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Trump fires Tillerson, names CIA chief Pompeo successor

Alleged 'black site' overseer tapped as first woman to lead CIA

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump yesterday sacked his top diplomat Rex Tillerson and named current CIA chief Mike Pompeo to succeed him, ending a rocky tenure by the Texas oilman who had frequently been at odds with the mercurial US president. A senior White House official said Trump wanted to reshuffle his team with a view to launching talks with North Korea, following last week's spectacular announcement he plans to meet Kim Jong Un.

Trump thanked Tillerson "for his service," but had scant words of praise for the 65-year-old Texan, who had effectively been sidelined on the world stage and was long rumored to be on the way out. The outgoing secretary of state, who returned overnight from a trip to Africa, did not even speak to the president before his sacking was announced and was unaware of the reason for his sudden downfall, according to a top aide. That aide - Steve Goldstein, the undersecretary for public affairs and public diplomacy - was quickly sacked after his comments. No reason was given, but White House and State Department officials said Trump had made the decision.

Before leaving on a trip to California, Trump spoke openly of his divergences with the former Exxon chief - including over the Iran nuclear deal as he explained the rationale for the latest departure from his chaotic White House. "We got along actually quite well but we disagreed on things," Trump told reporters. "When you look at the Iran deal, I thought it was terrible, he thought it was okay," Trump said. "So we were not really thinking the same. I wish Rex a lot of good things," the president added. "I think he's going to be very happy. I think Rex will be much happier now."

Announcing Tillerson's sacking in a tweet earlier yesterday, Trump lavished praise on Pompeo, a former US army officer and congressman who led the CIA for nearly 14 months, saying he would do a "fantastic job!" "He will continue our program of restoring America's standing in the world, strengthening our alliances, confronting our adversaries, and seeking the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula," Trump added, calling him "the right person for the job at this critical juncture" and urging his swift



Rex Tillerson



Mike Pompeo



Gina Haspel

confirmation. His enthusiasm was echoed by the US envoy to the United Nations, Nikki Haley - who tweeted her congratulations to her "friend" Pompeo.

Democrats quickly pounced on the news.

"There's a pattern and practice to dismiss anyone with whom this president has a policy difference, and that appears to be the case with Secretary Tillerson," senior Senator Dianne Feinstein said. To succeed

Pompeo at the Central Intelligence Agency, Trump nominated Gina Haspel, a controversial career intelligence officer who is the first woman tapped for the post.

Continued on Page 11

News in brief

Saudi cabinet approves atomic policy

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's cabinet yesterday approved the national policy of its atomic energy program, state media said, as the kingdom prepares to award contracts for its first nuclear power plants. The policy insists on limiting nuclear activities to peaceful purposes and calls for enhanced safety measures as well as the use of best practices for radioactive waste management, the Saudi Press Agency reported. Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil exporter, is seeking nuclear power to diversify its energy supply mix in order to free up oil to boost exports. The kingdom has accelerated plans to build 16 nuclear reactors over the next two decades, officials and analysts say, at a cost of some \$80 billion. Negotiations are underway with the United States for its agreement to export technology needed for their construction. — AFP

Qatar announces Abu Dhabi oil deal

DOHA: State-owned Qatar Petroleum announced yesterday it has signed a deal with Abu Dhabi to operate a shared offshore oil field, despite a bitter diplomatic rift between the Gulf neighbors. The United Arab Emirates confirmed the contract had been renewed with the Japanese operators of the Al-Bunduq field but said it had not had any contact or dealings with Qatar on the issue. The small oil field, located on the maritime border between Qatar and Abu Dhabi, is managed by a Japanese oil consortium. The previous deal to operate the oilfield ended earlier this month. Yesterday's statement did not say how many years were covered by the latest agreement. However, the UAE Supreme Petroleum Council (SPC) said Abu Dhabi did not hold any negotiations with Qatar regarding the oilfield. — AFP

Dubai deal triggers port row

MOGADISHU: Somalia's parliament has declared "null and void" a port deal signed by breakaway Somaliland that has raised tensions between Mogadishu and Hargeisa. Dubai-based DP World this month struck a deal giving Ethiopia a 19-percent stake in Somaliland's Berbera port. The move has angered Somalia, which does not recognize Somaliland's long-standing claim of independence and has a history of animosity with Ethiopia. Declaring the deal unconstitutional and therefore "null and void" Mogadishu's parliament on Monday asserted in a resolution: "It is only the Federal Government of Somalia that can engage in international deals." "All ports, and airports in the country are national property and... no one can privately claim ownership," it said, after 168 out of 170 MPs voted the deal down. — AFP

Tabtabaei wants PM to testify; Hayef queries work visa exemptions

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Opposition MP Waleed Al-Tabtabaei yesterday said he will ask HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah to testify in the cassation court in the case involving 69 opposition activists who are accused of storming the National Assembly building. Tabtabaei's statement on Twitter came after reports cited the prime minister

expressing dismay over Kuwait's drop in the Corruption Perception Index's latest release. The premier was quoted as saying that the new low ranking distorts the country's image and vowed to take necessary actions.

Tabtabaei, who was among 67 opposition activists handed harsh jail terms for storming the Assembly building in late 2011, said that he and other activists will ask their defense lawyers to demand

Bomb targets Palestinian PM convoy during rare Gaza visit

GAZA CITY: A bomb blast targeted Palestinian prime minister Rami Hamdallah's convoy during a rare visit to the Gaza Strip yesterday, leaving him unhurt but provoking outrage over what officials called an assassination attempt. The attack is likely to further increase tensions between Hamas - which denied any involvement - and president Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah, with a reconciliation agreement between the two all but dead.

Palestinian intelligence chief Majid

Faraj was also in the convoy but was not injured in the explosion, which occurred shortly after they entered the territory. At least six people were wounded, with none of their injuries believed to be life-threatening. A security source in Gaza said the convoy was also fired on by unknown gunmen at the time of the explosion, before Hamas security forces sealed off the area.

After the attack, Hamdallah briefly appeared at the opening of a wastewater treatment facility in Gaza before cutting short his visit and returning to the Israeli-occupied West Bank, where his government is based. "It was a very well-planned attempt. It was a roadside bomb about two meters into the ground," Hamdallah said at his office upon his return. A statement on official Palestinian media said Abbas

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Kuwaiti officials to visit Manila to discuss labor deal

KUWAIT: The Philippines will resume negotiations with Kuwait this week on what Manila hopes will be a model labor agreement that would provide strong guarantees on the safety and welfare of Filipino household service workers, according to a statement by the Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs. It said an eight-member Kuwaiti delegation will be in Manila from March 15 to 16, 2018 for negotiations on the proposed "Agreement on Domestic Workers' Recruitment, Employment, and Protection between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Government of the State of Kuwait".

"We are looking forward to the conclusion of this bilateral agreement that we hope will be a model document in terms of providing the necessary guarantees to ensure the

safety and well-being of our household service workers in Kuwait," Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Peter S. Cayetano said. Cayetano issued the statement on Monday evening shortly after he and Labor and Employment Secretary Silvestre Bello III met at the Manila Hotel with foreign affairs and labor officials involved in the negotiations.

The secretary said the Philippines should go beyond the usual in the negotiations with Kuwait, noting that bilateral labor agreements Manila had previously entered into with other countries look good on paper but could not be effectively implemented. "President Duterte wants this agreement to be different from the other agreements we signed with other countries by making sure that whatever is written there will translate into real, actionable measures that will protect our kababayans (countrymen) from exploitation and abuse," Secretary Cayetano said.

The secretary said the Philippines was earlier able to secure the commitment of Kuwait on several matters, including the minimum monthly salary of KD 120; rest hours of at least eight hours per day; possession of their passports and mobile phones; and limiting their work to only one household. During the Manila Hotel meeting, Cayetano again

underscored to the members of the Philippine negotiating panel the need to include more practical measures to make the proposed agreement more implementable.

Among the measures Cayetano earlier said he would want to see in the agreement would be payment of salaries direct to the bank account of Filipino domestic workers whenever feasible and a mechanism that would allow them to file their complaints directly with Kuwaiti authorities. Cayetano said these measures should be in place before the DFA and the DOLE would recommend the lifting of the labor deployment ban that the president declared earlier this year in the wake of the reported abuses of Filipino domestic workers.

Foreign Affairs Undersecretary for Migrant Workers Affairs Sarah Lou Arriola said the Kuwaiti delegation that will participate in the negotiations would be led by Ambassador Ghanem Saqer Al-Ghanem, Assistant Minister for Legal Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The other members of the Kuwaiti panel are from the residence affairs department of the interior ministry and the Public Authority for Manpower of the ministry of social affairs and labor. — Press release



GAZA: Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah (right) is greeted by Hamas' security chief Tawfiq Abu Naim upon his arrival in Gaza yesterday. — AFP

Kuwait, Turkmenistan strike numerous deals

President Berdimuhamedow in Kuwait in an official visit



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow. — KUNA



Kuwaiti Minister of Oil and Minister of Electricity and Water Bakheet Al-Rashidi signs an agreement with the Turkmen president's advisor on oil and gas issues Yagshygeldi Kakaev.

KUWAIT: Kuwait and Turkmenistan yesterday signed a number of agreements in a lavish ceremony with both nations' respective leaders in attendance. Presiding over the proceedings, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, with His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah by his side, was joined by Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow. The two sides have agreed to form a joint committee for cooperation, in addition to a bilateral visa exemption deal for holders of diplomatic, service and special passports.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and his Turkmen counterpart Rasit Meredow co-signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to hold regular discussions.

An MoU between Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) and the Turkmen government was also signed, in which the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister and Turkmenistan's deputy prime minister put their names on the dotted line. Kuwait's Finance Minister Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf and the Turkmen deputy prime minister were also the signatories of an agreement for economic cooperation,

in addition to a trade deal signed by Kuwaiti Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan and the Turkmen minister.

An MoU between Kuwait Petroleum Corporation and Turkmengaz was sealed by Kuwaiti Minister of Oil and Minister of Electricity and Water Bakheet Al-Rashidi, along with the Turkmen president's advisor on oil and gas issues Yagshygeldi Kakaev. The Kuwaiti and Turkmen governments also forged an agreement for closer ties on the cultural front, where Kuwaiti minister of state for national assembly affairs and acting information minister Adel Al-Kharifi co-signed the deal with Turkmenistan's deputy prime minister.

