf, Christian Eriksen and Son all going close for the hosts but Juve's vast European experience saw them home. — Reuters

Business

THURSDAY, MARCH 8, 2018

18 AAW launches first exclusive Bosch showroom in Kuwait**20** Ooredoo presents achievements and financial results for 2017**21** KIF 2018 to put spotlight on robust opportunities for investors in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank Chairman Omar Kutayba Alghanim presides over Bank's Ordinary Annual General Meeting yesterday.

Gulf Bank holds annual general meeting

Bank announces cash dividend of 9 fils per share, 29% increase from last year

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank concluded its Ordinary Annual General Meeting No 57, which was held at the Palms Beach Hotel- Kuwait, yesterday, with 85.041 percent attendance. Omar Kutayba Alghanim, Gulf Bank Chairman, opened the meeting by welcoming the shareholders and highlighting the Bank's major business and corporate social responsibility initiatives throughout 2017. Alghanim noted: "Gulf Bank has met all of its strategic milestones for the last few years, and is moving forward on a path towards growth. From a financial perspective, we achieved double-digit net profit growth for the fourth consecutive year. This level of profitability has enabled us to recommend a distribution of 9 fils as a cash dividend to our shareholders, a 29 percent increase from last year." Alghanim continued: "Our Bank's solid performance across its business segments is based on providing excellent customer service to all our customers, both corporate and retail."

Commenting on the key financial highlights for the year, Alghanim stated that the Bank recorded a net profit of KD 48 million for the year ended 31 December 2017; an increase of 12 percent over the previous year. He also highlighted the growth of Gulf Bank's gross loans portfolio of 8 percent to KD 4 billion and the improvements in asset quality, represented by a reduction in the non-performing loan ratio to 1.7 percent, the lowest level in 10 years. Alghanim added: "Gulf Bank continues to be well recognized in terms of its credit worthiness and financial strength internationally. During 2017, Gulf Bank maintained its "A" level ratings from the top three international credit rating agencies: (Moody's, S&P Global Ratings and Fitch Ratings). We are especially proud of Gulf Bank's recent long term outlook upgrade from "Stable" to "Positive" by S&P Global Ratings."

During the meeting, the General Assembly voted to approve a cash dividend of 9 fils per share. In addition, a new Board of Directors was elected by the General Assembly for the next three-year period (2018-2020). The newly-elected Board of Directors includes: Omar Kutayba Alghanim; Ali Murad Behbehani; Bader Eljeaan; Omar Alessa Al-Qenaei; Jassem Boodai; Khaled Al-Mutawa; Bader Al-Khorafi; Sayer Al-Sayer; and Basel Al-Bader - as a representative of



Omar Kutayba Alghanim

Kuwait Investment Authority. The two alternate Board members are Dari Al-Bader and Fawaz Hassan. The General Assembly also approved all the remaining agenda items.

Setting Standards for Corporate Social Responsibility and Human Capital

Gulf Bank continues to be a leader in corporate social responsibility initiatives and remains strongly committed to giving back to our beloved country and to all the people of Kuwait. The CSR program is focused on education and youth, entrepreneurship, health and fitness, as well as promoting Kuwait's rich culture and heritage. As in previous years, we have produced a separate report on our corporate social responsibility program. The following are key highlights:

INJAZ - Kuwait

The Bank continues to be a lead sponsor of INJAZ-Kuwait, which delivers Arabic and English language education programs on entrepreneurial and leadership skills to help youth build successful careers. The Bank holds the distinction of being the company with the highest number of staff volunteers participating in the program, with more than 250 staff volunteering their time to help INJAZ reach high school and university students in Kuwait.

Ajyal Graduate Development Program
The Bank's flagship Ajyal Graduate



KUWAIT: Gulf Bank shareholders attending the ordinary general assembly meeting

Development Program is now entering its fourth year of developing human capital. The program identifies and nurtures young Kuwaiti talent early in their careers and, through an intensive program of trainings to help prepare them for future leadership positions in banking and within Kuwait's financial sector.

Initiatives for the Holy Month of Ramadan

Each year the Bank conducts a series of initiatives as part of its Ramadan campaign.



Bank records a net profit of KD 48m for 2017

Entitled 'Change Your Thoughts', this year's Ramadan commercial focused on promoting kinship and strengthening family ties and was narrated by Kuwaiti screen legend - Saad Al-Faraj. The Bank also partnered with SAVECO supermarket and the Kuwait Food Bank to deliver foodstuff boxes to families in need. Furthermore, Bank employees carried out numerous visits to children in hospitals to celebrate girga'an with them.

Memorial Pearl Diving Journey

The Memorial Pearl Diving Journey is a key sponsorship in the Bank's commitment to preserving the heritage of Kuwait. Youth from Gulf countries come to Kuwait to participate in this two-week event, which recreates the pearl diving journey of our ancestors, reminding today's youth of the hardships and challenges faced by our ancestors before the discovery of oil.

Gulf Bank 642 Marathon Supports UNHCR's Voice for Refugees

In its third year, the 'Gulf Bank 642 Marathon' highlights the importance of health and fitness. This year's event was exceptionally well attended and put Kuwait firmly on the international sporting map, as the event is internationally accredited and appears in the international calendar of marathon races. Open to all, the event has four race distances (5km, 10km, 21km, 42km) to appeal to all levels of fitness. Participants included individuals, families and teams from various backgrounds and over 130 nationalities.

For the second consecutive year, the Bank partnered with the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees), also known as the UN Refugee Agency, and its 'Voices for Refugees' initiative. This is an online awareness campaign to stand with refugees and make their voices heard and humanize their plight. Following the event, the Bank and its partner Pro Vision Sports Management made a financial donation to UNHCR.

Awards

Gulf Bank's performance continues to be strongly recognized on local, regional, and international levels. The Bank kicked off the year by setting an international Guinness World Records achievement for 'the largest prize linked to a bank account payout' for its Al-Danah account prize of KD 1 million. Regionally, the Bank was awarded 'Best Mobile Banking Experience in the Middle East' from Arabian Business magazine; 'Credit Risk Technology Implementation of Year in the Middle East' from the Asian Banker; and 'Best Customer Service Provider in the Middle East' from International Banker. Locally, the Bank's human resources training program won 'Best Training Program in Kuwait' from the Manpower and Government Restructuring Program. The Bank won 'Excellence in VIP Customer Service' from the Public Relations and Customer Service Awards. The Bank's Ramadan television commercial also received the Advertising Creativity Award for "Most Influential Commercial" at the Arab Media Forum.

In conclusion, Alghanim said: "I extend my sincere gratitude to our Shareholders, Board of Directors, the Central Bank of Kuwait, and the Capital Markets Authority for their ongoing leadership, support, and guidance. On behalf of Gulf Bank, I would like to thank our valued customers for their continued trust in the Bank, as their loyalty is at the core of our success. Finally, I would like to thank our staff for their dedicated service and for being part of the Gulf Bank family."

Business

AAW launches first exclusive Bosch showroom in Kuwait

350 sqm showroom features over 130 kitchen and home appliances



KUWAIT: AAW Chairman and CEO Faisal Al-Mutawa, AAW General Manager Ali Al-Mutawa and BSH Home Appliances FZE CEO Tomas Alonso inaugurate the first Bosch showroom in Kuwait. —Photos by Joseph Shagra



KUWAIT: A live cooking demonstration by Kuwaiti Chef Noura Al-Majeda



KUWAIT: Ali Abdulwahab Al-Mutawa Commercial Co (AAW) yesterday launched the first exclusive Bosch showroom by BSH Hausgerate GmbH (BSH) in Kuwait during a launch ceremony held at the new showroom located in Al-Dajeej.

The showroom, occupying 350 sqm, is the company's newest showroom in the Middle East and features a wide range of products by the renowned German brand, including washing machines, dishwashers, refrigerators, dryers, coffee machines, built-in appliances and various small appliances from toasters to vacuum cleaners.

During the opening ceremony a wide range of the latest Bosch home and kitchen appliances developed by German engineers were unveiled, from refrigerators and washing machines to ovens and dishwashers. Bosch Home Appliances offer the perfect results in the most simple way, no matter if you have an open-plan kitchen and living room or a small closed-off kitchen.

The showroom was inaugurated by AAW

Chairman and CEO Faisal Al-Mutawa, AAW General Manager Ali Al-Mutawa and BSH Home Appliances FZE CEO Tomas Alonso.

Featured at the event was a live cooking demonstration by Kuwaiti Chef Noura Al-Majeda who showcased Bosch appliances while preparing a healthy three-course meal from Moroccan couscous with aubergine rolls to a delicious chocolate cake.

Considering Kuwait as one of the largest markets in the GCC, through the launch of the exclusive showroom BSH aims to expand its sales and distribution footprint and retailer network across the country. Due to the product's quality, performance and durability, Bosch home appliances are the ideal choice for Kuwaiti consumers who seek high quality and reliable products at their homes.

AAW General Manager Ali Al-Mutawa said: "Today, we are happy to inaugurate the first ever exclusive Bosch home appliances showroom in Kuwait to meet the demands of the marketplace by

expanding our offering. As the exclusive distributor of Bosch in Kuwait this launch marks a milestone in our 20-years long relationship and we look forward to continuing our journey."

BSH Home Appliances FZE CEO Tomas Alonso said: "We are excited to be here today to launch the first exclusive Bosch showroom in Kuwait. Understanding the needs of the Kuwait community the showroom offers an extensive list of the latest high-quality and energy-efficient products in the market. Building on our 20-year success we have confidence in our partnership with one of the Kuwait's leading distributors and will continue to work together to achieve our goals."

Headquartered in Germany, BSH Hausgerate GmbH is the largest home appliance manufacturer in Europe and the second largest worldwide, it is also one of the leading companies in green technology in the sector worldwide. Bosch's product portfolio spans the entire spectrum of modern household appliances that includes everything

from ovens, extractor hoods, dishwashers, washers, dryers, refrigerators, and freezers to small appliances like vacuum cleaners, coffee machines, electric kettles and irons. This makes Bosch the only full-range provider of home appliances globally.

AAW's relationship with Bosch spans over 20 years as their exclusive distributor in Kuwait delivering high quality products to the consumers. AAW is one of the largest trading and commercial companies in the Middle East, with business operations across a range of growing sectors, such as Consumer Goods, Pharmaceuticals, Furniture and Carpets, Real Estate, Kitchen Furniture, Home Appliances, Outdoor Gear, Sports and Fashion and Food & Beverages. The company operates over 100 different global brands in the Middle East's surging retail and consumer goods market.

The Bosch showroom is now open to the public from 9:30 am to 9:30 pm on weekdays and from 4:30 pm to 9:30 pm on Fridays and is located on Airport Road 55 adjacent to AAW Furniture.

KFH announces 10 winners of Hesabi draw



KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) announced the winners of "Hesabi" for Youth draw. The draw was held under the supervision of Ministry of Industry and Commerce.

The winners are: Norah Al-Mutairi, Abdullah Al-Shemmari, Asma Al-Mutairi, Hala Al-Marzouqi, Jawaher Al-Rashidi, Shatha Al-Subaie, Talal Al-Enezi, Abdulhadi Al-Merri, Rawan Al-Enezi and Abdullah Al-Mutairi. KFH awarded each winner with a cash prize of monthly KD 200 for a year.

KFH launched this draw in an

attempt to reward the youth segment of customers by providing them with programs tailored especially for the youth to suit their lifestyles and meet their expectations.

Hesabi program has been designed to meet the needs of youth and aspire for their active life style. This program presents for youth many exclusive offers and a wide range of privileges including Hesabi ATM card with a unique design, eligibility to issue Hesabi prepaid card (as per credit regulations of KFH), distinguished offers and discounts etc.

NBK Capital Monthly Markets Report

Global equities in February close in the negative

KUWAIT: Global equities in February closed in the negative across the board and experienced heightened volatility. The MSCI All Country World Index shed 4.4 percent while US equities did not fare any better with the Dow Jones and S&P 500 both dropping 4.3 percent and 3.9 percent, respectively. On February 5, the Dow Jones experienced its largest intraday drop losing 1,600 points although it slightly recovered and closed down 1,175 points. The intraday drop was a result of market participants pulling back on the fear of faster than expected rising interest rates. Coincidentally on February 5, James Powell assumed office as Chair of the Federal Reserve. Later in the month, Trump inked a massive spending deal ending the year's second government shut down. Additionally, the market's expectations for rate hikes increased to four from three. On the economic front, the US's Markit Manufacturing PMI came in at 55.3, slightly lower than January's reading of 55.9. The preliminary Gross Domestic Product figure for Q4 was 2.5 percent on an annualized basis.

In Europe, the Stoxx Europe 600 posted a -4.0 percent return, for February, wiping out the gains reported in the previous month. The two largest markets in Europe, being the DAX 30 Index and CAC 40 Index, each posted losses of 5.7 percent and 2.9 percent, respectively. In Germany, Chancellor Merkel's party the Christian Democratic Union and the Social Democratic Union (SPD) formed a coalition government. In addition, Fitch

rating agency upgraded Greece from B- to B with a positive outlook citing economic growth and reduced political risk positively influencing government debt sustainability. In terms of economics, the Markit Manufacturing PMI for the Eurozone area in February came in at 58.6 vs January's figure of 58.5. In addition, the Consumer Price Index, year on year, on a preliminary basis was 1.2 percent, a nominal drop of 0.1 percent from January.

In the UK, the FTSE 100 continued its negative streak from the previous month, posting a 4.0 percent loss in February. The sell off from across the Atlantic carried over into the UK with the FTSE 100 reaching its lowest point in over a year. Like the US, rate hike expectations in the UK have increased with the market predicting a rate hike as early as May. On Brexit, a divorce deal has yet to be agreed on and the EU has stated that one needs to be reached quickly otherwise the exit will be a hard one. The UK economy continues to be strong with the Markit Manufacturing PMI coming in above 50 at 55.2 while the GfK Consumer Confidence slipped 1 full point to -10.

Japan's Nikkei 225 was unable to continue its positive run through February losing 4.5 percent. The sell-off in US markets carried over into Japan causing the index to fall by more than 12 percent from its high in mid-January. The losses sustained in February are not attributable to domestic factors: in fact, corporate earnings are expected to grow during fiscal years 2017 and 2018. In addition, Gov. Haruhiko Kuroda, of the BOJ, will serve a second term affirming the government's confidence in his abilities to lift Japan's economy out of stagnation. Like the UK, Japan's Nikkei Manufacturing PMI came in over 50 at 54.1 which is slightly higher than January's figure. The Consumer Confidence Index, still below 50, slipped further by 0.3 to 44.3 in February.

In February, the MSCI Emerging Market Index

lost more than 50 percent of its January gain, closing down 4.7 percent. Unlike most markets, the index started its descent earlier in the month, yet bottomed out on February 9. The two single largest markets comprising almost 46 percent of the index are China and South Korea. China's Shanghai Composite Index fell 6.4 percent while South Korea's KOSPI 200 Index fell 6.2 percent. In terms of manufacturing PMIs, both China and South Korea reported figures greater than 50. In China, the Caixin Manufacturing PMI came in at 51.6 while in South Korea the Nikkei Markit Manufacturing PMI came in just over 50 at 50.3.

Brent Oil ended the month on a negative note dropping 4.7 percent, wiping out 100 percent of the gains achieved in January. In February, the commodity traded in a range between \$60pb and \$70pb with the highest closing price on the 1st of February at 69.65. During the month, crude inventory levels crept up and US production increased to a point surpassing Saudi Arabia while further narrowing the gap with Russia. Also in commodities, Gold dropped 2.0 percent in February although still maintains a positive return for the first two months of 2018.

Following a strong start to the year, GCC equities ended February in negative territory. The S&P GCC Index was down 2.7 percent. The GCC indices overall, much like other global markets, are heavily influenced by US equity markets. A majority of the GCC equity markets closed in the red, except for Bahrain up 1.4 percent, Kuwait up 0.5 percent, and Oman slightly up 0.1 percent. The worst performing index was Qatar's DSM Index down 6.0 percent followed by Dubai down 4.4 percent, Saudi Arabia down 3.0 percent, and Abu Dhabi down 0.1 percent. MENA equities, as measured by the S&P Pan Arab Composite Index, was down in February 2.1 percent while Egypt maintained its positive momentum closing February up 2.9 percent.

EXCHANGE RATES

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
Europe		
British Pound	0.411623	0.419123
Czech Korune	0.006681	0.015981
Danish Krone	0.046016	0.051016
Euro	0.367260	0.374760
Georgian Lari	0.133817	0.133817
Hungarian O.001131	0.001321	
Norwegian Krone	0.034629	0.039829
Romanian Leu	0.064164	0.081014
Russian ruble	0.005296	0.005296
Slovakia	0.008916	0.018916
Swedish Krona	0.032585	0.037585
Swiss Franc	0.313802	0.324802
Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.225985	0.237985
New Zealand Dollar	0.212368	0.221868
America		
Canadian Dollar	0.226906	0.235906
US Dollars	0.296350	0.300770
US Dollars Mint	0.296850	0.300770
Asia		
Bangladesh Taka	0.003187	0.003771
Chinese Yuan	0.046004	0.049504
Hong Kong Dollar	0.036528	0.039278

Indian Rupee	0.004170	0.004811
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000018	0.000024
Japanese Yen	0.002763	0.002943
Korean Won	0.000271	0.000286
Malaysian Ringgit	0.073057	0.079057
Nepalese Rupee	0.002997	0.003167
Pakistan Rupee	0.002528	0.002818
Philippine Peso	0.005675	0.005975
Singapore Dollar	0.222947	0.232947
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001641	0.002221
Taiwan	0.010308	0.010488
Thai Baht	0.009229	0.009779

Arab	
Bahraini Dinar	0.790277
Egyptian Pound	0.014067
Iranian Riyal	0.000083
Iraqi Dinar	0.000202
Jordanian Dinar	0.419146
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000154
Moroccan Dirhams	0.022653
Omani Riyal	0.774071
Qatar Riyal	0.078236
Saudi Riyal	0.079033
Syrian Pound	0.001273
Tunisian Dinar	0.121744
Turkish Lira	0.073657
UAE Dirhams	0.080376
Yemeni Riyal	0.000976

Australia CB chief slams US tariffs, confident on domestic growth

SYDNEY: The head of Australia's central bank is upbeat about domestic economic growth despite a disappointing end to last year, but fears the specter of a trade war calling threatened US tariffs "highly regrettable." President Donald Trump intends to slap duties on imports of steel and aluminum, a pledge that has met with warnings of retaliation from the rest of the world and spooked financial markets.

Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) Governor Philip Lowe's comments yesterday come as data showed growth in Australia's A\$1.8 trillion (\$1.40 trillion) economy slowed last quarter as bad weather hit exports, although a pickup in spending helped it extend its 26-year run without recession. Lowe slammed the tariffs yesterday at a business summit in Sydney, saying a tit-for-tat move from other countries would be very damaging.

"The recent announcement on tariffs by President

Trump was highly regrettable," Lowe said, strong words for a typically measured policymaker. "History shows protectionism is bad."

Australia's export-driven economy relies heavily on international trade and capital. It is particularly vulnerable to a US-led trade war, which threatens the outlook for global growth and the demand for commodities. Those concerns have been reflected in global financial markets, with investors dumping shares for the safety of gold, cash, the Japanese yen and Swiss francs.

The Australian dollar, considered a risky asset, has been volatile since the start of February, losing 3.6 percent that month alone.

Yesterday, it slipped 0.6 percent to go as low as \$0.7772, not far from a recent two-month trough of \$0.7713. It was last down 0.4 percent at \$0.7797. To add to the uncertainty a key advocate for free trade in the White House announced his resignation yesterday, fanning fears Trump would go ahead with tariffs and risk a trade war. Closer to home, Lowe sounded confident about the country's future, saying the economy was moving in the right direction and signalling the next move in rates was likely up, not down.

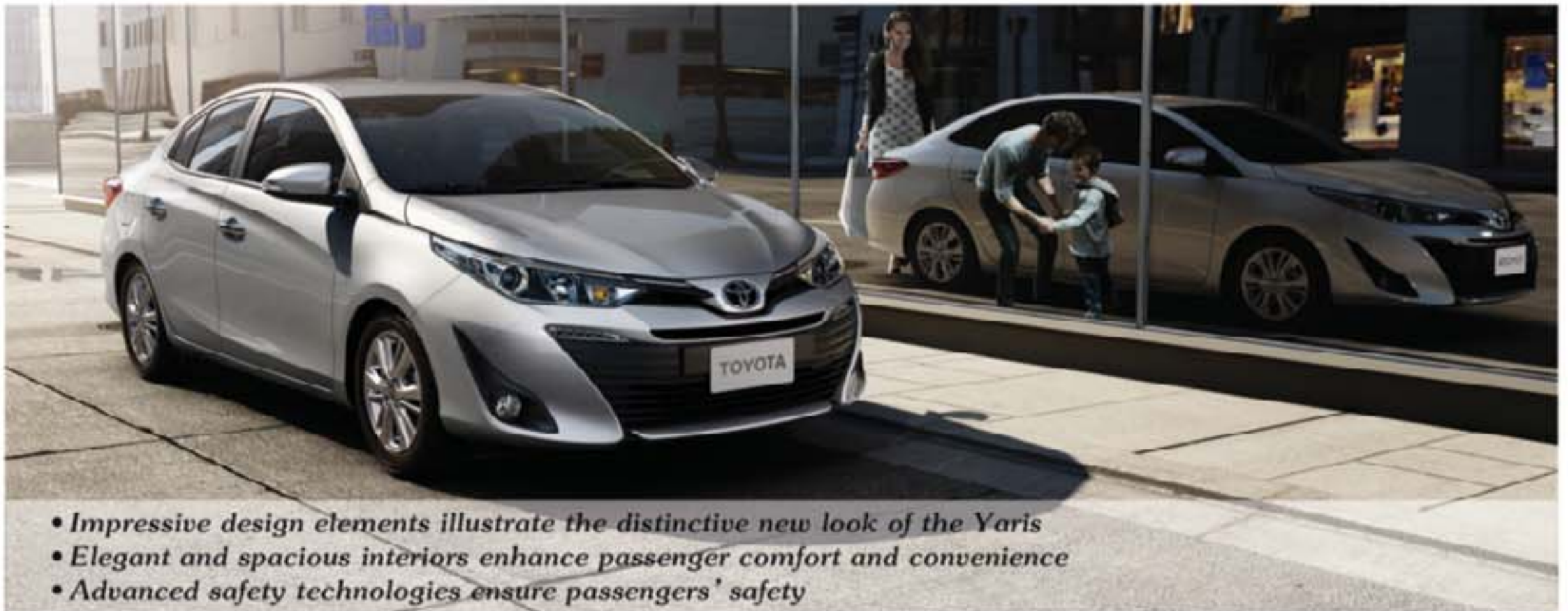
Lowe's confidence rests partly on unexpected strength in the domestic labor market and a synchronized upturn in global activity. That helped offset a disappointing end to last year with official data showing annual economic growth slowed to 2.4 percent in the December quarter, from an upwardly revised 2.9 percent in third quarter. —Reuters

**Mohamed Naser Al Sayer & Toyota Unveil
The All New Yaris 2018 – PACKED WITH STYLE**

Expressive design, dynamic performance, expansive comfort, trusted safety...the all-new 2018 Yaris sedan embodies all these and more.

REACTIVATE YOUR LIFE – with the new 2018 Yaris Sedan

**New Yaris with Stylish and Bold Look to
Set New Benchmarks for Compact Sedans**



- Impressive design elements illustrate the distinctive new look of the Yaris
- Elegant and spacious interiors enhance passenger comfort and convenience
- Advanced safety technologies ensure passengers' safety



Mohamed Naser ALSAYER & Sons (MNS&S), a subsidiary of ALSAYER Holding has unveiled the all-new Yaris 2018 – Packed with Style. The press conference held at Toyota new cars showroom Alrai was attended by Bernd Schultz Chief Operating Officer, Johan Heislitz Senior Business Director MNS&S, Stephen Cleary Chief Marketing Officer, Scott McNicol General Manager Sales, Hamad Al-Fouzan Product Planning Manager, Toshiyuki Nakahara Deputy General Manager of Middle East & Central Asia Division and accompanying delegate from Toyota Motor Corporation along with distinguished members of the press and media.

According to Johan Heislitz "Toyota sedan models have remarkable footprint and have achieved strong sales and market shares within competitive business environment. There are probably more than a million happy users of Yaris across the globe, it is an impressive car in the GCC region too. Toyota has set new benchmark for compact sedans with the launch of stylish and bold new Yaris 2018."

Setting new standards for the compact sedan segment, Toyota announced today the launch of the new exciting and stylish Yaris in the Middle East. Featuring advanced and emotional design and offering superior comfort along with uncompromising blend of quality and durability, the new Yaris delivers a true Toyota experience to reinforce the car's position in the region's automotive market.

Takamoto Suzuki, Chief engineer of the new Yaris, said: "The team of Toyota engineers has created the new Yaris under the concept 'New Value Pioneer' with the ultimate goal of developing a car that excels in serving the preferences of active people who follow trends and innovation, and offering the unique pride of ownership. Accordingly, the new Yaris has been meticulously crafted with state-of-the-art design both in the interior and on the exterior, coupled with high-quality accessories and a complete list of convenient options in the spacious and comfortable cabin. Furthermore, the new Yaris delivers optimal performance and fun driving experience while maintaining great fuel economy and intense driving pleasure. With all these features, I am deeply confident that the new Yaris will fulfill our customers' demands and become the perfect small-size sedan for all."

Commenting on the excellent track record of Yaris Scott McNicol said "Yaris is yet another Toyota model popular around the world. It is sold in over 120 countries. Since introduction it has won customer hearts. Our research results show users of Yaris find it extremely practical and convenient, economical in terms of fuel consumption as well as maintenance – in addition to Toyota Quality Durability and Reliability, the market leading compact sedan Yaris becomes the right investment choice for personal or business use."



"We are excited to launch the new Yaris in the region and we are confident that it will definitely be at the top of the list for customers when they search for a compact sedan that combines stylish design and ride comfort along with dynamic performance and superior value," said Yujo Miyamoto, Chief Representative, Middle East and North Africa Representative Office, Toyota Motor Corporation.

"At Toyota, we always strive to connect with our customers to understand their evolving needs and evaluate dynamics of the market to create ever better cars that will strongly appeal to all customers. Owing to its stylish design, quiet and roomy interior cabin, as well as its powertrain that delivers both dynamic driving performance and fuel economy, the new Yaris

will stand out in the region's highly competitive market. I would like to extend our deepest gratitude to our customers for their constant support and inspiration, which continue to motivate us to develop new cars that exceed their expectations," Mr. Miyamoto said.

The new Yaris demonstrates remarkable attention to detail in the design and engineering of the vehicle encompassing its flashy exterior and class-leading interior design and state-of-the-art passenger cabin to its responsive driving dynamics. The overall length has been increased by 15 mm to 4,425 mm, and the overall width of the vehicle has grown by 30 mm to 1,730 mm. The result is a highly aerodynamic body with a wider and more masculine stance. Cutting-edge design defines the exterior of the

new Yaris, with its dynamic angles as well as sharp headlamps with integrated clearance lamps. The front of the new Yaris has been updated with a horizontal grille for a wider yet more aerodynamic appearance. LED daytime running lamps have also been integrated into the shape of the grille for a sleek appearance, while slimmer rear combination taillights adorn the rear of the car with a unique look. From the side, it features a distinct character line that starts from the front wheel arch, heading towards the rear doors, with another line linking the door handles to the rear taillights. The addition of the newly introduced Shark Fin antenna adds to the aerodynamic design of the car. Available in eight distinctive exterior colors of which two have been newly-developed, including Red M.M., and Dark Blue M.M., which expresses a sense of power and elegance, the new Yaris has been rearmored with a newly designed 15-inch alloy wheels.

With an exciting interior featuring a distinctive design, and offering convenience and comfort with a layer of luxury, the new car's cabin owns an exclusive profile. Simulated stitching along the edges from the instrument panel to the front console render a feel of luxury in the interior of the new Yaris. The front cup holders are equipped with an LED shower light, providing a sense of advanced technology. In addition, the central console of the new Yaris has been redesigned to create a greater sense of integration. The cabin has been adorned with a range of enhanced features, including Smart Entry & Start System, Cruise Control System, optitron meter and 4.2-inch Thin Film Transistor (TFT) multi-information display, automatic air conditioning system, as well as a Six-speaker sound system with AUX and USB jacks. The interior is available in two colors, with the Black creating a calm, rich modern interior, and the Ivory making the interior feel even more spacious and sophisticated.



Delivering a dynamic driving experience, the new Yaris comes with a 1.5-liter and a 1.3-liter engine alternative. The 1.3-liter four-cylinder engine generates a maximum output of 98 hp and 12.6 kg-m of torque and is mated to either a five-speed manual transmission or a Multidrive 7S advanced seven-speed automatic transmission. On the other hand, the 1.5-liter four-cylinder engine can churn out a maximum output of 105 hp and 14.3 kg-m of torque and is mated to the Multidrive 7S automatic transmission to offer a smooth shifting experience with excellent fuel efficiency.

As with any other Toyota model, safety remains a top priority for the new Yaris, which includes a comprehensive array of safety features to protect its occupants, such as seven SRS airbags, Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), Electronic Brake Force Distribution (EBD), Brake Assist (BA), Traction Control (TRC), Hill-start Assist Control (HAC), High Mount Stop Lamp, and an enhanced body and platform structure, among many others.

Business

Ooredoo presents achievements and financial results for 2017

More than 1200 sites upgraded, customer base up to 32.6%: Al-Thani



KUWAIT: Ooredoo Chairman Sheikh Saud bin Nasser Al-Thani, General Manager and CEO, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulla Al-Thani and board members pose for a photograph.



Sheikh Saud bin Nasser Al-Thani



Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulla Al-Thani

KUWAIT: National Mobile Telecommunications Company K.S.C.P. "Ooredoo" presented its achievements and financial results for 2017 during its annual general meeting, which was held at the company's headquarters in Kuwait City yesterday. The meeting was attended by the company's Chairman, Sheikh Saud bin Nasser Al-Thani, board members and General Manager and CEO, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulla Al-Thani and saw an attendance of 93,346 percent of the shareholders. The Chairman of the Board of Directors declared that the Board agreed to distribute cash dividends to the Company Shareholders valued at 70 percent of the nominal value of share, which is equivalent to 70 fils per share.

Ooredoo Kuwait's customer base in stood at 2.2 million for 2017, representing a 6 percent decrease compared to the same period in 2016 due to intense competition and the overall market condition. Revenues for 2017 were KD 222.7 million, an increase of 13 percent compared to KD 197.8 million for the same period in 2016. EBITDA was KD 54.3 million, up from KD 51.0 million for the same period in 2016.