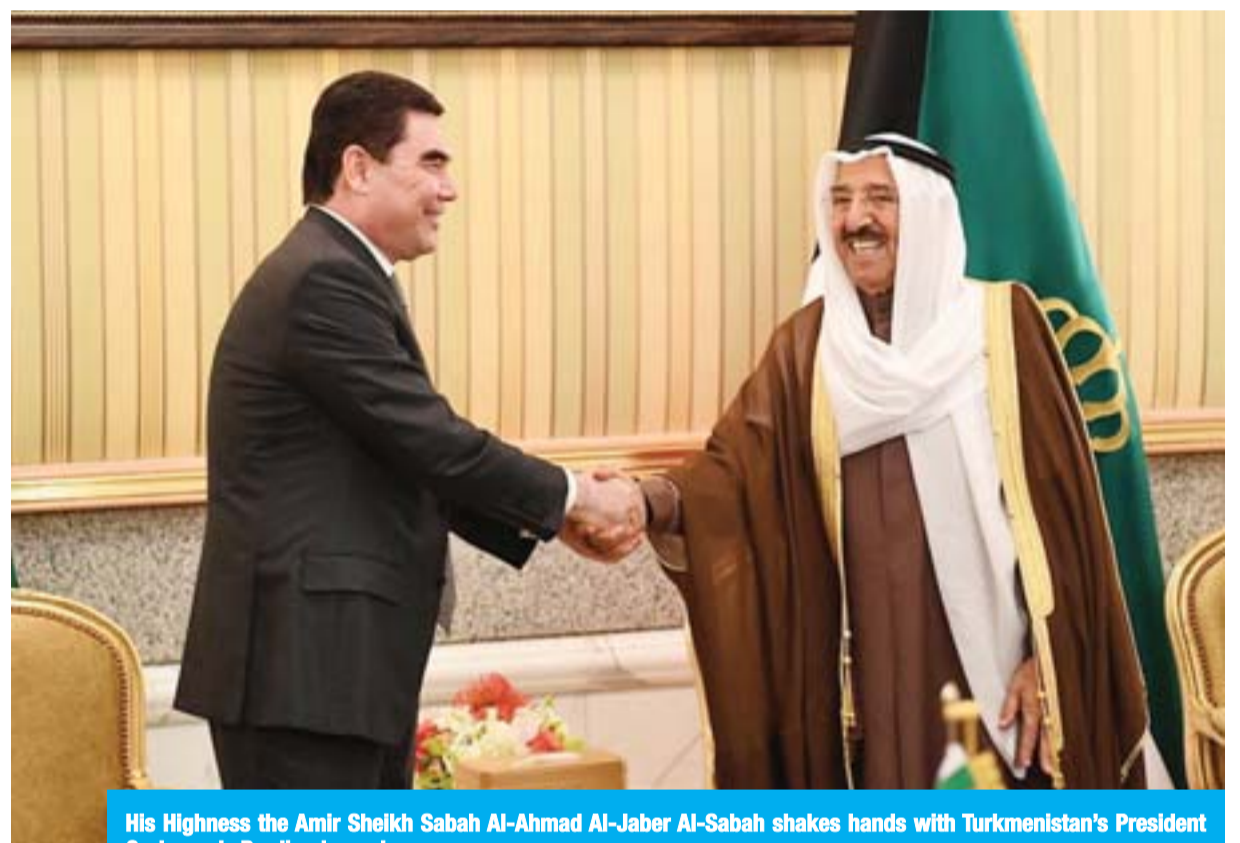
A technical assistance document between KFAED and the Turkmen government was sealed, bearing the names of KFAED's deputy director general Hisham Al-Wugayan and the chairman of the State Bank for Foreign Economic Affairs of Turkmenistan Jepbarov Rahimberdy. Turkmenistan's President and his accompanying delegation arrived in Kuwait yesterday on an official state visit where he held talks with His Highness Amir, President Berdimuhamedow was received by Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah at Kuwait International Airport. The delegation of honor was headed by Amiri Diwan Advisor Khaled Youssef Al-Fulajij. — KUNA



Amir, Turkmenistan's president hold talks

in addition to a trade deal signed by Kuwaiti Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan and the Turkmen minister.

A technical assistance document between KFAED and the Turkmen government was sealed, bearing the names of KFAED's deputy director general Hisham Al-Wugayan and the chairman of the State Bank for Foreign Economic Affairs of Turkmenistan Jepbarov Rahimberdy. Turkmenistan's President and his accompanying delegation arrived in Kuwait yesterday on an official state visit where he held talks with His Highness Amir, President Berdimuhamedow was received by Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah at Kuwait International Airport. The delegation of honor was headed by Amiri Diwan Advisor Khaled Youssef Al-Fulajij. — KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah shakes hands with Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow.

Saudi officials visit Saud Al-Nasser institute

KUWAIT: A Saudi military delegation led by Major General Ali al-Qahtani, Commander of the Command and Staff College, visited yesterday the Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah Diplomatic Institute to learn about activities and programs related to diplomatic training. Director General of Saud Al-Nasser Diplomatic Institute Ambassador Abdulaziz Al-Sharekh

said that the delegation included 12 officers. During the visit, Kuwaiti and Saudi officers discussed cooperation at various levels including security and military sectors, and exchange of training experience, he added.

Qahtani spoke during the visit about training experience at the College of Command and Staff of the Saudi Armed Forces. The Saudi military delegation's visit to Kuwait came in response to an invitation by Commander of Mubarak Al-Abdullah College for Command and Joint Staff, Marine Admiral Abdullah Dashti. The delegation was accompanied by Colonel Essam Al-Kandari and Colonel Abdullah Al-Hajri from Mubarak Al-Abdullah College of Command and Joint Staff. — KUNA

Amir to attend, patronize police officers' graduation

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is set to attend and patronize today the graduation ceremony of police officers at Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences.

His Highness the Amir received at Bayan Palace yesterday His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah; who also met separately with His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received Environment Public Authority's (EPA) Director General Sheikh Abdullah Ahmad Al-Humoud Al-Sabah accompanied by a number of Gulf voluntary teams. The reception was held on the occasion of the first forum for Gulf environment voluntary teams and civil societies.

In other news, His Highness the Amir sent a cable of condolences to Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud over the death of Prince Bandar bin Khaled bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister also sent similar cables to King Salman. — KUNA



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



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.



FOR THE CITIZENS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION VISITING OR STAYING IN KUWAIT

The Embassy of the Russian Federation in the State of Kuwait announces that the voting to elect the President of the Russian Federation will be held at the premises of the Embassy of Russia in Kuwait:

Daiya, Block 5, Diplomatic Campus, Al-Yemen street, plot 17,

on Friday, March 16, 2018 from 8:00 till 20:00.

All Russian citizens, visiting or staying in Kuwait, who have reached the age of 18 years are invited to take part in the elections. Make sure you keep your valid passport of the citizen of the Russian Federation with you.

For any information related to the forthcoming elections please address the Consular Section of the Embassy. For enquiries you are welcome to contact: 22560427, 22560428.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with Environment Public Authority's (EPA) Director General Sheikh Abdullah Ahmad Al-Humoud Al-Sabah accompanied by a number of Gulf voluntary teams. — KUNA

Local

Ministry of Public Works terminates 40 expat workers

Kuwait Human Rights Society receives labor grievances

By A Saleh and Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Public Works (MPW) is expected to notify 40 expatriate employees that their contracts will be terminated effective July 1, 2018. This step comes in line with Civil Service Commission (CSC) regulations that stipulate replacing expatriate employees in the public sector with national manpower, said sources who spoke on the condition of anonymity, adding that the ministry made the decision and selected the employees to be laid off according to its needs and the number of years a worker has been in service. The sources did not specify the terminated employees' positions or their years of service, however, CSC rules stipulate that an employee should be terminated (or referred to retirement in case of Kuwaiti workers) should they serve for 35 years or reach the age of 65. Exceptions are made for employees whose services would be needed in their positions such as doctors, as their contracts in this case would be renewed on a yearly basis. Several ministries have made similar steps in recent weeks after being notified to make efforts to hire more Kuwaiti jobseekers as the government hopes to fully 'Kuwaitize' the public sector's labor force within five years.

New teachers

In preparation for the 2018-2019 school year, the Ministry of Education (MoE) is expected to start receiving local job applications from new teachers within a few days, said informed sources, noting that applications will be open to expats residing in Kuwait, GCC nationals and bedoons according to the specializations needed and previously declared by the ministry. The sources also stressed that dispatching delegations to hire teachers from other countries will depend on the total number of teachers hired locally. Notably, MoE had announced its need for teachers of 18 subjects for the next school year.

Labor complaints

Kuwait Human Rights Society yesterday announced that it receives grievances from expatriates working in Kuwait through its website in both Arabic and English. It also responds to their inquiries about Kuwait labor laws, duties and rights. The society added that its website helps resolve several of expats' problems through periodic recommendations it makes to relevant

bodies, and works side by side with the government to protect their rights. The website also provides legal advice by specialized experts. The society launched the website and a hotline last July as part of a project executed jointly with the embassy of the Netherlands in Kuwait.

Medical errors

Kuwait Medical Association's (KMA) Secretary General Dr Mohammed Al-Qena'e announced that the society has launched 'Medical Responsibility' insurance to cover medical errors. He said the insurance policy's annual subscription starts at KD 75, and that the policy - through coordination with a banking firm - provides protection to both doctors and patients. Speaking on the sidelines of receiving the health minister at KMA's diwaniya recently, Qena'e said Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah listened to doctors' concerns and promised to resolve various problems. Qena'e added that the discussion included the mechanism of summoning doctors to MoI investigations, and the minister promised to coordinate with MoI to use a system that would not undermine doctors' humanitarian and vocational role in the society.



No plans to hire teachers from abroad

Jaber Hospital

The Ministry of Public Works (MPW) is scheduled to hand over the Jaber Hospital project to the Ministry of Health (MoH) today morning, said informed sources, noting that by doing this, MPW will renounce responsibility for the KD 304 million project. The sources added that turning the project over comes after tending to all the remarks previously made by MoH. The sources added that delaying turning the hospital over causes loss of public funds, especially since 15 months of the building's two-year maintenance contract have passed without benefiting from it.

11 shareholding companies

The Supreme Planning Council reported about the projects included in the government development plan, noting that they include establishing 11 shareholding

companies with 26 percent of its shares to be owned by the government, 24 percent to be owned by strategic partners and 50 percent to be offered for public bidding. Informed sources said the report includes development projects, residential cities, Shadadiya university, Kuwait international airport development, landscaping downtown Kuwait City, Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital, Boubyan port, Shuaiba power and water desalination plant and Al-Zour gas plant.

KD 2.7 billion

Chairman of the parliamentary budget and final statement committee Adnan Abdulsamad said the committee met yesterday and discussed assessing the cost of construction projects in the 2018-2019 fiscal year. He said that the total estimated budget would be KD 2.7 billion, which is 6 percent less than the current fiscal year budget. He also elaborated that the KD 1.9 billion of the budget will be used in 428 construction projects, in addition to KD 727 million for machinery and equipment purchases. Abdulsamad added that KD 500 million of MPW's budget will be allotted to the newly-established roads and land transport authority.

He added that the Audit Bureau reports stressed the weak executive capabilities of some government bodies that have offices overseas and noted that those offices had failed in purchasing property abroad to be used for diplomats' accommodation, instead of leasing them. He added that the reports also showed that some government bodies, such as the Ministry of Interior (MoI), had been renting a number of buildings for over 35 years.

The committee highlighted the parliament's decision not to have the Amiri Diwan execute any future construction projects and stressed that the new budget will only allocate KD 70 million to the Diwan to be used in completing the projects currently under construction.

Bonuses unaffected

Minister of State for Housing and Minister of

Services Jenan Boshehri strongly denied social media reports about suspending the yearly bonuses paid to Kuwait Ports Authority employees who achieve excellence in their annual job performance evaluation.