In a statement during the General Assembly, Sheikh Saud Bin Nasser Al-Thani, Chairman of the Board of Directors commented: "We have grown our customer base in Tunisia, Algeria, Palestine and the Maldives, boosted revenue in Kuwait, completed the most successful IPO in the history of the Maldives, generating more than KD 8.3 million, in 14 million shares (9.5 percent of fully paid issued



shares) which attracted more than 8000 new investors.

We have enhanced 4G services in Kuwait, Algeria, Tunisia and the Maldives, and officially launched operations in Gaza - remarkable achievements made possible by our investment in a state-of-the-art network. Most importantly, we have listened to the voices of our customers, and developed services and solutions that enrich their digital lives."

We have grown our customer base in Tunisia, Algeria, Palestine and the Maldives, boosted revenue in Kuwait, completed the most successful IPO in the history of the Maldives, sponsored the national football team in Tunisia as they qualified for the FIFA World Cup and continued to enhance our networks and increase access to digital services for all. We have enhanced 4G services in Kuwait, Algeria, Tunisia and the Maldives, and officially launched operations in Gaza - remarkable achievements made possible by our investment in a state-of-the-art network. Most importantly, we have listened to the voices of our customers, and developed services and



70 fils per share cash dividends

solutions that enrich their digital lives." On his part, Ooredoo Kuwait's General Manager and CEO Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulla Al-Thani noted that the company centered its operations in Kuwait around embracing digitalization on a large scale, keeping up with the international technology trends. "Despite the many challenges, we have succeeded in diversifying our portfolio of services for both individual and corporate customers, and we are working towards realizing our goals in creating services with added value to our customers. We acquired spectrum licenses for 2.6 Ghz and 2.1 Ghz data services, which will certainly have an impact on the services provided to our valued customers. We have also completed our network infrastructure upgrade, updating more than 1200 sites across Kuwait, which positively impacts the quality of the services provided. Our subscriber market share increased to 32.6 percent, and we aspire to grow more and serve a larger number of customers across Kuwait, providing them with the best telecom services to complement their lifestyle."

Ooredoo's Operations in 2017

Ooredoo's customer base in Tunisia reached 8.4 million for 2017, an increase of 5 percent compared to the same period in 2016. Revenues stood at KD 127.5 million, compared to KD 142.3 million for the same period in 2016. EBITDA was KD 50.5 million compared to KD 57.0 million for the same period in 2016. Tunisian Dinar depreciated by 11 percent year on year. In local currency terms, revenue increased by 1 percent in 2017.

In Algeria, the customer base increased to 14.3 million customers for 2017, up by 4 percent compared with the same period in 2016. Revenues for 2017 decreased to KD 285.1 million compared to revenues of KD 309.8 million for the same period in 2016, negatively impacted by the



increase in VAT and a weak economic environment. Despite revenue decrease, EBITDA increased, due to cost efficiencies, to KD 125.5 million in 2017, representing a 16 percent growth compared to KD 108.5 million for the same period in 2016.

Wataniya Mobile Palestine increased its customer base by 31 percent for 2017, to reach 1.0 million customers. 2017 Revenues stood at KD 26.0 million compared to revenues of KD 25.4 million for the same period in 2016. EBITDA for 2017 was KD 5.7 million compared to an EBITDA of KD 6.6 million for the same period in 2016.

Ooredoo Maldives reported a 15 percent increase in Revenues for 2017 to reach KD 36.3 million, compared to KD 31.6 million for the same period in 2016. EBITDA for 2017 was KD 19.7 million, an increase of 15 percent compared to an EBITDA of KD 17.1 million for the same period in 2016. Ooredoo Maldives now serves a total of 440k customers, an 11 percent increase compared to the same period in 2016.

Saudi crown prince seeks solution to banks' \$2.6bn Islamic tax row

RIYADH/DUBAI: Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has directed the Saudi government to resolve a dispute with banks facing higher Islamic tax liabilities, banking sources say, in an attempt to avoid any damage to his push to diversify the economy.

It follows disclosures by major Saudi banks in recent weeks that the government's General Authority of Zakat and Tax (GAZT) is asking them for additional payments of zakat - the name of the tax - for years going back as far as 2002. In some cases, the demands exceed half of a bank's annual net profit. Banks are contesting the extra payments, which are estimated at around 9.8 billion riyals (\$2.6 billion) across 11 of the kingdom's 12 listed banks.

Analysts have warned the liabilities could hurt liquidity at the banks, the majority of which are main financiers of the budget deficit through purchases of local bonds.

They would also restrict banks' ability to lend to the private sector, a key element in the government's reform plan to move the economy away from reliance on oil and create jobs for hundreds of thousands of unemployed Saudis. A committee with representatives from GAZT, the central bank and other parties was recently formed to look into the issue at the behest of the crown prince, widely known by his initials MbS, the sources told Reuters.

The committee, chaired by former central bank governor Fahad Al-Mubarak, currently an adviser to the Royal Court, has handed its recommendations to the court and they could be announced as soon as in the next few weeks, one of the sources said. Prince Mohammed begins a visit to Britain yesterday and is expected to travel to the United States later this month.

Although Saudi banks and other firms generally do not pay corporate tax, they are subject to zakat, a 2.5 percent levy on each bank's net worth.

Lenders and the authorities have been at loggerheads over the amount of zakat they pay for more than a decade. But the dispute has captured more attention from investors recently as the kingdom seeks to attract billions of dollars of foreign investment from global equity indexes in the next couple of years. Bankers say the way the tax is calculated is opaque and the heavy financial demands on banks threaten the stability of the banking sector and capital markets.

"MbS is keen on maintaining the banking sector's solid position ... He is aware of the economic challenges and wants to make sure banks will continue to be able to support the economy and the private sector," said one banker.

Central bank officials were not immediately available for comment, and neither GAZT nor the government media office responded to an emailed request for comment.

Another banker said a quick resolution of the issue was urgently needed. "This comes at a very bad time, while authorities are trying to promote the capital markets and are discussing global indices inclusion. There is a high interest to fix this issue before the end of March, ahead of FTSE inclusion decision," he said.—Reuters

Indonesia's rapid infrastructure drive takes a deadly toll

JAKARTA: A string of fatal accidents is threatening to derail Indonesia's relentless infrastructure drive ahead of the Asian Games, a push seen as a key to revving up growth in Southeast Asia's biggest economy. President Joko Widodo—who is counting on the construction advance for his 2019 re-election bid—temporarily halted all elevated transportation projects, after a dozen major accidents killed five and injured dozens more in recent months.

The stoppages include construction of Indonesia's first light rapid transit (LRT) and parts of a mass rapid transit system. The LRT in Palembang—which is co-hosting the Games with Jakarta—is supposed to be operating by August when millions of visitors are expected to arrive for Asia's premier multi-sport event, amid concerns that not all venues will be completed in time.

Widodo halted work shortly after a high-profile accident on an elevated toll road project in Jakarta left seven workers severely injured last month. The stoppage also comes after a balcony collapse at the

Jakarta Stock Exchange building this year resurrected concerns about lax construction standards. "Public trust has significantly dropped—this is a crisis, a work safety emergency," said Alvin Lie, a member of Indonesia's National Ombudsman.

'Looking for compromises'

Endemic corruption, red tape, and mismanagement have left many projects mothballed or neglected for years. But the president has made infrastructure development the centerpiece of his economic growth strategy for the vast archipelago nation. Widodo sees the building drive as essential to improving logistics and modernizing infrastructure—and reaching his goal of seven percent annual growth, up from around five percent now.

He regularly visits regions with projects underway, sometimes unannounced, in a not-so-subtle hint that building must stay on track for Indonesia to be a global player. "If we want to win the competition with other countries, infrastructure is what we need to do first," Widodo said. A furniture seller-turned-politician, Widodo has ordered the completion of

1,000 kilometers (600 miles) of new toll roads, 3,200 kilometers of railway track, 15 new airports, two dozen seaports, 33 new dams and power plants capable of producing some 35,000 megawatts of power—enough to supply electricity to about five million people—by 2019. His plans have won applause. But there are now serious concerns that the speed and scope of some projects is lead-



JAKARTA: This photograph shows a flyover for the light rapid transit (LRT) system under construction in Jakarta. —AFP

ing builders to cut corners on safety, experts said. Some contractors feel under pressure to hire partner firms with little or no experience in major construction and building design to meet tight deadlines.

"We have never seen Indonesia building on this kind of massive scale," said Mushanif Mukti, a senior official at the Association of Construction Safety and Health Experts. "They seem to rush without adequate capacity ... looking for compromises to get around tight time limits." There are few reliable statistics to

compare the current death-and-injury rate to previous years, and deadly workplace accidents are not uncommon in Indonesia.

But the government has now ordered that scores of major projects be re-evaluated in the wake of the accidents—a daunting task. Last year alone, some 245 projects worth 4.2 trillion rupiah (\$305 billion) were on the government's priority list, including work on a Jakarta highway that resumed several years ago after 20-year hiatus. —AFP

Bezos tops Forbes world's rich list as Trump wealth drops

PARIS: Amazon chief Jeff Bezos is now the world's richest person, having snatched the top spot from Microsoft founder Bill Gates who slips to second place, according to Forbes magazine's annual billionaires list published yesterday. US President Donald Trump's ranking on the list fell to 766th place from 544th in the last edition, his wealth now being estimated at \$3.1 billion, \$400 million less than a year ago. Bezos' fortune shot up to \$112 billion, Forbes said, after a 59-percent rise in Amazon shares over the past 12 months that put him way ahead of the \$90 billion listed for Gates.

After the announcement, Bezos' worth rocketed again to \$127 billion in line with a spike in Amazon stock, widening the gap between him and Gates.

Legendary investor Warren Buffett held on to his number-three ranking, followed by French industri-

alist Bernard Arnault, who jumped to fourth-richest person from his previous number 11 spot, mostly thanks to euro strength against the dollar, the magazine said.

Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg was fifth on the list. Two Chinese billionaires rose to be among the 20 richest people in the world: Ma Huateng, CEO of Chinese internet giant Tencent who is the richest person in Asia and number 17 in the world, and Alibaba founder Jack Ma. There are now a record 2,208 billionaires in the world, Forbes counted, and their combined worth is \$9.1 trillion, up 18 percent from last year. The US has the most billionaires (585), followed by mainland China (373).

Forbes' list contains 259 newcomers, including the first-ever cryptocurrency billionaires. Falling fortunes or political headwinds, meanwhile, pushed 121 people out of the illustrious list, including all 10 Saudi Arabians, the magazine said.

Russia list

Vladimir Lisin, controlling shareholder of Russian steel producer NLMK, displaced natural gas magnate Leonid Mikhelson at the top of Russia's rich list for 2018, Forbes magazine, which compiles the list, said on Tuesday. Another steel tycoon, Alexei

Mordashov, who controls NLMK's leading competitor Severstal, retained his grip on second place. Like Lisin, his fortunes were buoyed by rising global steel prices. Of the 2,208 billionaires included by Forbes in its global rankings this year, 102 are Russian, of whom one is a woman. Lisin, 61, is in first place and 57th worldwide, having seen his net worth increase by \$3 billion to an estimated \$19.1 billion as of this year, the magazine said.

Mordashov, 52, in close second with an estimated personal fortune of \$18.7 billion, has enjoyed an increase of \$1.2 billion since last year's Forbes list, placing him 60th globally.

Mikhelson, head of natural gas company Novatek, was pushed into third place in the Forbes list of Russian billionaires. Earlier this year, the US Treasury Department published a list of 96 "oligarchs" deemed close to the Kremlin that bore a close resemblance to the Forbes rankings for 2017.

The list was published as required by a package of sanctions legislation that U.S. President Donald Trump signed into law last year. Those included on the US list were not immediately subject to sanctions, but the publication cast a shadow of uncertainty over them and President Vladimir Putin labelled the list an "unfriendly act". —Agencies

Business

KIF 2018 to put spotlight on robust opportunities for investors in Kuwait

Forum reaffirms govt commitment in promoting value-added investments

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Investment Forum 2018 (KIF 2018) to be held on March 20 and 21 in Kuwait City is putting the spotlight on the robust investment opportunities in Kuwait for local, regional and international investors. Held under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, KIF 2018 is co-organized by the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA), and the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) at Bayan Palace and the Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Centre (JACC).

KIF 2018 will be attended by ministers and high-ranking Kuwaiti government officials, representatives of diplomatic missions in Kuwait, local and foreign investors, industry leaders and executives, consultants and financial institutions. With the goal of driving inward investments to Kuwait by highlighting the economic competitiveness of the country, KIF 2018 will highlight the Government's focus to strengthen several sectors and promote economic diversification – goals outlined by Kuwait Vision 2035, the strategic roadmap for long-term growth.

Ali Al-Ghanim, Chairman of the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI), said: "The Chamber supports the investment-friendly environment of Kuwait through various programs and initiatives, such as e-services. We also supervise the Kuwait Commercial Arbitration Centre and system that promotes transparency and contributes to solving any commercial disputes efficiently in accordance with international best practices. In addition, we organize regional and foreign economic delegations to present Kuwait's investment environment globally." "The private sector is the cornerstone of the future economy, and through KIF 2018, we are underlining the opportunities and returns that Kuwait assures investors," Al-Ghanim added.

KIF 2018 is being hosted on the backdrop of the significant growth in foreign direct investment (FDI) reported by the country, said Sheikh Dr Meshaal Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Director General for Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA). "FDI to Kuwait has increased to over \$2.3 billion in the past two years, and we are confident that KIF 2018 will lend further momentum to the inward inflows. With our investor-friendly laws, a world-class business environment, strategic

location and the robust growth in our telecom, information technology and financial sector, Kuwait offers incredible value for Arab, GCC and international investors, especially in building their business footprint in the region." He added: "The Kuwait Investment Forum is a significant platform that showcases the investment landscape of our country as well as the tremendous opportunities offered to Arab, GCC and international investors in a number of high-growth areas. It complements the strategic vision of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to transforming Kuwait as a dynamic hub for business. Among the key topics to be discussed

reached +4.8 percent in the first nine months of 2017, outperforming previous expectations, according to the Bahrain Economic Development Board's (EDB) Bahrain Economic Quarterly. The report notes that the rate of growth makes Bahrain's economy the fastest growing in the GCC.



by KIF 2018 include investment in 'Future Kuwait'; Trade Facilitation – A Driver for Development; Investment Opportunities- Lucrative Options in Dynamic Sectors, Financing for Sustainable Developments and Dialogue on "Kuwait Development Path: The Vision & the Determination". Details on the expert speakers and panel discussions at the event has already been announced on KIF 2018 website <https://kif.kdipa.gov.kw/>.

Special feature: An Update on "New Kuwait" will also be taking place at KIF 2018 will include various ministers, and will highlight the progress and outlook on Kuwait Vision 2035. This exclusive session will be the first public

event since the vision's launch in January 2017 and will shed light on the progress to date on each of the programs seven pillars. Marking the support of Kuwait's national businesses to KIF 2018, Kuwait Finance House, National Bank of Kuwait, United Steel Industrial Company (Kuwait Steel), Zain Telecommunications, Ali Alghanim & Sons Group are extending support as Diamond Sponsors, while Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) and Al-Markaz are the Platinum Sponsors. In addition to New Kuwait as a Strategic Partner and Kuwait Airways as the official carrier.



Private sector is the cornerstone of future economy

KFIC Report on Global and GCC Markets

Bahrain's economy fastest growing in GCC; Kuwait buoyant

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance and Investment Company (KFIC) announced its report for February 2018 which discusses the status of local and international markets.

International Economic Overview

Global equity markets weakened during the month of February as the MSCI World Index declined by -4.30 percent. In developed markets, Germany's DAX index was the worst performing index this month closing at -5.71 percent. In the United States, The S&P 500 declined by -3.89 percent, as the Federal Reserve chairman Jerome Powell has stated that interest rates will continue to increase on a gradual basis to keep the economy functioning smoothly and predicted that inflation would stabilize around 2 percent this year. In Europe, both Germany's DAX Index and CAC 40 edged lower -5.71 percent and -2.94 percent respectively, as the euro area reported a decrease in consumer sentiment in February from the previous month.

Meanwhile, data from European Commission showed lower inflation expectations in February from January. Asian markets closed lower during the month as China's Shanghai Composite declined by -6.36 percent after Chinese manufacturing data came in below expectations. In Japan, Nikkei 225 declined by -4.46 percent as factory output fell by the most in nearly seven years in January, while retail sales also slid more than expected. Industrial production contracted

-6.6 percent in January from December, the biggest drop since March 2011. In commodities, oil prices fell in February triggered by weak Chinese and Japanese industrial data as concerns of a global economic slowdown could lead to lower oil demand. WTI declined by -4.52 percent closing at 61.66\$/l and Brent fell by -5.60 percent closing at 64.76\$/l. US crude stockpiles increased raising fears that OPEC cuts will be nullified by rising US output. Gold prices have increased in February to 1.318/oz as uncertain outlook for stocks, bonds, and currencies has encouraged investors to use the precious metal as a safe haven.

GCC Economic Overview

In Saudi Arabia, the kingdom said that it will invest \$64 billion in developing its entertainment industry over the next decade. A large entertainment city near Riyadh, roughly the size of Las Vegas, is already planned as the country aims to boost its tourism sector. In Kuwait, Standard & Poor's (S&P) affirmed its AA/A-1+ ratings on the back of an expected return to GDP growth of +2.5 percent in 2018 mainly due to rising oil prices. S&P stated that its stable outlook reflects its expectation that Kuwait's public and external balance-sheets will remain strong over its forecast horizon, backed by a significant stock of financial assets. In UAE, Institute of International Finance (IFF) has stated that UAE's Economy is expected to improve in 2018 with strong oil prices, an improvement in global trade and the expected easing pace of fiscal adjustment. In Qatar, rating agency S&P has stated that the country will be able to withstand the blockade pressure mainly due to high level of government assets, strong public finances, and a larger than expected infrastructure plan. In Oman, annual inflation rate for January increased to +1.05 percent compared with the previous year, according to the consumer price index data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information. In Bahrain, the rate of growth of Bahrain's non-oil economy

reached +4.8 percent in the first nine months of 2017, outperforming previous expectations, according to the Bahrain Economic Development Board's (EDB) Bahrain Economic Quarterly. The report notes that the rate of growth makes Bahrain's economy the fastest growing in the GCC.

GCC equities review

GCC equities, as measured by the MSCI GCC IMI Index declined by -2.98 percent MTD. Bahrain's BB All Share index was the top performing index, followed by Kuwait's weighted index. Saudi Arabia's Tadawul index declined -3.02 percent mainly due to sharp declines in Diversified Finance -7.51 percent, Insurance -6.98 percent and REITs -4.11 percent. Kuwait's weighted index gained +0.49 percent with positive contribution coming from Banks +1.96 percent, Real Estate +1.86 percent and Oil & Gas +0.73 percent, negative contribution came from Consumer Services -5.94 percent and Consumer Goods -2.08 percent. Dubai's DFM index fell -4.43 percent with decrease in sector performance witnessed in Real Estate -7.81 percent, Investment & Finance Service -7.13 percent and Insurance -5.53 percent. Abu Dhabi's ADMS index declined by -0.10 percent with declines coming from Real Estate -4.27 percent, Telecom -3.37 percent and Insurance-0.74 percent. Positive contribution came from Energy +5.05 percent and Finance Service & Investment +3.51 percent. Qatar's QE index declined -5.52 percent as poor performance came mostly from Real Estate -14.34 percent, Insurance -6.35 percent, and Transportation -5.82 percent. Oman's MSM index rose +0.07 percent with strong positive performance coming from Services +0.46 percent and Industrials +0.30 percent. Bahrain's BB All Share index jumped +1.42 percent with strong performance coming from Services +4.49 percent and Industrials +3.86 percent and negative contribution coming from Insurance which dropped -1.99 percent.

United Real Estate announces profit of KD 2.2 million for 2017

KUWAIT: United Real Estate Company (URC), one of Kuwait's leading real estate development companies, announced its financial results for the year 2017, recording a profit of KD 2.2 million as compared to KD 8.7 million in 2016.

growth in assets is due to increase in investment properties and receivables resulting from higher contracting and service revenues.

Commenting on the results, Tariq Mohammed AbdulSalam, Chairman of URC, said, "URC has been able to achieve significant project milestones as well as demonstrate a strong growth in the company's operating revenues, despite the economic challenges that we witnessed in the region during the year 2017. This growth is due to the company's diversified and geographically-distributed developments and operations in Kuwait, Middle East, and North Africa."



Tariq Mohammed AbdulSalam

The decrease in net profit is due to several factors including: reduction in revenues from hotels (attributed to the renovation of the hotel in Kuwait and to the transition between hotel operators in Egypt), increase in losses from associates in Jordan and Morocco, increase in finance costs (due to the increase of the discount rate of the Central Bank of Kuwait), provisions relating to a legal dispute pertaining to Manazil Real Estate Investment Company (Egyptian Shareholding Company - Closed) and to foreign currency conversion losses.

The company witnessed strong growth in operating revenues, that reached KD 87 million. This translates to an increase of 23 percent as compared to the total operating revenues of KD 71 million in 2016. The company recorded a net operating profit of KD 21 million during 2017, similar to that recorded during 2016. Total assets of United Real Estate Company increased by 5.24 percent to reach KD 602 million, as compared to 2016 (KD 572 million). The

Furthermore, AbdulSalam said that the company has been able to make significant progress in its strategy during 2017. This includes the launch of landmark projects, including a portion of the "Hessah Al-Mubarak District", one of the significant developments and the first-of-its-kind in Kuwait. "The company also launched Phase 2 of "Assoufid" in Morocco, which consists of a five-star hotel and residential component that includes villas and high-end apartments. The project, which covers over more than two million square meters, includes a high-end golf course, as well as a number of different facilities and services.

Warba Bank exclusively sponsors 'Auto Finance Show 2018'

KUWAIT: In 2017, Warba Bank intensified its efforts to develop financing solutions for the purchase of cars, which have proved to be fruitful as they met the needs of both the Bank's customers and non-customers to acquire their choice of luxury cars that suit their aspirations while eliminating financial burdens. As a result, the Bank has been able to take the lead in the auto financing sector whereas its solutions became customers' first choice to achieve their dreams of acquiring the latest models of cars according to a convenient installment.

In 2018, Warba Bank continues to enhance its financing solutions by expanding its partnership with international car brand dealerships, offering its customers more convenient options. In this regards and in order to reach the largest number of people wishing to purchase different brands and models of cars according to a flexible payment mechanism, Warba Bank announces its exclusive sponsorship (as the solo bank present at the show) of the "Auto Finance Show 2018" organized by Marina World



Management on Marina Crescent from 8 to 10 March, 2018 with the participation of leading global car dealerships that will be keen to showcase the latest and most luxurious models.

During the show at Warba Bank booth, a professional team from the Bank will provide visitors with a comprehensive insight on the Bank's auto financing solutions which it offers under the slogan "credit your car at zero profit" with an installment period of up to 5 years let alone other various offers and financing solutions. That offer has been an unrivaled success as far for customers and non-customers who have greatly benefited

out of it. In addition to Warba Bank, the Honda Cars dealership is the Golden Sponsor of exhibition. Other exhibitors amongst Warba's partners are leading international cars' dealers such as: Toyota, Lexus, GMC, Chevrolet, Subaru, Dodge Charger, RAM 1500 Rebel, Jeep Rangler, Jeep Cherokee, Chery, GAC CS4, GAC CS5 and GAC CS8.

Commenting on the Bank's exclusive sponsorship of the event, Musaed Mazyad Al-Mazyad, Head of Individual Retail Sales & Distribution at Warba Bank, said: "Warba Bank has achieved an unprecedented success in providing easy and flexible auto financing solutions that have attracted large



numbers of people wishing to purchase cars according to a simple payment mechanism without adding any profits to the total of the installments.

Given the growing demand for car finance solutions, we are sponsoring the Auto Finance Show 2018 so that we can offer our solutions to as many customers and non-customers as possible and contribute to realizing their dreams of buying luxury cars by choosing one from a rich range of car models that will be offered in the Show."

It is worth mentioning that the Bank's auto financing solutions continue to see huge traffic amongst different segment of customers

and non-customers; these solutions have enabled them to own their dream car and pay for it in an affordable way. Accordingly, Warba Bank yesterday became the Islamic banking institution that enjoys the trust of customers and is the first choice for them to obtain flexible and quality credit facilities.

Warba Bank calls on all its customers and those wishing to acquire their dream cars, to visit its booth in the Exhibition where they will get the chance to transform their dreams into a reality in a flexible and easy way and at a zero profit. Warba Bank affirms that many other surprises await the visitors of the show!

Technology

UK video game industry, home of Lara Croft, fights gender imbalance

Studios appear less hesitant to cast women as main characters

LONDON: Giving life to a black elf in a fantasy video game, softly spoken schoolgirl Hannah leans into the microphone to deliver an ominous warning: "This world, and everything in it, will burn!" With seven other schoolgirls, the 13-year-old is learning the tricks of the gamer trade as part of an initiative to encourage more girls to enter the industry. For the past three years Creative Assembly, one of Britain's largest video game developers, has hosted girl-only workshops at its offices in Horsham, South London.

"We encounter a lot of feedback from school students and parents," said Jodie Azhar, lead technical artist on "Total War: Warhammer", the studio's flagship series. "We want to address these misconceptions such as 'it's easier for men to find jobs than it is for women in this industry' and 'my mom tells me to get a real job.'" With her rectangular glasses and red highlights, Azhar knows as a young female that she is an exception in Britain's video game industry.

According to a 2016 study, women fill only 19 percent of jobs, despite the fact that women make up half of British gamers. "In that 19 percent, how many of those women are actually making games?" asked Marie Claire Isaaman, president of the "Women in Games" group, which seeks to increase female representation. "If I look to a range of other data, most women aren't making games," she added. "So you have all male team(s) developing female characters. That can be a big problem." She did not elaborate on what exactly the 'problem' would be as there have been women who have also created and written male characters as well.

“We want to address these misconceptions”

Gamergate and Lara Croft

For Azhar, this shortage is primarily linked to education. "I think the biggest issue with women getting in the industry comes from a school age," she said. "Although I loved playing video games, I didn't realize that making them could be a professional career. At school, I never got told about these jobs." Much of the disparity can be traced back to a supply shortage, with fewer girls choosing to study STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects, according to Richard Wilson, head of the Independent Video Game Developers' Association in the UK.

Studios "can actively go out and try to encourage more women to get a career in the video games industry," he suggested. Part of the imbalance has also been ascribed to negative attitudes within the video game

world, claims that boiled over in 2014 with the so-called "Gamergate" incident. The row centered on accusations that journalists were artificially boosting games created by female developers, but soon took a dark turn with death and rape threats leveled against independent developer Zoe Quinn. The threats turned out to be massively overblown and amounted to

very little. Quinn has since developed no new games and released a novel detailing her 'experiences'. The novel did not sell very well at all. She now spends most of her time on Twitter shouting at strangers.

On the flip side, studios now appear less hesitant to cast women as main characters, such as in recent releases "Horizon: Zero Dawn" and "Uncharted: The Lost Legacy". In recent years, more and more women have



HORSHAM: In this file photo taken on February 23, 2018 Jodie Azhar, 30, Lead Technical Artist on the Total War game series at Creative Assembly, poses for a portrait in her offices. —AFP

also joined development teams. And the sector is booming: the UK has more than 2,000 studios, employing around 13,000 people, and the industry grew by 7 percent in 2017. The country boasts some of the industry's most prestigious names, such as the Rockstar North studio in Scotland, creator of the "Grand Theft Auto" series, and London's Rocksteady.

"Things are going in the right direction," said Isaaman, who hopes that 40 percent of the industry will be female by 2025. Not surprisingly, Britain is seeking to be at the forefront of the global debate. After all, it was near Derby in central England in 1996 that now-defunct studio Core Design gave birth to Lara Croft, one of the most iconic gamer characters of all time. —AFP

Genetic tweak makes plants use 25% less water

PARIS: Researchers on Tuesday unveiled a genetic modification that enables plants to use a quarter less water with scant reduction in yield. By altering a single gene, scientists coaxed tobacco plants—a model crop often used in experiments—to grow to near normal size with only 75 percent of the water they usually require. If major food crops respond the same way, they said, the first-of-its-kind genetic "hack" could help feed the growing population of an increasingly water-starved world. "This is a major breakthrough," said senior author Stephen Long, a professor at the Institute of plant biology at the University of Illinois. "When water is limited, these modified plants will grow faster and yield more."

The findings were reported in the journal Nature Communications. Today, 1.2 billion people live in regions where water is scarce, and four billion—two-thirds of humanity—experience scarcity at least one month every year. By 2030, the planet will face a 40 percent water deficit if global warming continues at its current pace, according to the UN World Water Development report.

Agriculture guzzles three-quarters of all ground-water withdrawals — 90 percent in poor countries. "Making crop plants more water-use efficient is arguably the greatest challenge for current and future plant scientists," said lead author Johannes Kromdijk, also from the University of Illinois. Long and his team tweaked the gene that codes a protein-known as PsbS—crucial to photosynthesis, the process by which plants convert light into nutrients. PsbS plays a key role in relaying information about the quantity of daylight, which triggers the opening and closing of microscopic leaf pores called stomata.

Some help from global warming

When stomata are open, plants can absorb the CO2 needed for photosynthesis. At the same time, however, water also escapes into the air. In the genetically engineered plants, increased levels of PsbS caused the tiny leaf pores to close earlier than they normally would, allowing the plant to retain more precious liquid.

Ironically, this gain in water storage is only made possible by global warming, which has increased the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere by about 25 percent since 1950. In the experiments, the tobacco plants could take in enough CO2 — despite the stomata's shortened work day—because of this higher concentration. "Evolution has not kept pace with this rapid change, so scientists have given it a helping hand," said Long. Experts not involved in the research described the discovery as promising, but called for tests on food-producing plants.

"As this photosynthesis gene is universal, there is potential for translating this research to crops," commented Matthew Paul, a plant scientist at Rothamsted Research in Harpenden, England. "However, the engineered plants produced less biomass," something that would not sit well with farmers and agribusiness, he noted. "A next challenge would be to see if the approach works in elite varieties of major crops without negatively impacting their ability to yield," he told the Science Media Centre in Britain. —AFP

More boys suffer online sex abuse than thought

BRUSSELS: Boys account for nearly a third of online child sex abuse images and often suffer the worst horrors, a new study revealed Tuesday, suggesting a greater problem than first thought. Interpol and Ecpat, a Bangkok-based international organization fighting child sexual abuse, produced the findings after reviewing more than one million online images and videos. "There is sort of a higher number than we would have maybe thought of males portrayed on the images," ECPAT's Marie-Laure Lemineur told a press conference in Brussels.