Martyrs Mural

Hawalli Governor Lt Gen (Retd) Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah inaugurated 'The Martyrs Mural', made in collaboration with the Martyrs Bureau and the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR) at Mishref Park. Speaking on the occasion, Sheikh Ahmad expressed his joy to take part in showing gratitude to the souls of people who sacrificed their lives to protect Kuwait. He also noted that HHI the Amir had recently ordered adding the names of people killed in natural disasters, the Al-Sadeq Mosque bombing and previous wars to those registered at the Martyrs Bureau. Sheikh Ahmad stressed that the Martyrs Bureau cherishes and honors all martyrs and not only Kuwaitis. Amiri Diwan Undersecretary and Martyrs Bureau Director Fatima Al-Ameer said the mural's idea was a success when it was first introduced at Shaheed Park. "Thence came the idea of building murals in parks at all six governorates," she underlined. PAAAFR acting deputy director for fish resources and landscaping Ali Al-Farsi said another mural had been launched at Adan Park and work is in progress to build more murals in Riggae and Abu Halifa parks.

Chairman of Kuwait Fishermen Union Thamer Al-Sowayan applauded HHI the Premier's keenness on listening to fishermen's grievances and complaints through inviting the union to attend the public services committee meeting held on Monday at Seif Palace with Minister of Social Affairs and Minister of State for Economic Development Hind Al-Sabeeh.

Sowayan added that the union presented its vision on Kuwait shrimp reserves and suggested special solutions to protect them as recommended by KISR. He also stressed the union's rejection of the decision suspending shrimping using rear-mounted fishing nets in local waters until further notice. "This decision will inflict considerable losses on boat owners and deprive local consumers of fresh Kuwaiti shrimp, which will leave national waters during the ban and get caught in neighboring countries, which will re-export it to Kuwaiti markets," he warned.



KUWAIT: A fire engine is seen outside a lubricants recycling factory in Industrial Shuwaikh where a blaze was reported yesterday.

No injuries in Shuwaikh factory fire

By Hanan Al-Saadoun and Agencies

KUWAIT: No injuries were reported in a fire that burned a tank inside a lubricants recycling factory in Industrial Shuwaikh yesterday. Firefighters isolated the tank where the fire started immediately upon their arrival to the scene, which helped prevent flames from spreading to nearby tanks and minimize damage. They managed to extinguish the blaze shortly afterwards. An investigation was opened to determine the cause of the fire.

Vehicles removed

The interior ministry's relations and security information said the team removing encroachments on state property in cooperation with Kuwait Municipality removed eight abandoned vehicles, eight half lorries, eight dump trucks, forklifts, cranes, five tow trucks and four large bulldozers from Dajej on the Sixth Ring Road.

E-Passport Center

The interior ministry's nationality and passports center said Mubarak Al-Abdullah Electronic Passport Center began receiving applicants from yesterday from 8:00 am until 1:30 pm and from 4:00 pm until 8:00 pm. He said citizens can make appointments online at (www.moi.gov.kw), then go to the center to complete the transaction.

Students' contest

As part of the 34th Gulf Traffic Week, a contest between students from Umm Amer Al-Ansariya

Secondary School and Lubna bint Al-Harith School was held at the education ministry theater. Activities began with informative flashes and statistics of deaths resulting from traffic accidents, followed by the contest.

Advisor assaulted

Diplomats and workers at an embassy physically assaulted a legal advisor, Al-Anbaa reported yesterday quoting a security source. A dispute occurred between an Egyptian-American and a diplomat in the embassy that led to his beating. The advisor called police, so patrols and paramedics rushed to the scene, but embassy employees prevented them from entering. After negotiations, police and paramedics entered the embassy and took the injured advisor to an ambulance, which was also attacked. The advisor suffered deep wounds despite police attempts to protect him. The attackers escaped back into the embassy. In a separate case, a Kuwaiti juvenile was stabbed in the back during a fight in Dhaher. They boy's uncle obtained a medical report of the injuries sustained by his nephew. Meanwhile, a citizen in his 20s told police he was beaten by two persons near a Dhaher bridge.

Fugitives caught

Ahmadi police arrested a citizen and a bedoon, who were found wanted over a robbery. A security source said the two were pulled over and found under the influence of drugs, and had different kinds of drugs with them. They were also found wanted for robbing a taxi driver in Fintas. Both were sent to concerned authorities. Separately, a Gulf national was sent to the Drugs Control General Department after he was found under the influence of drugs along with a citizen who was with him. Both had hashish joints and eye drops.

Sheep theft

A citizen told Abdullah Al-Mubarak police that seven sheep were stolen from his Abdaliyah farm, while another said his motorcycle was stolen in Fintas.

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Local

Amir's policy, parliament role made Kuwait image good: Speaker Ghanem

Japan's parliamentary friendship group expects stronger ties with Kuwait

TOKYO: The visiting Speaker of Kuwait's National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem said yesterday there are key elements that helped in giving Kuwait its good international and global reputation, namely His Highness the Amir's policy. "His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's Foreign policy, vital role of the Kuwaiti Parliament and democracy helped Kuwait earn its good reputation, respect and appreciation from various parliaments of the world," he said in a press release after meeting with top Japanese officials. He praised warm welcome and respect shown by President of the House of Representatives, Chairman of House of Counselors and their appreciation for His Highness the Amir's international role.

As for the talks, Ghanem said the Kuwaiti delegation expressed readiness to propose amendments to statute of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). Ghanem clarified that the discussions focused on ways of cooperation, issues of common concern, regional and international crises in North Korea, the Middle East, Yemen, Iraq, Syria and other countries.



National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem is seen with Japan-Kuwait Parliamentary Friendship League's Chairman Eisuke Mori.

He noted that some agreements signed between the two countries would be ratified by their parliaments. "We have reached an agreement on a working paper which will be implemented and applied during international forums, especially the Inter-Parliamentary Union meetings," he said.

"As being Kuwaiti Parliamentary repre-



TOKYO: Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and his accompanying delegation meet with top officials of the Japanese National Diet (parliament). —KUNA

sentatives, we were able to get new partners and allies from all geo-political organizations that will support our suggestions, defend our causes and boost respect to our mission," he noted. In this respect, speaker Ghanem said "any attempts to offend the Kuwaiti parliament through senseless complaints will not affect respect of veteran parliaments in all countries of the world," affirming "the Japanese parliament is one of these institutions that respect the Kuwaiti parliament and praise its role."

Friendship group

Japan-Kuwait Parliamentary Friendship League's chief expressed hope to further promote friendly relations between Kuwait and Japan in all domains, with emphasis on parliamentary exchanges and cooperation. Speaking after their lunch meeting with Ghanem in Tokyo, Chairman of the Japan-Kuwait Parliamentary Friendship League Eisuke Mori said that the Kuwaiti speaker's visit greatly contributes to reinforcing bilateral cooperative ties between Kuwait and Japan. "Our talks with the Kuwaiti parliamentary delegation were very positive,"

said Mori, who has recently assumed a position as the chairman of the league. Pointing out the long-term stable supply of crude oil from Kuwait, Mori called Kuwait "a very important country for Japan." The chairman also spoke positively of the current friendly and cooperative relationship between the two parliaments, asserting significance of dialogue and exchange among assembly members.

From a viewpoint of a lawmaker, Mori praised Kuwait's leading role in promoting democracy in the Middle East through pioneering efforts. "Kuwait is the first country among the region to have formulated a constitution. It has also adopted very democratic political systems. We would like to express our sincere respect for this," the chairman said. Mori also renewed gratitude for the generous assistance and sincere support to the Japanese people by the Kuwaiti government and the people after the devastating earthquake seven years ago. "Kuwait offered the biggest support for the affected areas. The assistance from Kuwait covers a lot of ground." In the aftermath of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, Kuwait donated

five million barrels of crude oil to Japan, equivalent to some \$500 million, to support its reconstruction work.

Meetings

During their meeting, Ghanem and Mori discussed issues of common concern and ways to enhance cooperative relations between the two countries in all fields especially in the parliamentary sector. The meeting was attended by MPs Nayef Al-Merdas, Osama Al-Shahin, Khaled Al-Shatti, Khaled Al-Otaibi, Majed Al-Mutairi, Mubarak Al-Harees, Mohammad Al-Dallal, Abdulwahab Al-Babtain, and Japanese lawmakers.

Ghanem and his accompanying delegation also held two separate sessions with top officials of the Japanese National Diet (parliament). The meetings with Speaker of Japan's House of Representatives Tadamori Oshima and President of the House of Councilors Chuichi Date discussed boosting parliamentary cooperation and unifying the two countries' stance on key issues in international events. They also discussed the role of parliaments in facing the recent regional and international developments. —KUNA

Kuwait concerned over Syrian children's rights violations

GENEVA: The State of Kuwait yesterday voiced extreme concern over Syrian children's rights violations. Addressing the 37th session of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), held between November 26 and March 24, Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN and Other International Organizations in Geneva Ambassador Jamal Al-Ghunaim regretted that Syrian children know nothing about life but death, and, unfortunately, are denied the rights of childhood and future.

Many of them have been killed or wounded in air strikes and military attacks on their houses and schools, and regrettably deprived of basic rights, including medical care, he lamented. He called on the international community to exert more efforts to protect Syrian children, given that six million children inside and outside Syria are in dire need of direct humanitarian aid, especially in the fields of education and medical care.

Syrian generations to come are hoped to build their own nation, to restore national unity and to launch sustainable development, he reminded. Since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis, the State of Kuwait has shouldered its due responsibility towards the Syrian people, and sought from the very beginning to rally up international support for carrying out humanitarian operations and extending aid to host countries, Ghunaim said.

It has also hosted and co-chaired several international conferences mainly aiming at supporting the Syrian people, he said, hoping that the 2nd Brussels conference in April on humanitarian needs in Syria and the region would be successful. He recalled to memory the call launched by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah during the donors conference in London on a fresh necessary strategy to help Syrian displaced persons and refugees.

This strategy is built on the adoption of programs and plans purposed to provide them with chances for learning and determining their own future, the Kuwaiti diplomat pointed out. However, he regretted the international community's failure to respond to the humanitarian sufferings and woes of the Syrian people through an effective political solution to the Syrian crisis.

The State of Kuwait emphatically condemns all serious violations of human rights in Syria, mentioned in an independent probe committee's report discussed at the UNHRC, he said. He quoted the report as indicating blatant violations of the international humanitarian law and international human rights law, something which

requires international action against surging war crimes committed against Syrians.

The State of Kuwait further deplores repeated attacks on medical and infrastructure facilities in Syria, not to mention indiscriminate use of heavy weapons and air raids, Ghunaim added. Furthermore, the Kuwaiti diplomat renewed Kuwait's call for giving all humanitarian workers of UN agencies and other aid organizations easy access to all Syrian territories, including Eastern Ghouta.

Ghunaim reiterated Kuwait's unwavering commitment to Syria's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, while urging everyone to work with UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura's efforts to restore peace and security to this war-hit Arab country. The State of Kuwait backs the UN envoy's efforts to reach an agreement based on Geneva principles and UN Security Council Resolution 2254, while stressing the necessity of holding up the cessation of hostilities and creating an effective and practical surveillance mechanism meant to provide a congenial atmosphere for the aspired political solution, he concluded.

Resolution 2401

Fifteen days have passed since the adoption of the UN Security Council Resolution 2401 but the parties to the conflict in Syria's Eastern

Ghouta failed to adhere to 30-day ceasefire, Kuwait's Representative to the UN said Monday.

Regrettably, the conflict continues and the aid workers are unable to rescue the nearly 400,000 civilians trapped in the besieged enclave, Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi said in a statement to a UNSC session on the Resolution 2401. The resolution, co-sponsored by Kuwait and Sweden and unanimously adopted on February 24, demands parties to Syria's seven-year-long conflict to cease hostilities without delay for at least 30 consecutive days, and enable weekly humanitarian aid deliveries and medical evacuations of the critically sick and wounded. However, the UN aid workers and partners were unable over the last two weeks to safely reach the needy people in Eastern Ghouta which has been besieged by the Syrian regular forces since 2013, Ambassador Al-Otaibi regretted.

March 5 was the bloodiest day for Douma city, in Eastern Ghouta since the adoption of the UNSC resolution, he said, noting that more than 100 people were killed in airstrikes by the Syrian regime on that day. The continued airstrikes on Douma and other areas aroused profound concern of the international community and forced the UN aid convoys to stop deliveries to starving people, he pointed out.

Ambassador Otaibi urged all parties to the conflict, particularly the Syrian government, to provide the necessary guarantees for the aid workers to resume aid delivery and medical evacuations immediately. He warned that without a political settlement to the conflict the humanitarian situation in Syria could further worsen, thus leading to more deaths and destruction. —KUNA



DOUMA: Syrian children sit on a luggage bag before a mural on a wall bearing the logo of the Syrian Red Crescent at the organization's branch in Douma in the rebel-held enclave of Eastern Ghouta on the eastern outskirts of the capital Damascus yesterday prior to their evacuation with other humanitarian cases to the government-controlled Wafadin crossing. —AFP

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Local

Kuwait ranks seventh worldwide in the prevalence of diabetes

Annual Diabetes Awareness Day sponsored by KIPCO, URC

KUWAIT: Kuwait Projects Company (Holding) (KIPCO), in collaboration with United Real Estate Company (URC), one of Kuwait's leading real estate development companies, joined hands with the Diabetes Unit, Amiri Hospital to raise nationwide awareness on diabetes and shine the spotlight on effective prevention methods. Addressing one of Kuwait's fastest growing epidemics, the partners announced, during a press conference, that they will work collectively through this national movement to



One in five people are affected

provide thorough information on diabetes and high-light preventive measures.

Hosted by URC at Marina Crescent for greater reach, the 7th Annual Diabetes Awareness Day will be held on Saturday, March 17, 2018, from 10:00 am onwards, featuring a series of twenty three booths with different provisions related to diabetes. The 2018 theme, which focuses on the cure by adopting a balanced diet and regular exercise, will include free health checks on blood pressure, eyes and foot examinations, effective tips and advice by healthcare professionals, as well as types of activities to follow through the effective utilization of diet centers, sport equipment's and available gymnasiums.

Owing to the epidemic's prevalence in Kuwait, this year will see the largest collaborative efforts ever organized locally, including the active participation of two governmental establishments, namely the Public Authority for Food and Nutrition (PAFN) and the



KUWAIT: (From left) Dr Abdulnabi Al-Attar, Abeer Al-Omar and Hamad S Al-Mulaifi attend a press conference to announce the Annual Diabetes Awareness Day.

Public Authority for Youth and Sports (PAYS). Additionally, hospital nurses, various educators on the topic, medical students and dieticians will be present to detail preventive measures and share an overview on proper lifestyle management.

Group Corporate Social Responsibility Director at KIPCO, Abeer Al-Omar addressed the growing concern on diabetes and what KIPCO is doing to help: "As one of the leading holding companies in Kuwait and the MENA region, KIPCO believes in securing a safe and better future for its citizens by integrating sustainable initiatives in the society. Promoting health is a vital area for KIPCO and raising the awareness on diabetes remains essential for future generations to have a healthier tomorrow. Sponsorship of this initiative falls in line with our CSR strategy that encom-

passes three main societal focus areas:

Education, Advancement of Kuwaiti youth and Health. We are pleased to combine our efforts and support the Amiri Hospital and Diabetes Unit on making the Diabetes Awareness Day gain its prominence/wide reach."

Right solutions

Hamad S Al-Mulaifi, Director of Sales and Marketing at URC commented: "As the event venue sponsor, we are pleased to partner with KIPCO and the Diabetes Unit in Amiri Hospital to tackle diabetes, one of the most pressing health challenges in Kuwait at this time. We believe in the shared responsibility to empower Kuwait's people with the right solutions and resources to exist free of illness and strengthen indi-

vidual capacity to lead normal, successful lives. With a 40-year history in Kuwait and successful track record in fostering healthy communities, URC is a natural partner in an initiative such as this."

Dr Abdulnabi Al-Attar Consultant of Internal Medicine and Diabetes, Head of Diabetes Unit at Amiri Hospital: "Considered a serious, lifelong condition that demands exceptional care, it has reached an alarming rate in our country with over 23 percent of Kuwaitis now suffering from the chronic disease. Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states are on the list of the top 10 countries with the highest prevalence of the disease with Kuwait ranking 7th in 2017, out of which one in five people are reported to have Diabetes."

"We are here to say that there are ways to protect yourself, which involves basic improvisations in one's daily lifestyle. Through the incorporation of physical activities and healthier meals, diabetes and its common comorbidities can be prevented. I urge citizens and residents to visit the awareness campaign to conduct the tests for glucose, blood pressure, blood sugar, triglycerides, cholesterol, carry out a retina exam among others and more importantly, benefit from the advice of the doctors and nutrition specialists to transform your life. I would like to also thank KIPCO, URC and other likeminded entities for their support, which I am certain of will provide a fresh impetus to raising renewed awareness and expedite the journey towards healing."

"Diabetes necessitates further medical attention also due to the resulting implications faced by the patients in Kuwait such as cardiovascular and chronic kidney diseases, blindness, and even amputation. Kuwait's health care system is renowned for its highest standards and international best practices in managing and curing diseases such as Diabetes. One can be confident in the methodologies we implement. We urgently implore families to nurture a healthier upbringing through adoption of sports, better food habits, and proper medical care when needed", added Dr Abdulnabi Al-Attar.

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Mattis in Kabul, says elements in Taliban open to peace talks

Putin has Russia guessing; how long will he keep power?

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AFRIN, Syria: Civilians fleeing Afrin (background) after Turkey said its army and allied rebels surrounded the Kurdish city in northern Syria, drive through the Ahlam Mountain on their way to seek refuge in the Syrian town of Nubol, 26 kms northwest of Aleppo city yesterday. —AFP

Turkish army surrounds Syria's Afrin

Prospect of another devastating siege

BEIRUT: Turkey said yesterday its army and allied rebels had surrounded the Kurdish city of Afrin in northern Syria, raising the prospect of another devastating siege in the country's long conflict. With Syria's war set to enter its eighth year this week, fighting continues on several fronts, including around Afrin and in Eastern Ghouta near Damascus, where dozens of civilians including people with medical conditions were evacuated yesterday. While attention in recent weeks has focused on a ferocious regime assault on rebel-held Ghouta, in Syria's north Turkish forces and allied Syrian rebels have been advancing in their offensive against the Kurdish enclave of Afrin.

In a statement yesterday, the Turkish military said it had completely encircled Afrin city, home to some 350,000 people and defended by a well-armed Syrian Kurdish militia, the People's Protection Units (YPG). Birusk Hasakeh, a YPG spokesman inside Afrin, denied the city had been totally besieged but said the last route leading out of it was being shelled heavily. "If they do encircle the city, we will be ready for a long fight. We will resist," he said. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Turkish forces had moved to within firing range of that last access route, which leads to a pair of regime-held towns—essentially encircling Afrin and 90 villages to its west.

'Exit route' for civilians?

Sealing off Afrin city would be a key step in Turkey's "Olive Branch" operation, launched on January 20 and aimed at ousting

the YPG, a vital partner for a US-backed coalition against the Islamic State group, but seen by Ankara as "terrorists". It remains unclear what Turkey's next move will be, but it may lay siege to Afrin while allowing civilians to leave to avoid a high-casualty offensive.

'Monstrous indifference'

The Britain-based Observatory said Ankara was seeking to push civilians into either rebel-held or Syrian regime territory to allow for a "speedy military operation". Abu Jaafar, a commander in the pro-Ankara forces waging Operation Olive Branch, said rebels were considering leaving an "exit route" for civilians. "We will allow civilians... to leave so they will not be hurt in case (Kurdish) fighters hold out in the villages, neighbourhoods, or buildings inside Afrin," he said. Hundreds of civilians were seen fleeing Afrin on Monday, with cars and buses piled high with personal belongings heading to regime-held areas further east. Forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad have meanwhile

been pressing an assault to retake Eastern Ghouta, the last major rebel stronghold near Damascus. Since February 18, Russian-backed regime forces have recaptured more than 60 percent of the enclave, whittling down rebel territory to three isolated pockets. The UN Security Council passed a resolution last month calling for a 30-day truce to allow for aid deliveries and medical evacuations from the enclave—but the ceasefire demand went unheeded. The area has been under government siege since 2013, making food scarce and hospitals too strapped to properly treat sick and wounded people. The UN has said more than 1,000 people in Ghouta were in desperate need of being

taken out of the area for medical care. Yesterday, dozens of civilians, including people with medical conditions, were evacuated through a "humanitarian corridor" established by the regime and its ally Russia. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent, which was involved in the evacuations, published images of its volunteers carrying an elderly

woman into an ambulance and pushing an elderly man in a wheelchair. The Observatory said 150 civilians had exited a pocket of Ghouta that comprises its largest town Douma and is held by rebel faction Jaish Al-Islam. Jaish Al-Islam had earlier announced some "critical medical cases" would be evacuated.

More than 1,180 civilians have been reported killed since the Ghouta assault was launched, but international efforts have failed to stop the violence. Yesterday, the UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Kate Gilmore voiced concern for some 125,000 children trapped in Ghouta. "Is it not tantamount to a monstrous indifference to the suffering of children that Security Council resolutions for ceasefires are flouted?" Gilmore asked. The United States presented a new draft resolution to the Security Council on a ceasefire to halt what France has called a "bloodbath" in Ghouta.

Over 350,000 people have died since Syria's conflict broke out in 2011. With Russia's help, Assad has retaken most of the territory he had lost in the early years of the uprising. Syrian troops have used siege tactics in several areas, sealing off rebel-held territory and pressing a military operation before securing an evacuation deal. The government has reportedly been pursuing separate negotiations over Ghouta's three rebel-held pockets, focused on local truces or potential evacuations for rebels and civilians. Opposition forces have denied negotiating with the regime. —AFP



Syrian war rages on several fronts; death toll mounts

Nepal's first female president Bhandari wins second term

KATHMANDU: Nepal's lawmakers yesterday elected President Bidya Bhandari for a second term, extending the tenure of the Himalayan nation's first female head of state for another five years. Bhandari took nearly two-thirds of the vote to retain her position as ceremonial head of state, the election commission confirmed.