The report said 64.8 percent of the unidentified victims were girls and 31.1 percent were boys while both sexes were depicted together in 4.1 percent of images and videos. "When boys were depicted in the abuse, it was more likely to be severe," the report said. The report added that the younger the child, whether a boy or a girl, the "abuse was more likely to be severe."

NewsGuard, new venture to combat 'fake news'

WASHINGTON: Two prominent American journalists announced plans to launch a venture called NewsGuard which will provide online users with "reliability ratings" for media outlets. NewsGuard's founders said they will hire dozens of experienced journalists to analyse the 7,500 news and information websites which are the "most accessed and shared" in the United States.

NewsGuard will launch ahead of the November mid-term elections in the United States, founders Steven Brill, who started Court TV among other ventures, and Gordon Crovitz, former publisher of The Wall Street Journal, said in a statement. NewsGuard will provide green, yellow and red "reliability ratings" for news sources, they said, with green being for trusted sources, yellow for those requiring caution, and red for "deliberate purveyors" of "fake news." Brill and Crovitz said NewsGuard will provide "nutrition labels" for each of the 7,500 news sources it will review. These will be a more detailed analysis of each outlet and will explain why a publisher receives a green, yellow or red rating. "In addition to alerting people to fake news," Crovitz said, "one of our key goals is to help consumers, including young people, know when to take news from certain sites with a grain of salt." NewsGuard said it will license its ratings to social media and search engines and other news aggregators so they can add them to their feeds.

"Our goal is to help solve this problem now by using human beings—trained, experienced journalists—who will operate under a transparent, accountable process to apply basic common sense to a growing scourge that clearly cannot be solved by algorithms," Brill said. "We are not going to make granular judgments about political leanings, or which of two legitimate news sites—Buzzfeed News or the Boston Globe, for

example—produces more reliable journalism," Crovitz said. "But we will tell readers the Denver Post is a real newspaper and that the Denver Guardian exists only as a purveyor of fake news." Brill and Crovitz said they had raised \$6 million for NewsGuard from 18 investors. The lead investor is the Publicis Groupe ad agency holding company. "Advertisers

The findings are important and require further study because it is often assumed that girls and older children are far more likely to be abused than boys and young children, ECPAT and Europol officials said. Some of the victims were infants and toddlers. The study rated levels of victimization from cases of nudity, erotic posing, explicit sexual activity, assault, gross assault as well as sadism and bestiality.

Bjorn Sellstrom, Europol's coordinator for crimes against children, urged the public to be careful about the terms used to describe the abuses. "This is not child pornography. This is evidence of crimes," the Swedish police officer told the press conference. The images were contained in the International Child Sexual Exploitation database that Interpol set up nearly a decade ago, leading to the identification of 12,000 victims.

But Sellstrom said many more could be identified as less than half of the world's countries are connected to the data base, with none in Africa and only a few in Asia. The system's sophisticated software compares photos and videos, allowing investigators to also identify abusers and locations across the participating member states. Nearly 47 percent of the files in the database portray child victims that have been identified by the authorities while the remainder depict unidentified children. Europol and Ecpat



In this file photo taken on December 4, 2017 a mousepad with the Facebook logo is seen at Facebook's headquarters, designed by Canadian-born American architect Frank Gehry. —AFP

called for a coordinated global response involving civil society, media, academia and various layers of government. "This is not a law enforcement problem. This is a societal problem," Sellstrom said. —AFP



'NewsGuard' is a new venture to provide 'reliability ratings' about media outlets.

care about the quality and credibility of the brands they support, and we are delighted to be the lead investor in NewsGuard as a key part of the solution to the crisis of fake news." Publicis Groupe chairman Maurice Levy said. NewsGuard's founders said they hope to eventually expand beyond the United States. —AFP

Uber using self-driving trucks for long hauls

SAN FRANCISCO: Uber on Tuesday said it is using self-driving semi trucks to augment human-driven rigs in its on-demand trucking service in the US state of Arizona. Humans pick up cargo from Uber Freight customers and drive it in trailers to transfer hubs. There the trailers are hitched onto self-driving trucks for

long highway hauls, according to the San Francisco-based company. The self-driving vehicles head to transfer hubs close to their destinations, where the trailers are hitched back onto human-steered rigs to complete their journeys. "This a big step forward in self-driving truck technology, and the future of the freight industry at large," Uber said in a release. "This paints a picture of the progress being made towards our vision for the future of trucking: now hauling real loads in Arizona."

Uber has been testing self-driving truck technology since 2016, and began using autonomous rigs for hauls late last year. Uber claims to have made the first commercial shipment ever by self-driving truck when it hauled a trailer full of Budweiser beer some 120 miles of highway in Colorado. New-comer Embark last year began using self-driving trucks to haul refrigerators

from a warehouse in Texas to a distribution center in southern California. Uber Freight is a free app that lets shippers book truckers with ease similar to how people can summon Uber car rides. "Much like what we do with our self-driving Ubers in Pittsburgh and Phoenix, we are developing our self-driving truck product by deploying it to the Uber Freight network and fulfilling hauls for real customers," the company said.

Package and shipping company UPS announced in December that it will buy 125 of Tesla's all-electric semi trucks, the largest such order since the vehicle was unveiled a month earlier. The order by UPS, one of the biggest operators of commercial trucking fleets, came on the heels of a PepsiCo announcement two weeks ago to buy 100 of the Tesla trucks. —AFP

Health

Corruption, deprivation sharpen Angola's rising malaria outbreak

Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 90 percent of malaria cases worldwide

LUANDA: Heavy rains, filthy conditions, medicine shortages and endemic corruption have combined to make a lethal malarial cocktail for Angola. Since the start of the year more than 300,000 cases of the disease have been reported across the country, leading to at least a thousand deaths. The toll, say experts, is a clear sign of the poverty and failings of governance in a country which, paradoxically, is one of Africa's top oil producers.

"The number is frightening," said Jose Antonio, the director of public health in Kilamba Kiaxi, a poor neighborhood of the capital, Luanda province, which includes the capital, has been the hardest hit with more than 75,225 cases and 117 deaths followed by Benguela in the west of the country where 43,751 cases and 213 deaths have been reported. In 2017, 7,000 people died from the disease.

Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 90 percent of malaria cases worldwide and 92 percent of deaths caused by the condition that is spread by infected mosquitoes. Malaria remains one of the leading causes of premature death in Angola and every year public hospitals are deluged with patients battling the disease.

“ The number is frightening ”

'She is dead'

In the Cajueiros clinic, in the heart of the densely populated Cazenga neighborhood in Luanda, dozens of mothers and their children queued for medical consultations. "Every day we record at least 15 to 20 cases of malaria in our hospital," said pediatrician Miguel Sebastiao. That compared to just one or two in the dry season.

"They don't give us any medicine here. You can have a free consultation but they just give you a prescription to go and buy drugs at a pharmacy," complained Rosa Eduarte, who had come to seek a diagnosis for her five-year-old daughter. Because of her precarious financial position, she had no other choice than to visit a public hospital, which typically lacks even basic supplies like cotton wool, syringes, latex gloves and, crucially, medicines.

"We don't have any tablets here," said Marcelina Paulina, a nurse at the Palanca Dona Paulina hospital in

Luanda. Ana Joaquina lost her sister at the end of February. "The doctors diagnosed malaria. The hospital didn't have any money to buy medicines. She is dead," said Joaquina matter-of-factly. Like all of Angola's other public services, health care has been starved of resources by the economic crisis that has plagued the country since oil prices collapsed in 2014. In 2016 an outbreak of yellow fever killed almost 400 people and shone a light on the risible state of government-run healthcare. The system has also suffered from chronic corruption, according to doctors and opposition politicians.

'Easier to buy luxury cars'

"It's easier to buy luxury cars for the hospital managers than it is to buy medical supplies," said Maurilio Luyele, a medical doctor who is also a lawmaker for the opposition Unita party. Last month, three senior officials were sentenced to eight years imprisonment after embezzling \$2 million (1.6 million euros) that was intended for the fight against malaria.

Even if Angola had the "best medicine in the world," the issue of malaria will persist "while we don't resolve the problem of rubbish piling up in the streets, of stagnant water and a lack of hygiene," said Sebastiao, the pediatrician. Refuse collectors have not visited some parts of Luanda for months, another service that is also afflicted by corruption.

Some quarters of Luanda have been transformed into open-air dumps as local authorities grapple with limited budgets and the small number of companies providing refuse services. During the rainy season from September to May, roads and public spaces are transformed into marshes with floating detritus—a paradise for mosquitoes. Faced with a growing crisis, the government of new president Joao Lourenco who took office in September last month launched an emergency plan to fight the malaria epidemic with mass insect fumigation and the distribution of mosquito nets. —AFP



LUANDA: A malaria stricken child is examined by a pediatrician at a hospital. —AFP

Bloomberg to launch \$20m anti-tobacco watchdog

CAPE TOWN: Philanthropist Michael Bloomberg announced yesterday that he will spend \$20 million (16.13 million euros) to launch a watchdog to detect and expose deceptive practices by the tobacco industry. The monitor, to be called Stopping Tobacco Organizations and Products (STOP), will seek to count-

er the industry's influence by publishing reports detailing pro-smoking activities and tactics. It will also support non-profit organizations and government to resist interference from the tobacco industry.

"Over the last decade tobacco control measures have saved nearly 35 million lives, but as more cities and countries take action, the tobacco industry is pushing to find new users, particularly among young people," said Bloomberg, an ambassador for the World Health Organization (WHO) on non-communicable diseases. "We cannot stand by as the industry misleads the public in an effort to get more people hooked on its products—and this global watchdog will help us hold the industry accountable." —AFP

CLINIC

PAGE

248 33 199

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What's On

ACK internship program scores record numbers



The School of Engineering at the Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) scored record numbers with the winter 2017/2018 internship work term. 125 students were placed with 31 employers over the course of the winter break and thrived with the 150 hour work experience that earned many certificates of achievement.

Joumana Tasse, Internship Coordinator at ACK said "I am grateful for the continuous support of local employers who commit their time and expertise to our Engineering students. The internship experience enables our students to seamlessly bridge their aca-

ademic knowledge into a work place setting. This promotes growth, maturity and confidence."

Dr Mohammed Abdul-Nibi, Acting Dean at the School of Engineering, refers to Amit Kalantri's famous quote "Life is not only about acquiring knowledge, it is about applying knowledge" to best describe the core objectives of the internship program. ACK continues to support enriching the student experience and is currently underway for its next internship work term that will take place in the summer of 2018.

Ambassador of Canada hosts reception for International Women's Day



March 8th marks the International Women's Day around the world. To honor this momentous occasion, Her Excellency Ms Martine Moreau, Ambassador of Canada to Kuwait had the pleasure of hosting a group of women leaders in the community whose important work have contributed to the empowerment of women and girls and the advancement of their rights and freedoms here in Kuwait and throughout the world. The theme for this year's International Women Day is #PressforProgress. The objective of this commemoration this year is to press for increased gender equality and empowerment of women and girls around the world.

Canada has chosen to step up efforts in this regard with the adoption in June 2016 of a feminist foreign policy seeking to reduce extreme poverty and to build a more peaceful, inclusive, and prosperous world. A policy that recognizes that promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls is the most effective approach to achieve this goal. Furthermore, advancing gender equality and women's empowerment will be a central priority of Canada's G7 Presidency and the G7 Summit to be hosted in Charlevoix, Quebec in June 2018. On this occasion, Ambassador Moreau wishes all women in Kuwait and around the world a very happy women's day!



Safir Hotel & Residences Fintas holds its annual staff party

Safir Hotel & Residences Kuwait - Fintas held its annual staff event to mark their hard work and efforts that have contributed to the success and performance achieved in 2017. The event was held at Al Seif Grand Ballroom and included Saif Eddin Mohammed, General Manager of the hotel along with the management team, employees and their families. The event commenced with an introductory note from Saif Eddin Mohammed to all colleagues outlining their outstanding performance during the year 2017.

Certificates of appreciation were distributed to the employee, supervisor and superstar of the year 2017 by the General Manager & Department Heads for their notable per-

formance and achievements while thanking colleagues for everything they do to embody the hotel's core values and help make it the preferred business choice in Kuwait. Their hard work, commitment and dedication of colleagues to the hotel's business ensure the smooth operation, guests' satisfaction and make the hotel serves a better place in the

community. Attendees enjoyed a rich dinner buffet during the event, in addition to the distribution of valuable gifts including the flight tickets that were contributed by a number of sponsors. Associates expressed their gratitude to the management team especially the Human Resources Department on the fun time they spent with their families.



The Kharafi Group recently honored the iconic media figure and general manager of its UNEXPO, Magdi Al-Hawwary on the conclusion of his tenure with the group and his return back to Egypt. A special ceremony was held for the occasion during which Engineer Bader Naser Al-Kharafi presented a certificate of appreciation to Al-Hawaari on concluding his 20 year long career with the group.

GUST welcomes NASA scientist

Gulf University for Science and Technology's (GUST) Global Studies Center (GSC), in coordination with the Embassy of the United States of America, announced yesterday the successful presentation by leading scientist Nagin Cox, from NASA's jet propulsion laboratory, who provided insights into space exploration, Mars missions, and women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). The seminar was attended by GUST management, faculty, staff, students, and the general public.

Head of the Global Studies Center at GUST, Dr Martin Rosenstock, said, "It was an honor to collaborate with the US Embassy, to bring in such an established scientist as Nagin Cox, from a prestigious institution like NASA. The audience thoroughly enjoyed the presentation, and learned a lot about the latest developments in the field. It is important to shed light on topics that we don't come across on a daily basis, for GUST and the community as a whole, to stay aware and relevant in our fast paced world."

Zainab "Nagin" Cox has been exploring since she decided as a teenager that she wanted to work at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory. She realized her dream and has been a Senior Spacecraft Operations Engineer at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) for over 20 years. She has served as a systems engineer and manager on multiple interplanetary robotic missions: including the Galileo mission to Jupiter, Mars Exploration Rover missions, and the Kepler telescope mission to search for earth-like planets around other stars. Currently, Cox is a Mission Leader on the operations team for the Mars Science Laboratory (MSL),



NASA's Mars Curiosity Rover, which landed in August 2012 and has been exploring Mars ever since. Senior NASA Engineer, Nagin Cox, said "I appreciate the opportunity to be here today. This is a remarkable time in the space program, and I am privileged to be able to work at JPL and share this vision with the world."

For the presentation, Cox shared insights about the various missions from her extensive experience, touching on topics such as what it takes to put a robot on another planet, the technological requirements, and the effects on the human being managing the robot. Cox shared many humorous stories about the various aspects that come along with working on "a different planet" including time zone challenges, terminology, and effect on their personal lives. She also shared the collective goal of institutions such as NASA to have people not only go to Mars, but also other planets, and become "multi-planetary."

In addition, Cox touched upon the challenges and benefits of having more women in the STEM fields, especially as she is a U.S. Department of State STEM Speaker who has spoken to audiences around the world on the stories of the people behind the missions. Such unique discussions and events are continuously organized by the Global Studies Center, in an effort to provide new knowledge, stimulate research, aid in student development, and enhance the faculty's campus experience. It is a leading research center on global studies in Kuwait and a vehicle for engaging both internal and external communities through events on stimulating issues.

CRYwalk 2018 in Salmiya and Mahboula

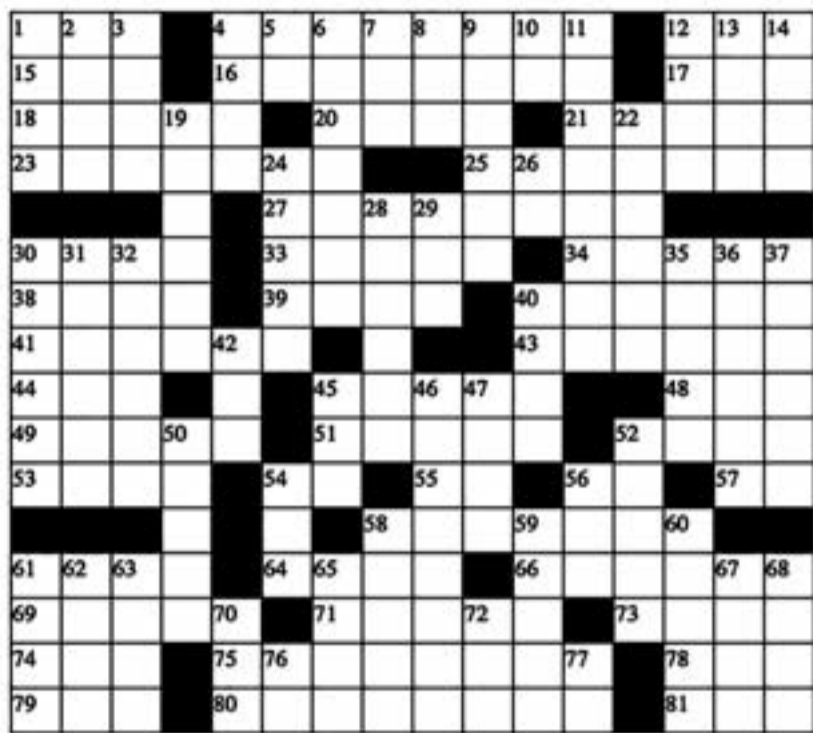
Last week, FOCC (Friends of CRY Club, Kuwait) successfully completed the 7th annual CRYwalk event. The CRYwalk was always held for Salmiya and Mahboula on different days. But this year, the "CRYwalk 2018" was organized at both locations on the same day. FOCC were pleasantly surprised to see the participation at the same level as the last year.

As in the last 3 years, the most

thrilling entry was a small girl at 20 months of age, walking with her friend of 2 years, with the rest of the family enjoying and clicking pictures galore. The total collective distance walked by all was 399 km, at an average of 4.86 km per child. We thank them all from the bottom of our hearts and hope that CRYwalk will steadily grow in the year to come. FOCC thanks all the star participants, who earned a t-shirt and a medal each for participation. As we say in CRY, everyone Wins. FOCC organizes 3 annual events for children - CRYcket for children under 14 years, CRYchess and CRYwalk for children of upto high-school age. Our next event, the CRYchess is coming up in April 2018.



CROSSWORD 1852



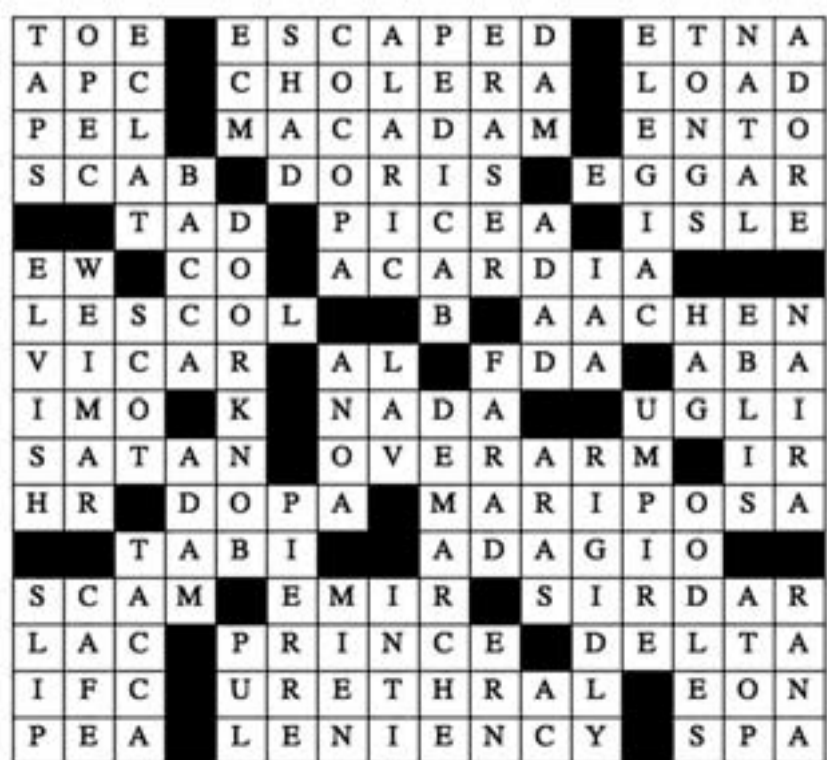
ACROSS

- The longer of the two telegraphic signals used in Morse code.
- The capital and largest city of Nepal.
- The supernatural being conceived as the perfect and omnipotent and omniscient originator and ruler of the universe.
- A Turkish unit of weight equal to about 2.75 pounds.
- A native or inhabitant of the Ukraine.
- Any of various primates with short tails or no tail at all.
- A mixer incorporating a coil of wires.
- A theocratic republic in the Middle East in western Asia.
- Indigo bush.
- Someone in love with themselves.
- A steep part of a glacier resembling a frozen waterfall.
- A fellow female member of a youth gang.
- The capital and largest city of Yemen.
- Of or relating to Oman or its people.
- Capital of the state of Oregon in the northwestern part of the state on the Willamette River.
- The yield from plants in a single growing season.
- Freedom from difficulty or hardship or effort.
- Pleasantly occupied.
- Relating to the blood vessels or blood.
- A small piece of cloth.
- The United Nations agency concerned with international maritime activities.
- (Babylonian) A demigod or first man.
- (Old Testament) The second patriarch.
- A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
- An intensely radioactive metallic element that occurs in minute amounts in uranium ores.
- A Mid-Atlantic state.
- (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
- Wild goose having white adult plumage.
- A city of northern Poland near the mouth of the Vistula River on a gulf of the Baltic Sea.
- A Russian prison camp for political prisoners.
- Genus of erect herbs of the Middle East having showy flowers.
- Large burrowing rodent of South and Central America.
- An ugly evil-looking old woman.
- Port city on southeastern Honshu in central Japan.
- A guided missile fired from shipboard against an airborne target.
- A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organism.
- Occurring or existing before birth.
- A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.

DOWN

- Being or moving lower in position or less in some value.
- A Loloish language.
- Dense growth of hairs covering the body or parts of it (as on the human head).
- Kamarupan languages spoken in western Burma and Bangladesh and easternmost India.
- A state in northwestern North America.
- A plant of the genus *Kriphofia* having long grasslike leaves and tall scapes of red or yellow drooping flowers.
- The month following February and preceding April.
- (Irish) Mother of the ancient Irish gods.
- Grandson of Amaterasu and first ruler of Japan.
- An official prosecutor for a judicial district.
- Beneath the surface of the sea.
- Offering fun and gaiety.
- German industrialist who was the first in Germany to use an assembly line in manufacturing automobiles (1871-1948).
- Made of fir or pine.
- Food that is discarded (as from a kitchen).
- Streaming or flapping or spreading wide as if in a current of air.
- Wearing footwear.
- Being one more than one hundred.
- The common people generally.
- The compass point midway between northeast and east.
- A large fleet.
- Nuts or fruit pieces in a sugar paste.
- (folklore) A corpse that rises at night to drink the blood of the living.
- A soft cotton or worsted fabric with an open mesh.
- A succession of notes forming a distinctive sequence.
- Colloquial British abbreviation.
- A federal agency established to coordinate programs aimed at reducing pollution and protecting the environment.
- Support resembling the rib of an animal.
- South American caracara.
- An official language of the Republic of South Africa.
- A genus of Ploceidae.
- A summary that repeats the substance of a longer discussion.
- The elementary stages of any subject (usually plural).
- A digital display that uses liquid crystal cells that change reflectivity in an applied electric field.
- Any of numerous fruits of the gourd family having a hard rind and sweet juicy flesh.
- Small terrestrial lizard of warm regions of the Old World.
- Squash bugs.
- Consisting of or involving two parts or components usually in pairs.
- Primitive chlorophyll-containing mainly aquatic eukaryotic organisms lacking true stems and roots and leaves.
- The lean flesh of a fish similar to cod.
- Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
- God of love and erotic desire.
- A swindle in which you cheat at gambling or persuade a person to buy worthless property.
- Take in solid food.
- A state in northwestern United States on the Pacific.
- A silvery ductile metallic element found primarily in bauxite.

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Aries, working with others is exactly what's called for at this time which is a great thing since you're ready, willing and able! Escapism is attractive and to fill this need you enjoy books, plays or movies; this could actually help with something you're working on. Your strong managerial abilities are in high gear and are much needed to finish up a difficult project. Your charm and effervescent personality are appealing and influential. If you have been considering making a change in your job, this is a very good period of time to pursue this! Making good decisions is prevalent as you're very clear-headed and practical just now. You could have a strong tendency to look inward for answers to some personal issues. This evening you enjoy a fun gadget. Aries.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Taurus, a neighbor or friend asks for your help in a situation that could involve the law. Quick thinking solves a current problem at work that had seemed impossible. Figuring something out just before you enter a meeting saves the day when it comes to a certain person; your mind is on go and clearer than it's been in a while. Frustration from being constantly interrupted and overlooked is prominent; being taken advantage of never leads to positive outcomes. A fiery confrontation with someone whose opinions and attitudes are in total opposition to yours is likely; take a step back and consider the lessons you can learn from adversity. Your managerial abilities are definitely much needed today. Tonight, good food and friends create a sense of peace. Taurus.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Gemini, you feel certain you can accomplish anything you set your sites on at this time; take advantage of this energy while it lasts! You feel most impatient to experience every good thing regarding life, love, success. High energy levels could entice you to step out and take chances on an emotional level. Watch that you don't overexert yourself during this time. You're admired for your foresight and distinctive qualities. Using your intellect and personality creates confidence for your clients and customers as they look to you for guidance. A new acquaintance rubs you the wrong way. Some information you stumble upon contradicts something you have always been told; consider this carefully before you say anything. Outside is where you want to be. Gemini.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Cancer, home and hearth are the most important things in the world for you now. Effecting change is your focus as you understand these need to occur within you as soon as possible regarding a touchy issue. Strong support for a venture you have taken on helps lift your confidence level. Being with someone who's got a bubbly personality makes your day much better. Your thoughts are on someone you greatly admire; a mentor is strongly indicated here. You know better when someone suggests a long drawn out way of doing something; you sit back and watch as these methods fail. Reaching your goals seems almost too easy, as though things just fall in your lap; you make great strides during this period of time that are long-lasting. Cancer.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Leo, a hot, emotional issue is brought to light when someone contacts you with inflammatory information regarding the past of someone close to you. You're drawn to interact with neighbors or members of your immediate family. An unruly situation arises that causes blocks and levels of frustration you're not prepared to deal with. Harsh words could be communicated by you to someone else if you're not careful. You want very much to tell someone how you feel about behavior they exhibited; be careful, for you might just get some hurtful words in return. A sense of pulling away from disruptions and conflicts dominates later today. Surround yourself with the comforts of home as you relax and recharge after a trying day that does finally end well. Leo.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Virgo, someone finds you very attractive but isn't confident enough to approach you. Changing your eating habits is something you struggle with today. A new project demands your attention as it comes near to the end; you seem to be in-tune with what would be the best method to finish this. You wonder about someone you work with as they don't seem to be on top of things as usual; letting this person know you're there for them feels like something important you should do. Being able to purchase something you have desired for a long time brings much happiness. A sweetheart or mate contributes to your sense of contentment and security. Financial abundance seems more than possible! Joining loved ones for dinner brings a nice close to your day. Virgo.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Libra, the vibration of ambitions being met is prevalent at this time. Being able to let your most secret feelings be known brings relief; having a trusted confidant makes a positive difference in your life. You answer the call to step outside and take the walk your body's asking for; this or stretching provides physical relief you sorely need. You're able to meet the demands of someone difficult you work with or for; you have become accustomed to the outlandish requests of this person. Boredom threatens but you're able to occupy yourself with something that changes this. You become concerned when you don't hear from someone. Knowing what's best for you serves a valuable purpose when someone suggests a new treatment you have doubts about. Libra.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Scorpio, expect a special reward for a job well done; this could indicate a raise in pay or a type of promotion. You feel a deep comradeship with those you work with or spend time with. Like-minded people provide encouragement when you need it; joining others to gain a common goal makes success certain. Remember, if a shoe doesn't fit, we don't wear it! You could find that a new project brings prosperity to all involved. Taking one step at a time is best in a troubling situation. A strong vibration of ambition feeds your attempts to succeed; use this correctly and create abundance. Someone catches your eye in a very good way; this could be personal or professional. Tonight, you may relax with a good book or perhaps an exciting movie. Scorpio.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Sagittarius, almost everything you do or attempt to do today goes smoothly; your capabilities are noticed by several people who matter. Figuring something out clears the way for a new beginning you have long wanted to try; confidence levels are high. Sensual pleasures are highlighted at this time; a need to be in control or have power could be what's meant here. Teamwork is indicated and success is more than likely with the efforts of this group of people. Meeting with someone who encourages and supports you means a lot when you seek advice. Someone of the opposite sex gets your attention; this could indicate the start of the serious love affair you have longed for. You lose a tantalizing mystery. Getting down to the core of things brings knowledge. Sagittarius.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Capricorn, your help is requested in the planning of a surprise party; your circle of friends is the type who have fun just planning an event! A new piece of equipment makes a world of good difference in the workplace! You tie your purse strings and refuse to buy something you want but absolutely don't need. You're able to tap into the vibrations of those around you; this helps you to avoid something unpleasant. You work hard to control yourself when what you want to say could set your career back; learning self-discipline isn't easy at all. Independence and security do battle as you seem to want both but can't figure out how to balance them. Remember we can create the life we want! Affairs of the heart are likely to be most important right now. Capricorn.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

Aquarius, when someone asks for your opinion, they truly want it; also, your words influence this person in the way you suggest. Responsibility is an honor, but also a burden; be careful what you say, your words are powerful things. You may feel bored and in need of doing something on the fun side! An invitation comes at just the right time and you're tempted, even knowing you could get in trouble sort of for going; use your best judgement here. You could actually find you have more than one choice of social outing; does this mean double trouble or having better choices you mean what you say and you say what you mean; everyone understands every single word! You know for sure what's best for you. Aquarius, so just go ahead and do it.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Pisces, you may feel as though you couldn't fight yourself out of a wet paper bag. A certain person continually cuts you off and interrupts; also, it's not easy to get your words out clearly. You know intuitively that your ideas should be kept to yourself; you actually overhear something that supports something you'd like to try. Shallowness of feeling allows you to observe and understand all sides of a story fairly. Memories from long ago warm your heart and make you smile; a certain childhood experience is still one of your favorites. You could decide it's time to take a scientific look at your familial roots. Interaction with loved ones on especially personal levels strengthens you resolve to grow and prosper. To love and be loved is all you want. Pisces.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Phonetic Alphabet

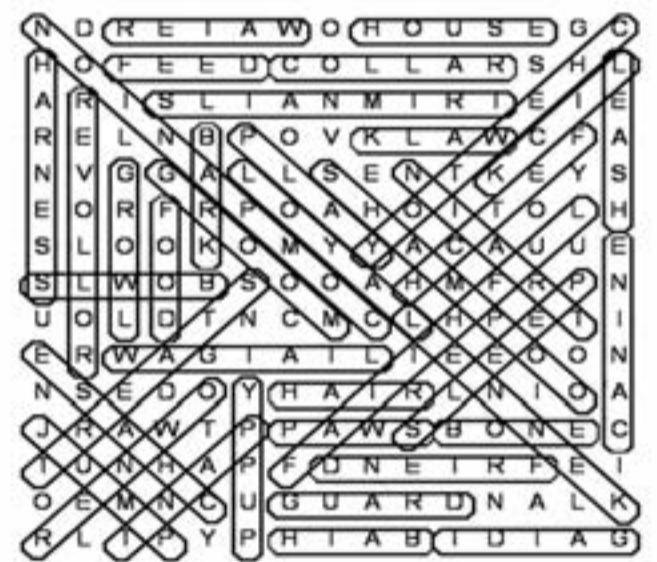
Find and circle the Phonetic Alphabet words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell an additional word from the Phonetic Alphabet.