Bhandari, who was backed by the ruling Communist bloc, was widely expected to defeat her sole opponent. Her first five years in office have been largely uncontroversial. Critics say she has not done enough to advance women's rights in deeply patriarchal Nepal—though her role is largely ceremonial. Late last year she signed into law a revamp of the country's ancient penal code, which criminalises the dowry system and bans an old Hindu practice that banishes women from the home while menstruating.

The 56-year-old took up politics in her teens, joining the fight to overturn the monarchy's centuries-long rule and later marrying a fellow communist, Madan Bhandari. It was after her husband's death in a mysterious car accident in 1993 that the mother of two became a prominent voice, riding a wave of sympathy to win a seat in parliament. As Nepal's political map was being redrawn after the end of the brutal Maoist insurgency in 2006 and overthrow of the king two years later, Bhandari campaigned hard to bring woman's voices to parliament.

She was first elected president in 2015, shortly after Nepal's post-war constitution was passed, which carves out one-third of seats in parliament for woman and mandates that either the president or vice president must be a



KATHMANDU: Nepali parliamentarians wait to cast their votes to elect Nepal's President in Kathmandu yesterday. —AFP

woman. Bhandari is not the only woman at the top of Nepal's government. House speaker Onsari Gharti Magar has presided over the often raucous parliament with an iron fist since 2015, the first woman to hold the position.

Meanwhile, Sushila Karki served as the country's first female chief justice until her retirement in 2017, shocking her political backers when she took a tough stance on Nepal's endemic corruption. Bhandari is a close ally of the ruling Communist bloc that has a strong majority in parliament as well as six of the seven provincial assemblies. The Communists rode to a thumping victory late last year in local, provincial and national elections that capped Nepal's tumultuous 11 year transition from monarchy to federal democracy. —AFP

Online harassment takes 'heavy toll' on women politicians

LONDON: Women politicians are judged more harshly online than their male peers on appearance and marital status, according to an international study comparing how male and female politicians are treated on social media. After analysing Twitter posts sent to male and female lawmakers, women were found to be three times more likely than men to receive sexist comments, said the study, described by its author as one of the first to quantify the different treatment.

"Sexism and abuse are everyday occurrences for many female politicians who are active online," said Eva Barboni, founder of Atalanta, a British group that aims to boost the number of women in senior government jobs. "This takes a heavy toll on both the politicians themselves and on our broader democratic debate, particularly when it escalates from harassment to threats," she said in a statement.

Social media attacks are so common for female politicians that they deter women from running for office around the world, advocates and female lawmakers say. By analysing tweets sent between September and November 2017 to three prominent pairs of female and male politicians in Britain,

South Africa and Chile, Atalanta found nearly three-quarters of Twitter posts sent to women were to do with their appearance or marital status. Most of these comments were negative and were unrelated to their competence as politicians, said the report, which also included interviews with women politicians.

"It's something that I would advise people to think about carefully before they become an MP, so they know what they're getting into," British parliamentarian Rachel Reeves was quoted as saying in the report. "I think it's a shame that that's one of the things that people have to consider." Many politicians in Britain have become more vocal about the abuse they face after opposition Labour politician Jo Cox, a 41-year-old mother of two children, was shot and stabbed to death a week before Britain's Brexit referendum in 2016.

Platforms such as Twitter, YouTube and Facebook have been criticised for failing to remove abusive material posted online even after they were notified. Britain's ethics watchdog in December recommended introducing laws to shift the liability for illegal content on to social media firms, and called for them to do more to take down intimidatory content. Nearly 45 percent of all women parliamentarians had received threats of death, rape, beatings or abduction during their term, according to a 2016 study by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the international organisation of parliaments. —Reuters

International

Despite Brexit, Britain wins EU support on nerve agent attack

UK gives Putin until midnight to explain nerve attack

BRUSSELS: The European Union expressed solidarity with Britain after London accused Russia of a nerve agent attack on British soil, but EU diplomats cautioned there was little appetite for more economic sanctions on Moscow. Despite tensions over the slow pace of negotiations with Britain over London's decision to quit the bloc next year, the EU and NATO reacted quickly after May's speech in the British parliament on Monday on the poisoning of a former Russian double agent, Sergei Skripal, 66, and his daughter Yulia, 33.

The case poses a test for post-Brexit security cooperation. Russia, the EU's biggest energy supplier, is also accused of backing war in Ukraine and meddling in US, French and German elections. The office of EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini called use of the Soviet-era nerve agent "shocking" and said the European Union was "ready to offer support if requested". NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said it was "horrendous." European Commission deputy head Frans Timmermans called on the bloc to express "its full solidarity with the British people and the British government" and make a collective European effort to find and punish those responsible.

Speaking separately to the EU, France said the attempted murder of a former Russian double agent on March 4 was a "totally unacceptable attack". The statement followed a telephone call between Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian and his British counterpart Boris Johnson. But it made no mention of Russia, which Prime Minister Theresa May said was "highly likely" to be behind the attack. Outgoing German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel said he had called Johnson and remained in close touch with British authorities. "It's clear the perpetrators must be held accountable. If it should be confirmed that Russia was behind (the attack), that would be a very serious incident," Gabriel said in a statement.

Sanctions response?

Britain has given President Vladimir Putin until midnight to explain how the nerve agent was used to strike down Skripal, who had passed secrets to British intelligence. If that deadline passes, Britain could ask for EU

governments to consider new asset freezes and travel bans on Russian officials not already under sanctions related to Moscow's 2014 seizure of Ukraine's Crimea. Britain could also call a special meeting at NATO. Next Monday at a monthly meeting in Brussels, EU foreign ministers are due to discuss Russia's presidential election on March 18, which Putin is expected to win, potentially giving Britain's Johnson a chance to appeal to EU governments.

May herself could directly discuss the issues with fellow leaders in Brussels at a two-day summit in May, and Timmermans said the issue should be on the agenda.

"We cannot have nerve gas being used in our societies. This should be addressed by all of us, and not just left to Prime Minister May and the British government," Timmermans, who as Dutch foreign minister in 2014 accused Russia of downing an airliner flying from Amsterdam over Ukraine, told the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

UK mulls new asset freezes, travel bans

Echoing the EU's top diplomat Mogherini, four senior EU diplomats told Reuters that Brussels would wait until Britain itself has taken a view on how to respond before making any policy moves of its own. They dismissed any suggestion that Brexit weakened London's position. "Brexit shouldn't have any effect on this," one said. Norbert Roettgen, chairman of Germany's parliamentary foreign affairs committee and an ally of Chancellor Angela Merkel, said that if Russia fails to cooperate in the investigation, there should be a joint Western response.

But in Brussels, diplomats said additional sanctions on Russia were unlikely to win support because attributing the nerve attack to Moscow was difficult and also because keeping existing economic sanctions on Russia was already difficult. "Despite the seriousness of this incident, I just don't see agreement (on new sanctions)," a second EU diplomat said, predicting a strong statement of support instead. A third diplomat said that Britain and France had been unable to persuade the rest of the bloc to impose additional sanctions on Russians over Moscow's bombing campaign in Syria. Countries seeking closer ties with Russia, notably Italy, Hungary and Greece, are wary of further damaging business.—Reuters



SALISBURY: A police officer stands on duty at a cordon near a bench covered in a protective tent at The Maltings shopping centre in Salisbury, southern England, where a man and woman were found critically ill on March 4, after being apparently poisoned with what was later identified as a nerve agent sparking a major incident. —AFP

Syria war enters its eighth year

BEIRUT: From the bloody repression of peaceful protests against President Bashar al-Assad's regime to foreign intervention, below are key dates in Syria's civil war as it enters its eighth year. The complex conflict has left more than 350,000 people dead, according to the Syrian Britain-based Observatory for Human Rights, while millions have been displaced and the country lies in ruins.

Revolt and repression

On March 15, 2011, unprecedented protests demand civil liberties and the release of political prisoners after 40 years of repressive rule by the Assad family. Denouncing "an armed rebellion by Salafist groups", the regime represses demonstrations in Damascus and the southern city of Daraa but protests continue. In July, defecting army colonel Riad al-Assad sets up the Turkey-based rebel Free Syrian Army (FSA). Islamist groups join the revolt.

Air strikes, Hezbollah, Iran

In March 2012, regime forces take control of the rebel stronghold in third city Homs after a month of bombardment. Other bloody operations are carried out, notably in the central city of Hama, after massive anti-regime protests. In July, FSA fighters launch a battle for Damascus but the government holds firm. From 2013, regime helicopters and planes unleash crude barrel bombs on rebel zones. The same year, Iran-backed Lebanese Shiite militant group Hezbollah says it is fighting alongside Syrian government forces. Iran also boosts its military support for longtime ally Assad.

Chemical weapons

In August 2013, Washington accuses the regime of killing more than 1,400 people with chemical weapons in rebel-held districts near Damascus. In September, the United States and Assad ally Russia agree a plan to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons, averting punitive US strikes against the regime. But forces on the ground, in particular from the regime, have since been

accused again of using chemical weapons. In April 2017, a sarin gas attack on the opposition-held village of Khan Sheikhun leaves more than 80 dead, prompting Washington to attack a regime air base.

Rise of the jihadists

In January 2014, hostilities between jihadists of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and rebel groups turn into an open war in the north. ISIL, the future Islamic State (IS) group, takes Raqa—the first provincial capital to fall out of regime control—from rebel forces. The jihadist offensive allows Damascus to justify its fight as a battle against "terrorism".

Coalition air strikes

In September 2014, a US-led coalition launches air strikes against IS in Syria. The strikes benefit Kurdish groups, which since 2013 have run autonomous administrations in Kurdish-majority areas and go on to oust IS from key areas.

Russia to Assad's aid

In September 2015, Russia launches air strikes in support of Assad's troops, who are on the back foot. Russian firepower helps turn the tables for the regime, which begins to retake rebel-held territory, including the northern city of Aleppo in late December 2016. In January 2017, Russia and Iran, as backers of the Syrian regime, and Turkey, supporting the rebels, organise talks in Astana, Kazakhstan, between representatives of both sides. The process leads to the creation of four so-called "de-escalation zones", although sporadic fighting and bombardments continue.

Turkish offensive

In an added complication to the drawn-out conflict, Turkey launches an operation in January 2018 against the powerful Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) which played a key role in beating back IS. The militia controls the Afrin region on the border with Turkey, and Ankara is wary of Kurdish aspirations for autonomy, labelling the YPG a "terror group".

Blitz of Eastern Ghouta

On February 18, the Syrian regime launches a ferocious assault on the remaining rebel-held enclave near Damascus, Eastern Ghouta. In just over three weeks, the Russian-backed onslaught kills more than 1,100 civilians, according to the Observatory.—AFP

Texas 'package bombs' probed as hate crimes

CHICAGO: Two parcel bombs rattled the US city of Austin on Monday, 10 days after a similar deadly blast, as Texas police said they were investigating the possibility that the attacks were serial hate crimes. The explosions came as Austin, the state capital and a metropolis of two million people, welcomed hundreds of thousands of visitors for the massive South by Southwest entertainment and media festival.

A 17-year-old was killed early Monday after bringing a package into his home and opening it, while a woman living at the same address was injured. A second explosion later in the morning left an elderly woman in critical condition, after she was injured picking up a package in front of her home, police said. The twin bombings followed an initial blast on March 2, when a 39-year-old man was killed—also after opening a parcel bomb. "This again is the third in what we believe to be related incidents over the past 10 days," Austin police chief Brian Manley told a news conference.

"We are imploring the community, if you know anything about these



TEXAS: The scene near Galindo Street in Austin, Texas where a woman in her 70s was injured in an explosion. The incident was the second reported explosion on Monday and the third in two weeks. —AFP

attacks, it is imperative that you come forward." The Texas governor's office offered a \$15,000 reward for information leading to an arrest in the case. "I want to assure all Texans, and especially those in Austin, that local, state and federal law enforcement officials are working diligently to find those responsible for these heinous crimes," Governor Greg Abbott said in a statement. Investigators have found no evidence so far of a terrorism link, and have yet to establish a definite motive or profile for the bomber, Manley said.

Police were considering whether

racial hatred was a factor. "We have had two victims that were African American, and the victim of this

latest incident was a 75-year-old Hispanic female," the police chief said. "So, we are still working to identify whether or not that may play a role, but we are not going to rule that out." Michelle Lee, a spokeswoman for the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which is aiding in the probe, told AFP: "Nothing had been ruled out in terms of motive." Authorities say the packages, described as unremarkable looking boxes, were left overnight and not sent through the mail or any other delivery service.—AFP

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International

Putin has Russia guessing - how long will president keep power?

No known succession plan or chosen heir

MOSCOW: Soon after Vladimir Putin is re-elected on Sunday, his thoughts will turn to the question that is likely to dominate his next term as Russia's president: what will he do when it ends? Putin's victory in the presidential election is not in doubt as his ratings are high and he has the state machinery behind him, but how long the man who has dominated Russia for nearly 18 years wants to stay power is uncertain.

The constitution limits the president to two successive terms, obliging him to step down at the end of his mandate—as he did in 2008 after serving two four-year terms. His mandate will not expire until 2024 but the problem needs immediate attention because the uncertainty about his long-term future is a source of instability in a fractious ruling elite that only he can keep in check.

"The Russian political scene is entering a new phase," said Gleb Pavlovsky, a former Kremlin adviser who is now critical of the country's leadership. "Most discussion within the ruling elite focuses not on the next stage of the Putin era but on what will constitute the post-Putin era." Vygaudas Usackas, the European Union's ambassador to Russia until last October, says the stakes are high. "This is a risky moment for the system," said Usackas, who is now director of the Institute of Europe at Lithuania's Kaunas University of Technology.

Putin has at least three main options. He could take a leaf out of Chinese President Xi Jinping's book and seek an end to term limits, hand over to a place-holder for a term and then return, or anoint a successor and bow out of public life. Each choice carries risks and Putin may have other options up his sleeve. A

former spy, he is secretive and likes to pull surprises. But the uncertainty about his plans is potentially more destabilising than anything for the ruling elite, the political, security and business leaders around Putin.

Two sources close to the Kremlin said there was, as yet, no plan for when Putin's terms ends. The matter is so sensitive that they

ends. "There are no discussions in the corridors about the succession. It's as if people know that he (Putin) will be around forever," said a source in a government ministry.

If Putin want the constitution changed to allow a third successive term, he will need two-thirds support in the lower house of parliament, three-quarters in the upper chamber and approval in two-thirds of regional legislatures. All are institutions where Kremlin allies are the overwhelming majority but Putin has said will not change the constitution to stay in power. If he did so, he would risk a backlash from voters who might see it as Russia turning its back on democracy. He also avoided the temptation to tinker with the constitution to extend his rule in 2008, when he last faced term limits.

Instead, he stepped aside and let a loyal lieutenant, Dmitry Medvedev, run for president, certain he would win with the Kremlin's backing. Putin, who became prime minister for four years, secure re-election when Medvedev's term ended in 2012, and Medvedev has been prime minister since then. Putin controlled the country from the wings between 2008 and 2012, and might see a similar move as an option now. Medvedev's ratings are much lower than Putin's but the ruling elite could accept him as a tried-and-tested proxy for Putin. "Only Medvedev," a source in government circles told Reuters when asked who could be president after Putin. "Everyone is afraid of change."



One option could be to seek changes to constitution

agreed to talk only on condition of anonymity. Russia's ruling system, while projecting an image of unity, is divided along many lines—between security hawks and economic liberals, between people with personal vendettas, and between competing business interests. Putin holds the disparate interests together, so any hint of a vacuum at the centre of the system is risky.

Putin forever

Putin is so entrenched within Russia's ruling system that many of its members can imagine no other leader. Many in state companies and major banks say they anticipate no real change at the top when Putin's next term



MOSCOW: An employee presents a bust of Russian President Vladimir Putin at a gift shop in Moscow yesterday. Seven candidates are lined up against Vladimir Putin in March 18 presidential election that he is all but guaranteed to win, extending his Kremlin term to 2024 with a fourth term in office. —AFP

Fatigue

Age, though, might now get in the way for Putin. He is in robust physical shape but will be 71 when his term ends. If he again stepped aside for a full term, he would be 77 on his return—the presidential term was extended to six years in 2008 during Medvedev's presidency.

One of the sources close to the Kremlin said Putin does sometimes feel extremely tired, but largely through exasperation at officials' incompetence and bureaucratic sloth. During a meeting with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko in 2016, Putin was caught on an open microphone

confiding to his ally: "I don't get enough sleep. The day before yesterday I slept for four hours, last night I got five hours."

Putin might also be loath to rule in his late seventies as he has portrayed himself as a healthy and energetic leader since replacing the ailing Boris Yeltsin and providing the vitality lacked by most leaders in the dying days of the Soviet Union.

He will soon have ruled longer than Soviet Communist leader Leonid Brezhnev, whose 18-year rule from 1964 to 1982 is primarily associated with stagnation, though dictator Josef Stalin ruled the Soviet Union for three decades.—Reuters

News in brief

39 sentenced to death

DHAKA: A Bangladesh court yesterday sentenced dozens of men to death for the brazen daylight murder of a ruling party official in 2014, officials said. Ekramul Haque, the then Awami League leader in eastern Feni district, was dragged from his vehicle by a mob and hacked with machetes before being shot at point blank range. The 47-year-old was then placed back inside his vehicle, which was torched. A number of those travelling with the local party leader were injured in the brutal assault. Court inspector Nojibul Islam told AFP that a judge in Feni district yesterday sentenced 39 men to death by hanging for the crime. —AFP

Bus crash kills 38

ADDIS ABABA: Thirty-eight people have died after the bus they were travelling in plunged off an embankment in northern Ethiopia, state media said yesterday. "A total of 38 people, (28 male, and 10 female) were killed in the accident," state-affiliated Fana Broadcast Corporate said of the crash in the Legambo district of the regional state of Amhara, citing local authorities. Ten passengers survived but suffered "serious and minor injuries" in the accident, which took place between the towns of Dessie and Mekane Selam, Fana reported. Amhara regional spokesman Nigussu Tilahun confirmed the accident, saying it happened on Monday. —AFP

Violent protests in Guinea

CONAKRY: Opposition supporters in Guinea protested and erected barricades in the mining towns of Boke and Kamsar yesterday, disrupting some shipments of the aluminium ore bauxite, industry officials said. The unrest sparked by a row over local elections held in February spread from Conakry, paralysing much of the capital since protests erupted on Monday. In Boke, police responded to protests yesterday with teargas and clubs, a resident said. Spokesmen for the police and government were not immediately available to comment on the demonstrations in Africa's top producer of bauxite that has regularly faced political violence. —Reuters

Thirteen die in inferno

ISTANBUL: Thirteen people including children were killed and 20 others injured yesterday when a Turkish passenger bus burst into flames after colliding with a truck in northern Anatolia, state media reported. The bus, which was travelling from Istanbul to the northern city of Tokat, hit the truck on a motorway in Corum province early in the morning, according to the government-run Andalou news agency. Medical teams and fire engines rushed to the scene. Pictures showed that the bus had been reduced to a burnt-out shell by the fire that erupted after the crash. The local governor's office said the truck was parked on the motorway hard shoulder when the bus hit. —AFP

Egypt sets up hotline

CAIRO: Egypt's judiciary announced yesterday it has set up a hotline to gather complaints of "fake" news in the traditional or electronic media that could pose a threat to national security. Two weeks ahead of elections in Egypt, the media have been under close scrutiny, with an increase in cases of journalists being arrested and websites blocked. "The Egyptian judiciary has set aside mobile telephone numbers to receive complaints on the instant messaging app WhatsApp and by SMS, so long as the name of the complainant and their personal details are given," it said in a statement. —AFP

Nepal investigates deadly crash after runway confusion

KATHMANDU: Recordings show apparent confusion between the pilot and air traffic control over the runway approach at Kathmandu airport as Nepal yesterday began investigating its deadliest plane crash in decades. Aviation authorities said they had recovered the flight data recorder from the charred wreckage of the plane, which burst into flames after crashing into a football field near Kathmandu airport on Monday killing 49 people.

Witnesses have described how the US-Bangla Airways plane carrying 71 people abruptly changed direction moments before it crashed. On Monday the airline's chief executive Imran Asif said there had been a "fumble from the control tower" as the plane approached the airport's single runway. But airport manager Raj Kumar Chhetri told AFP it was too early to say what had caused the mountainous country's deadliest crash since 1992. "It is yet to be identified whether the pilot or air traffic control was wrong," he said, adding the investigation would be carried out with Bangladesh.

Recordings of the conversation between air traffic control and the pilot appear to indicate confusion over which end of Kathmandu airport's single runway the plane was to approach. Air traffic control can initially be heard clearing the plane to land from the southern approach. "You are going towards runway 20," the controller is heard saying seconds later, referring to the northern end of the tarmac. A series of confused messages follow just before the crash in which the pilot says they will land at "runway 20" and then "runway 02"—the southern end. "There is certainly considerable confusion from air traffic as to which runway the aircraft actually wants to land on," said Britain-based aviation expert Andrew Blackie, who has reviewed the recordings.

Notoriously challenging

Survivors told AFP the pilot gave no warnings as the plane abruptly changed direction. "I had asked the air hostess, what is happening, is everything fine? She gave a thumbs up, but I could see she was panicking," said Ashish Ranjit, 35, who escaped through a window on the plane's right. "It was so low and it took such sharp turns." The plane hit the runway and skidded through an airport fence, leaving a trail of fuel and coming to a stop in a field where it burst into flames.

Twenty-two passengers—mostly sitting on the plane's right side—managed to free themselves from burning wreckage by climbing through the plane's windows or were pulled from the fuselage by passengers and rescuers. Kathmandu airport lies in a bowl-shaped valley with the Himalayas to the north, making it a notoriously challenging place to land. Nepal has a poor road network and internal flights are key to accessing remote parts of the Himalayan nation. It has suffered more than 20 aviation accidents in the last decade, mostly involving small planes on domestic routes.