- | | | | |
|---------|--------|--------|---------|
| ALPHA | HOTEL | OSCAR | UNIFORM |
| BRAVO | INDIA | PAPA | VICTOR |
| CHARLIE | JULIET | QUEBEC | WHISKEY |
| DELTA | KILO | ROMEO | X-RAY |
| ECHO | LIMA | SIERRA | YANKEE |
| FOXTROT | MIKE | TANGO | ZULU |
| GOLF | | | |

Yesterday's Solution

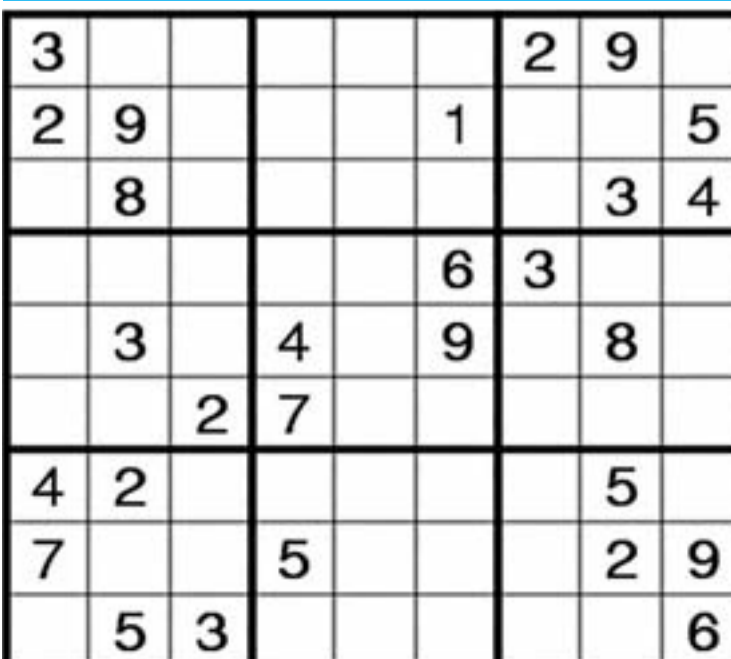
Pet Dog



- | | | | |
|-----------|---------|--------|------------|
| BARK | FEED | ID TAG | PUPPY |
| BATH | FETCH | JUMP | ROLL OVER |
| BONE | FOOD | KENNEL | SHAMPOO |
| BOWLS | FRIEND | LEASH | SLEEP |
| CANINE | GROOM | LICK | TRAIN |
| CHASE | GROWL | LOYAL | TREATS |
| CHEW TOY | GUARD | OWNER | TRIM NAILS |
| COLLAR | HAIR | PANT | WAG TAIL |
| COMPANION | HARNESS | PAWS | WALK |
| FAITHFUL | HOUSE | PLAY | WATER |

The hidden message is: DOGS LOVE YOU UNCONDITIONALLY

Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution



S African Afro-Jazz musician Thandiswa Mazwai enthralled Kuwait audience



By Chidi Emmanuel

It was a memorable evening on Tuesday as award-winning South African Afro-Jazz musician Thandiswa Mazwai mesmerized her audience with her voice and captivating songs. Speaking to Kuwait Times, Thandiswa shared her transition through the years and her experience in the music industry. "My impression of music is formed around memories - and every memory, good and bad, has a sound," she said, adding that her inspiration comes from life, as well as its challenges and beauty. "I am also inspired by my love for Africa," the celebrated artist said.

In her first trip to Middle East, the celebrated artist thanked Kuwaitis and expats for their show of support. In the region which has been engulfed by violence, she preached peace, tolerance and forgiveness. "As South Africans, one thing we have shown the world is our ability to forgive," Thandiswa added.

Born on 31 March 1976 (the year of the Soweto Uprising) in Eastern Cape, Thandiswa grew up almost entirely in Soweto, Johannesburg, amidst the heavy apartheid township violence of the 1980s. Her parents (Belede and Thami Mazwai) were journalists and anti-apartheid activists, and she recalls that her home was filled with books, articles and thick with political discussions. It was the political atmosphere that nurtured her perspective as a musician. Thandiswa studied English literature and International Relations in Wits University.

She became widely recognized as the voice of South Africa's conscious youth - their compositions consistently combining dance floor favorites with thought-provoking lyrics. Thandiswa is one of the most influential South African musicians. She began her career in 1998 with Bongo Maffin, one of the pioneering bands of Kwaito. After six award-

winning albums with Bongo Maffin, she ventured onto a solo career.

Her debut album, Zabalaza (2004) reached double platinum status, winning numerous awards including Kora For Best African Female Artist and Four South African Music Awards. The album was also Nominated for BBC Radio 3 Planet Awards. Her critically acclaimed second album 'Ibokwe' (2009) reached gold status within weeks of release and her live DVD 'Dance of the forgotten Free' (2010) won South African Music Awards for Best Female Artist and Best Live DVD in 2011.

The Guardian recently referred to her as "South Africa's finest female contemporary singer." Thandiswa's influence in the post-millennial South African sound can be heard far and wide. The new groups idolize and emulate Mazwai. She is the only artist in African music globally and she effortlessly channels the legends such as Mariam Makeba, Busi Mhlongo, Fela and Hugh Masekela, whilst bridging the music and generational gap between millennials and Gen X's across the continent.

Thandiswa released her third solo studio album titled 'Belede' (2016) - a collection of reinterpretations of legendary South African Jazz and protest anthems from the 1950s and 1960s 'golden era'. Thandiswa's selection is inspired by the music she listened to whilst growing up. The title 'Belede' is named after and dedicated to Thandiswa's late mother - a major influence in her music and political stance.

In his remarks, South African Ambassador in Kuwait M P Bona praised Kuwait government for promoting peace in the region and bridging the cultural divide. He said that the event was organized in partnership with Kuwait's National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL). The event was held at the Abdullhussain Abdulredah Theatre in Salmiya.



Photo shows S African Afro-Jazz musician Thandiswa Mazwai performing on stage.



UB40's Ali Campbell doesn't want to reconcile with his brothers

UB40's Ali Campbell has no interest in reconciling with his brothers after he was forced to leave the original line-up of the band. In 2008, the 59-year-old singer was left with no choice but to quit the reggae group he founded back in 1979 after a disagreement with his sibling Robin Campbell and his other bandmates over the practices of their management which he considered to be against their socialist ideals. The band went on to split into two factions with the third Campbell brother Duncan replacing Ali on vocals in one line-up and expensive legal battles followed over who could use the iconic name. Ali is now reclaiming the legacy of his group, and his version, titled UB40 featuring Ali Campbell, Astro and Mickey, is set to land the highest entry in the UK album chart this week with their new LP 'A Real Labor of Love'. Although he is pleased to be back as UB40, Ali isn't ready to forgive or forget his siblings for their treatment of him. Speaking exclusively to BANG Showbiz, he said: "I don't really want to speak to them. With UB40 we were all brothers as far as I was concerned. When I found out stuff that was going on with the management I went to the band thinking they would support me and they didn't... The band backed the management over me, to this day I'm still bewildered by it. They let me go when I was the singer and I wrote all the tunes. I started the band and it was always my band and it continues to be... It's been going on for 10 years. They were taking me to court to stop me from using the name of my band that I started in 1979... I just ignore them and hope they go away." And the 'Red Red Wine' hitmaker believes Robin and Duncan's group is tarnishing the legacy of UB40 with their poor live shows and by turning their back on their reggae roots and releasing coun-

try record 'Getting Over the Storm' in 2013. Ali fumed: "Astro had to come back to the fold after the 'dark side', as I call them, made a country record. That was just ridiculous, it was a slap in the face to me and my fans, and it was a deliberate thing they did. They only sold about 5,000 copies of the record, it was just a disaster... I think they're dreadful and are destroying the legacy of the band and still are whenever they play... What's killing me is that there are a lot of people out there that don't care what's happened internally and don't care about us airing our dirty laundry in public, the worse thing is that people think that Duncan is me! Duncan is a folk singer, that's his style. For Duncan to be singing my hits it's bloody embarrassing, they are better UB40 tribute band singers out there." Ali thinks the legal rows over the name UB40 is a farce anyway because it comes from the government paperwork Unemployment Benefit, Form 40 which was required to be filled out by jobless individuals to claim a benefit back in the 1970s and 1980s in Britain at the same time that the late Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister. The vocalist said: "All I've been doing is defending myself, at great cost to me and to those guys, now I think they've just run out of steam and run out of money to try and stop me from using the name. The fact is UB40, the name, isn't owned by me or anyone, it stands for 'Unemployment Benefit, registration form 40, it's owned by the government, or Margaret Thatcher!'" But look, we've differentiated ourselves now. We've been on the road together for four years and we're building the UB40 brand again." UB40's 'A Real Labor of Love' is out now. — Bang Showbiz



UB40 featuring Ali Campbell, Astro and Mickey



A blind singer performing in front of a skytrain station in Bangkok. — AFP photos



Blind singers from all around Thailand taking part in performance classes hosted by the Social Development and Welfare Department, at a hotel in Bangkok.



Two university students donating money to blind singer Singhkum Boonriang, 28, as he performs with his guitar at a park in Bangkok.



A man helping his son give money to blind singer Yupin Boonchuen, 50, as she performs in front of a skytrain station in Bangkok.



A woman donating money to a blind singer as she performs in front of a skytrain station in Bangkok.

Blind singers break through Bangkok's sound barrier

Strumming his guitar with ease and backed by a drummer, Singhkum Boonriang belts out covers of Thai ballads as strangers pass by on a busy Bangkok afternoon. But Singhkum is no ordinary busker—he's one of hundreds of blind singers who perform across the Thai capital at traffic junctions, skytrain stops and other busy locations. "It's born out of my love to play music and sing," Singhkum explains, sitting in front of a small donation box. Aided by a small speaker, he is hopeful of attracting attention, and some loose change. He started performing in his teens but took up the street gig four years ago when he moved to the Thai capital from the north.

"When I first arrived in Bangkok, I heard many street musicians playing in public spaces, and I love to sing, so I gave it a try," he adds. Like Singhkum, many of Bangkok's blind singers hail from poor and rural provinces and come to the capital in search of work. But their options are limited. "There are two or three jobs that we can do, like selling lottery tickets, singing or giving messages," muses 50-year-old Yupin Boonchuen, who makes around 1,000 baht (US\$31) a day performing outside a skytrain station.

Stigma

Attitudes towards begging and street performing are ambiguous in superstitious Thailand: some view disabilities as the result of bad karma from previous lives. Such street jobs also carry a social stigma, with buskers seen as hustlers on the run from city officials. "Sometimes (when I get chased away) I feel, why don't they give me a chance? I was sad that they didn't give me an opportunity to show my talent," Yupin says. But others in this Buddhist-majority nation see giving to the needy as a way to accrue merit in their next life.

The singers, armed with traditional mandolins and bamboo flutes, can transport listeners to the past. "They're actually part of the traditional folk culture of this country," explains Philip Cornwell-Smith, author of a book on Thai

culture. "The sound is quite plaintive—the music itself is quite nostalgic, almost, and so I think it has quite a strong pull on the Thai heart," he adds. Attitudes may also be changing thanks to reforms from an unlikely corner. The junta that grabbed power in 2014 has pushed through new rules separating street showmen from beggars by granting "talent" cards. All Thais who wish to perform for money in public spaces can now register with the authorities and play legally. So

Department, which runs the program. Yet as the legal channels open up, the number of street troubadours is increasing, including young musicians pumping out pop hits.

The added competition often means a drop in earnings. Singhkum, the guitarist at Lumpini park, says that on some days he can't make enough money to cover the two-way pick-up service he needs and the helper who chaperones his travel. And if this gig doesn't work out,



Blind singers from all around Thailand holding hands as they are led around a performance workshop hosted by the Social Development and Welfare Department, at a hotel in Bangkok.

far over 2,000 people have signed up as street performers with the blind singers making up the majority.

Few opportunities

The government has also started offering music, performance and fashion classes to help blind singers sharpen their skills and presentation. A recent two-day training course at a Bangkok hotel saw nearly 300 blind performers across the country receive voice lessons. "The project stemmed from the idea of not leaving anyone behind," said Napa Setthakorn, director of the Social Development and Welfare

he's not sure where else to turn. He asks: "How many opportunities does our society provide for the disabled?"

"I think little. The disabled people can do so many things but the acceptance from society is still low," the 28-year-old adds. His wish is to be seen as first and foremost as a musician. He insists: "I just want them to think of me as doing a job, not for the sympathy." — AFP

Time's Up leader to head Grammy effort on women

The body that administers the Grammy Awards on Tuesday named a leader of the Time's Up anti-harassment movement to lead a task force on better including women. The Recording Academy named Tina Tchen, a chief of staff to former first lady Michelle Obama, to head the effort after controversy over women's low representation at the music industry's latest awards. Tchen is the co-leader of the legal defense fund of Time's Up, a campaign launched in January by Hollywood women to combat sexual harassment across industries in the wake of dozens of abuse allegations against film mogul Harvey Weinstein.

"The music industry faces numerous challenges—from combating long-held biases to making sure women are represented and respected within the community," Tchen said in a statement. Tchen heads of the Chicago office of law firm Buckley Sandler LLP. She had also led the White House Council on Women and Girls started by the Obama administration to incorporate female welfare into federal government decision-making. A number of female artists voiced dismay that not more women won or were nominated at the January 28 Grammys, where funk revivalist Bruno Mars was the night's big victor.

Adding fuel to the controversy, Recording Academy president Neil Portnow, asked by a reporter why more women were not winning, said that female musicians needed to "step up." Portnow, who faced calls by female executives to resign, hailed Tchen's appointment. "In this moment, the Recording Academy can do more than reflect what currently exists; we can help lead the industry into becoming the inclusive music community we want it to be — a responsibility that the Board and I take seriously," he said in a statement.