"There are reasons why Nepal has such a relatively high accident rate, many of those are because of the challenges of operating in mountain airfields that surround Nepal," said Blackie, who was part of an team that probed a 2016 crash of a small turboprop plane in Nepal. But experts say the Canadian-made Bombardier Dash 8 Q400 is a manoeuvrable plane that was developed to fly in Canada's harsh arctic north and should be at home in Nepal's mountainous terrain. Bangladeshi media said a plane carrying relatives of the dead and injured had left Dhaka airport early yesterday for Kathmandu.—AFP



KATHMANDU: An airplane takes off at the international airport in Kathmandu yesterday near the wreckage of a US-Bangla Airlines plane that crashed on March 12.—AFP

Nepal's flight safety record

KATHMANDU: The crash-landing of a passenger plane at Kathmandu airport that killed 49 people has put Nepal's aviation safety record in the spotlight once again. Air travel is popular in the poor Himalayan country, but its mountainous terrain, poor regulation and a lack of investment in planes and infrastructure have led to large numbers of accidents over the years. Here are five things to know about flying in Nepal:

Poor national record

There have been 27 fatal plane crashes in Nepal in the past three decades an average of almost one per year, according to the independent Aviation Safety Network database. More than 20 of these occurred in the last decade alone and seven killed 18 people or more. All its airlines are barred from flying in European Union airspace. The majority of crashes happened at small domestic airports where pilots negotiated small planes onto tiny strips of tarmac in some cases hewn into steep mountainsides. But the worst have occurred at Kathmandu's single-runway airport, which services both international and domestic routes. In 1992, two planes crashed near Kathmandu within just two months of one another, killing a total of 280 people.

Capital overstretched

Aviation experts say challenging terrain is a key reason for the high accident rate in Kathmandu. Nepal's only international airport sits in a narrow valley 1,338 metres above sea level, meaning planes have a relatively tight space to turn in. The airport also lacks the sophisticated radar technology found elsewhere in the world, forcing pilots to navigate by sight, known as a non-precision landing. The airport has only one runway, so planes have to remain in long holding patterns in the air—a problem that has only

worsened in recent years. Nepal Airlines pilot Vijay Lama said Kathmandu provided the "basic minimum" and congestion at the airport was "creating havoc".

Lack of investment

Investment in Nepal's aviation sector has failed to keep pace with the boom in commercial flights—both international and domestic. Tiny Nepal, with a population of just 30 million, has 11 domestic airlines, almost as many as giant neighbour India. Plans to upgrade airports in major tourist destinations Pokhara and Lumbini for international flights have been in limbo for years.

Mountain landings

Although most of the biggest accidents have occurred in Kathmandu, most pilots acknowledge that the precipitous landing strips high in the Himalayas are the toughest to negotiate. Lukla—the gateway to Mount Everest—has been dubbed the world's most dangerous airport, requiring the pilot to navigate through narrow mountain gorges before landing on a steep runway just 500 metres (yards) long with precipitous drops on either side. In 2008 a passenger plane crashed on landing at Lukla, killing everyone on board except the pilot. "The country's beautiful but rugged terrain makes the safety of air operations more challenging than in other areas of the world," says the International Civil Aviation Organization, a UN special agency.

Lessons not learned

Some experts accuse Nepal's civil aviation authority of failing to act on recommendations from past crash investigations. Lama, the pilot, said investigations teams usually did not widely circulate their conclusions, making it difficult for the industry to learn lessons. But UK-based aviation expert Andrew Blackie, part of a team that investigated a crash in Nepal's south in 2016, said resources were an issue. "In Nepal there are some very tough choices about where the government is spending its money... they are very aware that an expensive investigation means less money spent on other things," he said.—AFP

International

Mattis in Kabul, says elements in Taleban open to peace talks

Taleban describes Afghan government as 'illegitimate'

KABUL: Elements of the Taleban are open to talks with the Afghan government, US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said yesterday as he arrived in Kabul on an unannounced visit. Mattis flew into the war-torn city two weeks after Afghan President Ashraf Ghani unveiled a plan to open peace talks with the Taleban, Afghanistan's biggest militant group. The insurgents have so far given no formal response to Kabul's offer for negotiations, but Mattis said some Taleban leaders have expressed an interest in the discussions.

"It may not be that the whole Taleban comes over in one fell swoop, that would be a bridge too far, but there are elements of the Taleban clearly interested in talking to the Afghan government," he told reporters aboard a military jet. Ghani's peace plan includes eventually recognising the Taleban as a political party. The group has said it is prepared to negotiate, but only with the United States and not with the Kabul government. The Taleban last week described the Afghan government as "illegitimate" and its peace process efforts as "deceptive", in a statement calling for a boycott of an Islamic scholars' conference in Jakarta. "Right now we want the Afghans to lead and to provide the substance of the reconciliation effort," Mattis said.

US looks to 'victory'

Thanks to the political process, Mattis said America is now looking towards victory in Afghanistan after more than 16 years of conflict. "What does that victory look like? It's a country whose own people and their own security forces handle law enforcement and any threats... certainly with international support for some years to come," he said. The US has renewed its focus on Afghanistan after years of drawdowns under former president Barack Obama and talk by top US generals of "not winning" and of a "stalemate" in the seemingly intractable conflict.

"It's all working to achieve a political reconciliation, not a military victory," Mattis said. "The victory will be a political reconciliation." As part of the so-called South Asia Strategy, President Donald Trump last year ordered the increased bombing of Taleban targets—including drug-making labs and training camps.

More than 3,000 additional US forces have also arrived in Afghanistan to boost the training and advising of local troops. Approximately 14,000 American forces are currently in Afghanistan, up from a low of about 8,500 when Obama left office.

Trump's strategy has been a "game changer" for Afghanistan, Ghani told Mattis in a meeting at the presidential palace that also involved Afghan Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah and Defence Minister Tariq Shah Bahrami. "It has forced every actor to re-examine their

assumptions. Some of that re-examination is likely to lead to the intensification of conflict in the short term but the re-examination is what the people of Afghanistan have been waiting for 40 years," he said. Ghani's offer of peace talks comes as civilian casualties have soared in recent months, with the Taleban increasingly targeting towns and cities in response to Trump's more aggressive military policy.

The Taleban claimed 472 attacks in January alone, the Washington-based terrorism research group TRAC said—an astonishing number given that the traditional fighting season does not usually start until freezing temperatures have subsided in the spring. Mattis said the jump in attacks on civilians was an indication that a pressured Taleban is unable to conduct broader, ground-taking operations. The Afghan security forces were able to stop some attacks, Mattis said, though he noted he wanted to see them shift to a more "offensive mindset" in the coming months.

Mattis's surprise Afghan visit, his third as Pentagon chief, was kept under tight wraps after a security incident during his last trip in September, when insurgents shelled Kabul's airport hours after he arrived. Mattis also said he had seen some changes in Pakistan's behaviour since Trump blasted the country last year for harbouring the Taleban. "There are operations by the Pakistan military that are helping right now, ongoing as we speak," he said.—AFP



KABUL: US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis (center) arrives at the Resolute Support Mission headquarters on an unannounced visit to Kabul yesterday. —AFP

Pressure grows on Abe over scandal as support melts

TOKYO: Pressure mounted yesterday over Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe over a ballooning cronyism and cover-up scandal, as a new poll showed his support at the lowest level since his re-election in October. Abe and his finance minister Taro Aso have been on the ropes in recent days following revelations that key documents relating to a controversial land sale were doctored before being sent to MPs.

Aso was forced to fend off opposition calls to resign on Monday after admitting his ministry altered 14 sets of documents sent to parliament. The scandal surrounds the 2016 sale of state-owned land to a nationalist operator of schools

who claims ties to Abe and his wife Akie. The sale was clinched at a price well below market value amid allegations that the high-level connections helped grease the deal.

Abe and Aso both apologised "deeply" over the affair amid signs the PM's popularity is suffering six months before he stands for re-election as head of the ruling LDP party. A new poll released by public broadcaster NHK yesterday showed support for the Abe government dropped to the lowest since he won a resounding re-election in October. His support fell by two percentage points to 44 percent from last month, NHK said, while a separate survey in the Yomiuri Shimbun daily showed support down six percentage points to 48 percent.

Commentators said the survival of Aso, a close Abe ally and deputy prime minister, was key to the leader's own ability to stay in the job. Aso has been at the centre of the Abe administration since its start in December 2012, playing a key role in the prime minister's trademark "Abenomics" economic policy. "If Aso leaves the government, the cabinet would surely be destabilised," the Yomiuri Shimbun said yesterday. Adding to the sense of political crisis in Japan, Aso hinted he might skip a Group

of 20 finance ministers' meeting next week in Buenos Aires, saying his attendance "depends on the situation of the current parliament".

'Full disclosure'

Meanwhile, opposition lawmakers stepped up their offensive, boycotting parliament debates while demanding key figures in the scandal including Abe's wife Akie, be summoned to testify. They have threatened to continue parliamentary boycotts until they receive "the full disclosure of truth" over the scandal. Aso has blamed lower level officials, but opposition lower house member Satoshi Arai tweeted yesterday it is "impossible to do this without approval by (Aso's) secretariat". Abe has previously vowed to resign if he is found to have had links to the disputed land sale and attention is already turning to his bid to be re-elected head of the LDP—and therefore prime minister.

"Abe's chances of winning a third three-year term as LDP president after his term expires in September have plummeted," said Tobias Harris, vice-president of Teneo Intelligence analysts. —AFP



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Oil majors' interest in Argentina tests free-market reforms

Oil majors are evaluating bids for offshore exploration rights in Argentina, a major change in a country that sent Spanish energy giant Repsol packing six years ago and has seen little offshore exploration for decades. To secure bids, Argentina will need to show it has moved beyond its historical fluctuations between free-market policies and left-wing populism and that it has made progress in lowering costs for energy firms.

Oil companies including Shell and Statoil told Reuters they are looking at bidding in the auctions, to be held later this year, and a government official said Exxon and Chevron have also shown interest. The country faces fierce competition to attract the billions of dollars of investment needed to develop deepwater reserves. Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico and neighboring Uruguay will all auction offshore blocks in 2018 after undertaking oil market reforms or revising contract terms to facilitate the entry of the world's top energy companies.

For Big Oil, the potential access to Latin American energy reserves is unprecedented. In many countries now opening, including Argentina, resource nationalism has long barred their entry or limited opportunities. Six years ago, former populist President Cristina Fernandez expropriated Repsol's stake in Argentina's state-owned oil company YPF SA. The move sent chills through both the energy industry and the entire private sector.

Interviews with oil industry executives, consultants, geologists and officials point to optimism for Argentina's upcoming auctions and for President Mauricio Macri's government, which has sought private sector and U.S. government help in structuring the process. "Growing confidence in the current government's policies - their focus on trying to create an environment that is attractive for investments - has been the big change," Shell's head of deepwater Wael Sawan told Reuters on the sidelines of an industry gathering in Houston. "It's that focus that has created more interest by the sector to say 'why not, let's look at this.'"

The auction will be a test of company confidence in the longevity of Macri's reform agenda because it can take a decade between an initial investment in offshore exploration and the first production. Argentina will take bids for three offshore basins from July through November. Exploration rights for blocks in the 130,000-square km Argentina Basin, 90,000-square km Malvinas West Basin and 5,000 square kilometers in the Austral Basin are on offer.

While little exploration has been done outside the Austral basin, YPF has identified 22 million barrels of oil equivalent for further investigation, upstream head Pablo Bizotto said at an event last Wednesday. "There is a lot of interest from large companies - Chevron, Exxon Mobil, Shell," Daniel Redondo, the secretary for strategic energy planning in Argentina's Energy Ministry, told Reuters on the sidelines of a recent event.