The Recording Academy said that the task force, whose other members are yet to be announced, will make recommendations on how better to bring in "under-represented communities," including in the telecast gala and in deciding the awards themselves. — AFP

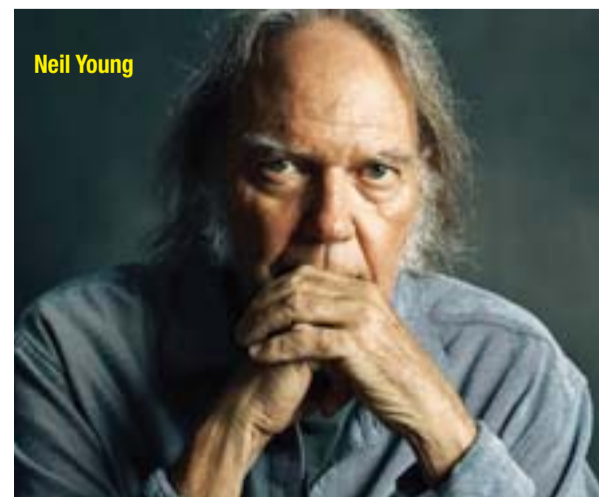
Neil Young, Beck, Lorde at Quebec's summer festival

Folk rock legend Neil Young, alternative rock icon Beck and young pop prodigy Lorde will be among headliners at Quebec City's sprawling summer music festival, organizers announced yesterday. The festival, in its 51st year, follows an unusual model for a North American music event with low-cost passes for 11 days of

music at venues across the historic city. Toronto R&B sensation The Weeknd will open the festival on July 5 followed the next day by Young, who is making his sole scheduled appearance of 2018 in his native Canada.

Other acts will include electronic music sensations The Chainsmokers, dreamy French electro-pop band Phoenix, pop chart-topper Shawn Mendes, rock crowd-pleasers Foo Fighters and veteran acts Cyndi Lauper and Jethro Tull. The Quebec festival also showcases French-language music with the lineup to include Jane Birkin, who will bring her orchestral renditions of the music of her late partner Serge Gainsbourg. The music closes on July 15 with the philosophical country singer Sturgill Simpson and jam-rock favorites Dave Matthews Band.

Unlike major commercial music events which strictly check ticket purchases, the publicly supported festival encourages fans to share passes which cost as little as Can\$100 (\$78 US) for all 11 days. The Festival d'été de Québec, as it is known in French, makes up for its inexpensive tickets with its vast size of 100,000 capacity at the main stage, the scene of the 1759 battle in which British forces decisively defeated France. — AFP



CHANEL ATTACKED FOR FELLING TREES FOR PARIS FASHION SHOW



People arrive to attend the Chanel's 2018/2019 fall/winter collection fashion show in Paris. — AFP photos



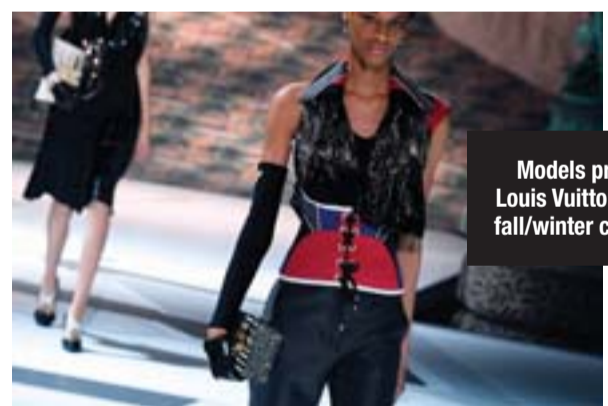
Karl Lagerfeld created a spectacular mid-winter wood for his Paris catwalk Tuesday, but immediately fell foul of environmental activists who accused him of felling century-old trees for the show. The veteran German creator turned the Grand Palais into a forest, with tons of dead leaves strewn on mirrored steps and nine tall mossy oaks planted down the middle of its vast nave. Trees had also been chopped down to make rows of benches for his guests, including Hollywood star Keira Knightley, British pop singer Lily Allen and former French first lady Carla Bruni Sarkozy.

But the France Nature Environment group condemned the show as "heresy", accusing the luxury brand of trying to "give itself a more green image while completely divorced from the reality of protecting nature." It said that whatever point Chanel was trying to prove with the show had failed. Nature is not chopping down trees in a forest, putting them up for a few hours for a show and then throwing them into a skip.

Chanel hit back strongly late Tuesday saying none of the oak and poplar trees it sourced from a forest in western France had been a century old. "In buying the trees Chanel also promised to replant 100 new oak trees in the heart of the same forest," the brand added in a statement. Chanel raised eyebrows last year for a PVC-themed collection at a time when plastic pollution is hitting the headlines.

Huge life-like forest

Fashion critics had earlier praised the set, with Harper's Bazaar declaring that the "runway may be (Lagerfeld's) best yet". It loved the "life-like forest" he conjured up that "seemed to extend infinitely". The 84-year-old creator



Models presents a creation for Louis Vuitton during the 2018/2019 fall/winter collection fashion show.

Impeccable Vuitton
Chanel's trademark long, pearl necklaces also made a reappearance, with former supermodel Cindy Crawford's 16-year-old daughter Kaia Gerber wearing earrings featuring the brand's double C logo. South Korean star Hyeon Jung and British model activist Adwoa Aboah also walked in the 80-look show. Meanwhile, Nicolas Ghesquiere turned out another impeccable collection for Louis Vuitton in the day's other big star-studded event, which rounded off the month-long circus of autumn-winter fashion shows that also took in New York, London and Milan.



had sent out a dark and classy collection that eschewed the bubblegum girliness of Chanel's haute couture show in January. The few pinks and electric blues he allowed to seep into the show were confined to handbags and the very Audrey Hepburn leather opera gloves worn with a series of black lace slip dresses.

The final touch was that the gloves, like his own, were fingerless. With his controversial wispy beard that so divided opinion at January's fuller now, the "Kaiser" took one of the briefest bows of his career after the show, allowing photographers little chance to check its progress. Some critics had then found it shockingly "scruffy" for the world's pre-eminent style guru, who had not changed his look in two decades. Lagerfeld began the show with a run of full-length black coats matched with sparkling gold tights, one coat feathered at the shoulders and cuffs which gave it more than a hint of French Empire dash.

Burnished gold

Earthy, autumnal colors dominated, lit up with the glint of embroidered crystals and glitter, as he ran through the gamut of Chanel's classic tweedy looks-city slickers bringing a touch of ever-so-tasteful glamour to the horsey country set. The whole top of one particularly striking coat with burnt orange velvet collars and cuffs was covered in a fall of delicate applique dark green and burnished gold leaves. This was not the gold of the nouveau riche but the distressed sheen of old money.

The veteran picked up and ran with its mottled glow in a line of darkly burnished gold and copper boots, suits and skirts. Critics and front-row stars including French actress and singer Vanessa Paradis and Iranian screen icon Golshifteh Farahani admired Lagerfeld's new big bags and accessories. They included a "log" handbag so close to the real thing you might risk losing it in the woods.





Ana Sousa, 45, TAP Air Portugal pilot for 11 years, poses for a portrait at a TAP hangar in Lisbon.



Shana Power, 25, Mixed Martial Artist, spars with EFC Champion Gareth Mclellan in the gym which she co-owns called Power House Intensive Training (PHIT), in Johannesburg. — AFP photos



Wendy Lawrence, 58, a retired US Navy captain and former NASA astronaut, is pictured on the Space Shuttle trainer that was used for astronaut's training at the Museum of Flight in Seattle, Washington.



Turkish firefighter Devrim Ozdemir poses for photographs in her protective clothing during a training session in Izmir.



Indian workers of the Northeast Frontier Railway engage in the maintenance of a railway coach at Guwahati Railway Station in Guwahati.



Zahida, a Pakistani female police Assistance Sub-Inspector (ASI), poses for a photograph at a police academy in Peshawar.



Lebanese mechanic Rana el-Hayek, 22, poses in a car repair garage where she works in Qannabat Brummana, northeast of Beirut.



Sierra Leone gold prospector Mariatu Bangura, 30, mother of 4, works in Pampana river near Meken, northern Sierra Leone.



Somali football coach and player Marwa Mauled Abdi, 24, poses at the football ground of Ubah fitness center, the first football field exclusively opened for women, in Hargeisa, the capital of Somaliland, northwestern Somalia.



Spanish Legionnaire Rosa Galvez, 36, poses at the Spanish Legion military base 'Alvarez de Sotomayor' in Viator, near Almeria.

WOMEN BLAZING A TRAIL IN 'MEN'S JOBS'

In the ring, battling flames or lifting off into space, women have entered professions generally considered to be men's jobs. For International Women's Day on March 8, AFP Photo and AFP TV met some 20 women breaking down the barriers of gender bias in the world of work. Here are profiles of three women trailblazers around the globe:

Firefighter in Turkey

"In the beginning, my family told me: 'Stop, you won't succeed, this is a job for men,'" says Devrim Ozdemir, who did not heed the advice. In 2008, she became one of the first women to put on a firefighter's uniform in Turkey. "Today, everyone supports me, they have confidence in me," says the 37-year-old.

For me it is important, we could have received less money for the same job, but no, we have the same salary."

Her enthusiasm, determination and pride in her profession also inspires youngsters, like her six-year-old son-in-law instead of reading him bedtime stories she tells him about her work. "I'm a heroine to my son, it's an incredible feeling," she says, smiling, and adding proudly: "He, too, wants to become a firefighter."

South African fighter

As the first woman amateur champion in mixed martial arts (MMA) in South Africa, Shana Power defies the stereotypes about women in a combat

actually had a lot of positives from it." Except perhaps for the money. "I don't think we get offered the same," admits the champion, now a MMA professional. But she adds that "in terms of the personal training and coaching, yes," it's the same as for men.

US astronaut

"I was 10 years old when Apollo 11 landed on the moon and that was my 'aha' moment as I like to say. "I looked at Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walking on the moon and thought that's what I want to do when I grow up: 'I'm gonna be an astronaut and I am gonna fly in space,'" says Wendy Lawrence, 58, a former NASA astronaut. A trained Navy helicopter pilot, she realized her dream becoming an astronaut with four flights onboard a NASA space shuttle between 1995 and 2005. She grew up in Jacksonville, Florida, not far from Cape Canaveral, the launch pad for the space shuttles.

"I think especially here in the United States, we like to say 'Well you throw like a girl or you run like a girl' and historically that's not been a very positive thing. "So I suspect that in the minds of some of my male colleagues, especially when I was going through flight school, they probably thought I was gonna fly like a girl," she recalls. That meant she had to "work harder to be perceived as better... I was willing to buckle down and be focused for a long period of time cause my mindset was: 'I'm gonna prove you're wrong.'" Lawrence retired in 2006 and says her advice is to avoid preconceived ideas about what women can do. "So I'd say give women an opportunity to try. You might be surprised at what they bring to the table, what they're capable of." —AFP

"I'm gonna be an astronaut and I am gonna fly in space"

Assigned to a fire and rescue brigade in the western city of Izmir, she has started a trend. Now there are 51 women firefighters, though they are still a small portion of the 1,200-strong force. "Today I am a firefighter who stands beside people in their difficult times," she says, of her motivation.

And sometimes the firefighting itself can be physically tough. "It has been difficult at times, for example on interventions that require physical strength. I also faced challenges in carrying all our equipment, but apart from that, I never had any trouble." Ozdemir encourages young women to persevere in the male-dominated pro-

sport with her ferocity in the ring. She was nicknamed "Titanium". Born in Johannesburg, the 25-year-old blonde was first attracted to MMA by such star fighters as American Holly Holm and wanted to do the same in her homeland. "When I was growing up I was very athletic. I've always been sporty. So I understood that the mind was as important as the body... if you can unlock the mind and build the mind then your body will be an unstoppable force."

Power says she was supported by the people who trained her in MMA and now trains and inspires others herself. "In my profession I've actually been quite fortunate. I haven't faced many challenges, for example, being a woman in a male-dominated sport. I've



Ayniye Kaya, a 78-year old Kurdish woman, collects garbage in the streets of Diyarbakir.



Spanish referee Elena Pelaez Arnillas, 23, poses at the Otero stadium in Palencia.

Lifestyle

THURSDAY, MARCH 8, 2018



An Indian woman transports bricks on a wheelbarrow at brick kiln in Jalandhar. — AFP



Afghanistan national powerlifting team member Rasheda Parhiz, 40, gestures during training session at a women's gym at Ghazi stadium in Kabul.



Afghanistan national powerlifting team member Rasheda Parhiz, 40, assist teammate Sadya Ayubi on a bench press exercise during a training session at a women's gym at Ghazi stadium in Kabul.



Afghanistan national powerlifting team member Rasheda Parhiz, 40, lifts weights during a training session at a women's gym.

Afghan female powerlifters flex their muscles

Inside the Afghanistan Powerlifting Federation's cramped gym, Rasheda Parhiz lies on a bench wearing a tunic over sweatpants and holding a 70-kilogram (150-pound) weighted bar above her scarf-covered head. The 40-year-old began powerlifting several years ago to help lose weight—she used to weigh 120kg and hid her ample frame under a burqa. Now a fitter 82kg, Parhiz's ability to lift 100kg has brought the mother of three trophies and medals in local and regional competitions, which she keeps in a plastic shopping bag in her mud-brick home.

"We are too lazy to dust them," says her 22-year-old daughter Lema, explaining why they are not displayed in the living room window next to tea sets and thermos. "Who's interested?" Parhiz asks modestly. Several times a week Afghanistan's female powerlifting team squeezes into a small carpeted room in Kabul where they strip off their body-covering abayas and pump iron. Lifting weights heavier than themselves, the women are also flexing their muscles in a deeply conservative and patriarchal country where sport has long been the domain of men.

The Afghan Olympic Committee started the federation seven years ago but it has struggled to attract women, who are often discouraged from playing sport on the grounds of protecting their virtue. Powerlifting is a branch of weightlifting using the squat, bench press and deadlift techniques but without any moves which lift the weight vertically overhead. There are 20 women on the national team com-



Afghanistan national powerlifting team member Rasheda Parhiz, 40, poses for a picture with her trophies and medals at her home in Kabul.

pared with more than 100 in the men's squad, which also receives more official support, says Totakhail Shahpor, who has been the women's coach for the past three years after his predecessor absconded during a competition in Canada. The 52-year-old former soldier considers it his duty to encourage and protect his female charges. "I treat them like my daughters," Shahpor says. "If I imposed discipline like the army, the next day I would have no one left."

Sporty girls 'bad'

To keep them motivated Shahpor pushes the women to take part in competitions even though each of them only receive 1,000 afghanis (less than \$15) a month—barely enough to cover transport costs. "Look at their shirts and trousers, they do not even have shoes," he says pointing to Sadya Ahmadi's grey and yellow tracksuit that has a large patch on the thigh. Ahmadi, 25, is the most successful member of the women's team, winning four gold medals at competitions in Uzbekistan, India and Kazakhstan, Shahpor says proudly.

Despite the taboos around female sport, the women claim they enjoy the backing, even encouragement, of their fathers or husbands to do powerlifting. "My husband is happy... he is proud of me and pushing me," says Parhiz. But there are limits to his support, and he would probably balk if powerlifting ever became an Olympic sport. Lema says her father does not approve of his daughters attending public gyms, because sporty girls are considered "bad". "He wouldn't like to see me at the Olympics," Parhiz says. — AFP



Afghanistan national powerlifting team member Rasheda Parhiz, 40, warms up during a training session.



Afghanistan national powerlifting team member Rasheda Parhiz, 40, reacts during a deadlift exercise as teammate Sadya Ayubi looks on during a training session at a women's gym.— AFP Photos