Consultancy Bain & Company, on a contract with the government to gauge interest, last year interviewed more than 60 companies, including "all the majors" and independent explorers including Anadarko and Hunt Oil, said Diego Garcia, a Buenos Aires-based Bain partner. Colombia's Ecopetrol may bid in the auctions, its chief executive told Reuters.

Norway's Statoil, which already has onshore drilling projects in Argentina, is partnering with YPF on offshore seismic studies and is "considering future licensing rounds," a spokesman said. "Huge areas of the Argentinian continental shelf will be available for bids from companies," executive vice president for exploration Tim Dodson said at an event in Buenos Aires last Wednesday. "We have of course started our evaluations already." Chevron and Exxon declined to comment. Anadarko and Hunt did not respond to requests for comment. Firms likely won't decide whether to bid until the full terms of the auction are published.

Opening to industry

Macri's government has enacted pro-market reforms across the economy. His 'Let's Change' coalition swept to victory in midterm elections last October, taking advantage of divisions within the opposition Peronist movement, which is generally defined by strong defense of labor rights and national sovereignty. Macri is on course to become the first non-Peronist president to finish his term since Argentina's return to democracy in 1983. He's expected to stand for re-election starting in late 2019.

The decision to hold offshore auctions comes as Argentina struggles to attract investment to its Vaca Muerta shale play, which is in a remote part of Argentina that lacks infrastructure to get oil and gas to consumers. Argentina is home to the world's No. 2 resources of shale gas and the fourth largest of shale oil, estimates the US Energy Information Agency. Yet oil production peaked in 1998 and gas output topped out in 2004, according to Energy Ministry data. Investment in exploration has dried up since the country's 2001 financial crisis and the populist political response.

Under the terms of a 2014 revision to Argentina's hydrocarbons law, which was well-received by industry, royalties paid to the national government will be 12 percent of the value of hydrocarbons extracted and companies would receive exploration rights for three years, with an option to extend for three years. Rights for each exploration block would be awarded to the company that pledges the most investment, as laid out in the law, Garcia said. —Reuters



Bitcoin start-ups take aim at remittances market

Bitcoin, battered by warnings about volatility and bubble-like appreciation, may have found a way to play a niche role in a big market: overseas money transfers. Used as a transfer mechanism rather than a currency, bitcoin circumvents banks' transaction fees. Start-ups such as Bitspark in Hong Kong, and Bloom, Payphil, coins.ph and Satoshi Citadel Industries' (SCI) remittance unit Rebit in Philippines, are trying to turn that into a business model.

Reduced liquidity on cryptocurrency exchanges and regulatory uncertainty are, for now, limiting monthly bitcoin-based remittances to millions of dollars in a multi-billion-dollar market, the start-ups say. But if cryptocurrencies mature, they say, traditional businesses will be in for some serious disruption.

"Bitcoin is so much better as a mechanism to send money around the world," said George Harrap, chief executive of Bitspark, a company that performs transfers for dozens of remittance shops in Hong Kong, Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, Pakistan, Nigeria and Ghana. "There's a lot less overhead that you need to do."

Many of the start-ups, such as Bitspark, do not deal directly with individual customers, but instead provide the "back end" transfer mechanism for remittance shops. The businesses estimate how much money they will need for a day, buy bitcoin in advance and immediately sell it for the currency in the receiving country. That means they do not hold cryptocurrency for any meaningful length of time, and customers' transactions are resolved in minutes, rather than days.

Kate Corporal, 28, a Filipina working at an international company in Incheon, South Korea, said she saved "huge" amounts sending money home using Rebit compared with traditional services. "One thing I can guarantee is that the money I intended to send and the money that my family received was exactly the same," Corporal

said. "Using bitcoin is really helpful for many Filipinos ... as every single cent that we send can be very significant."

Reduced demand for cryptocurrencies in smaller economies often means bitcoin prices are lower, so sending \$100 to Indonesia or the Philippines via bitcoin results in the equivalent of more than \$100 at the other end. Without the bank fees, the shops say they can charge their customers 25 to 75 percent less. But the model has little to no advantage in markets with larger Filipino communities such as Hong Kong and Singapore, where competition is high and fees are low - roughly 1-2 percent, compared with 10-15 percent in South Korea. Rebit sends money to Philippines mainly from South

\$160 billion, roughly two-thirds of the Asian remittance market and a third of the global one, according to World Bank estimates. That means local cryptocurrency exchanges cannot cope with the cash flow needs of larger businesses.

"As soon as you're doing \$10-15 million a day, liquidity becomes an issue and you're wondering, 'how am I going to do this,'" said Prajit Nanu, chief executive and co-founder of InstaReM, which remits money to over 60 countries. The start-ups avoid holding bitcoin for more than a few minutes because of its volatility. Bitcoin now trades around \$10,000, 10 times higher than a year ago, but half its December peak - a common swing for the emerging asset class. "We started in 2014, when bitcoin crashed from \$1,000 to \$200-\$300 and luckily our business model didn't rely on speculation," said SCI co-founder Miguel Cuneta. "We are merely using it as a transfer mechanism," he added. "We convert it as soon as possible."

Unclear rules

Cuneta says Rebit was only approved by Philippine's central bank last year. South Korea's backing away from banning cryptocurrency trading was encouraging, he said, but more clarity was needed in Seoul and elsewhere. In Singapore, start-up Toast gave up using bitcoin for remittances so it could get licensed. It is now transferring money the traditional way but plans to offer loans and insurance using blockchain technology and smart contracts - a product offered by bitcoin's main rival Ether and others.

"If you bought cryptocurrency as part of a money remittance mechanism it is very difficult to get your remittance license in Singapore or anywhere else because the regulators are still not sure how they are going to govern cryptocurrency," said Aaron Siwoku, Toast's founder. —Reuters



Volumes for now are in millions rather than billions

Korea, Japan and Canada and is looking to expand to the Middle East.

Liquidity problems

The giants Western Union and Moneygram, which dominate the current market, are testing Ripple's XRP, a cryptocurrency smaller and more centralized than bitcoin. But the industry's transformation does not appear imminent. The value of all bitcoin held globally is about

Can pop-ups pave the way to thriving public space in world's cities?

On a patch of gravel that was once a nondescript bus stop in Kuala Lumpur's old city, passersby can now find brightly-painted wooden pallets that double as seating and shelves stocked with free books for the taking. At least, for the time being. The transformation is temporary, a month-long demonstration to judge the public's reaction to the idea of turning a slice of the sprawling Malaysian capital no bigger than a small hotel room into a permanent public space. This try-it-before-you-buy-it approach is known as a pop-up. Pop-ups have become popular in many cities, often the brainchild of local residents in an effort to improve their neighborhoods or turn derelict spaces into community hubs. They include cycling activists who paint bike lanes without government approval to push for safer streets, retailers who launch temporary shops in repurposed shipping containers to revitalize flagging high streets or food trucks gathered in empty parking lots.

"We've found by working with cities sometimes they are a little bit wary about having to put a lot of investment into public spaces," said Cecilia Anderson, who leads the public space program at UN-Habitat, the UN's lead agency on urban issues. "Sometimes it helps to do a small pop-up public space just to showcase on a temporary level what kinds of benefits it has for the city, the citizens, and that neighborhood."

'Ultimate Irony'

Public space has been shrinking in the world's fast-growing cities, where almost 70 percent of the population is expected to live by 2050, compared to just over half today, according to UN estimates. Experts say, however, it should be a paramount goal for city leaders as research shows inadequate, poorly designed or privatised public spaces generate exclusion and marginalization. "Public space is really the backbone or the skeleton of the city," Anderson told Thomson Reuters Foundation. Highlighting its importance for social inclusion and well-being, public space was included as a target in the UN Sustainable Development Goals, with the aim to provide universal access to "safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces" by 2030.

In Kuala Lumpur's bustling historic center, local urban regen-

eration agency Think City installed a pop-up plaza along Petaling Street and three small green spaces, known as parklets. They form a cluster of benches, plants, and overhead canvas for shade taking up the size of a parking spot along the busy street, as well as a mock microhousing unit in an existing park. It also spruced up a laneway next to the agency's headquarters with a mural and a chalkboard inviting ideas on how else to improve the neglected alley.

For Think City director Neil Khor, the pop-ups are an attempt to reignite flagging interest in public space among residents in the city of 6.5 million people. "This is the ultimate irony - when I was growing up we had more public space," said Khor whose organization works on community-based urban regeneration. "Some time in the 1980s we had this mall culture from the United States. Suddenly the public space is exactly inside the mall."

What people want

While Kuala Lumpur's extravagant malls never seem to lack for visitors, the pop-ups garnered mixed reviews, if they were noticed at all. On two recent visits to the temporary public spaces, some of the parklets were empty, though one equipped with mobile phone chargers proved popular with a quartet of teenagers. A parklet adorned with a chessboard sat vacant while next door, Bangladeshi migrants conducted a vibrant trade in fruits and vegetables on the sidewalk, their produce truck blocking a freshly painted bike lane.

The plaza bedecked with bookshelves drew several curious onlookers, who were invited to leave comments on what they would like to see in the space, and whether it should be made permanent. Visitors asked for more seating, a drinking fountain, shade and a playground for children. Most respondents declared their enthusiasm for a permanent plaza. "It's wonderful, it looks good, it makes the place beautiful and lively. No complaints," said paralegal John Ng, who stopped by after work. "There should be more public spaces instead of tall buildings and cars," he said, standing in the middle of the plaza.

Retiree Emily Tan, taking a break from a shopping trip in Chinatown, preferred to sit on permanent benches next to the pop-up and take in the view. "This one they should develop as a park," she said. "More plants, flowers, and let people sit down."

Universal design

While officially-sanctioned pop-up public spaces can be found in cities around the world, the trend started in the developed world. A San Francisco design firm invented the parklet, and New York City became a model for carving out small plazas from unused odds and ends on the city's streets. "These temporary approaches in the global north were meant to bring informality to



Women sit in a new pop-up space in Kuala Lumpur's old city in Feb 2018. —Reuters

cities that didn't have them," said Ethan Kent from New York-based non-profit Project for Public Spaces. "These were solutions meant to bring back that life to the streets."

But as the concept and the designs that go with them have become universal, critics question whether pop-ups can work just everywhere. "On the one hand, it looks like a free street library, where you're encouraged to take a book you like," said Emily Silverman, a professor at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. "But the black base, cheerful colors, and especially the position in the middle of a street during an international conference, signal 'don't touch,'" said Silverman, referring to the World Urban Forum in Kuala Lumpur last month.

She said in Jerusalem, free street libraries worked well in secular and middle-class professional areas, but they got vandalized in ultra-Orthodox areas, for fear they would help distribute otherwise forbidden books. "The (pop-up's) lure of 'lighter, quicker, cheaper' can encourage artificial importing, ignoring local context to just get stuff done," she said.

Khor defended the overall initiative in Kuala Lumpur as a valuable social experiment. He noted an impromptu badminton game in the alleyway, chess matches between migrants in the parklet, a tea shop that regularly waters the plants in the parklet, and crowds eager to explore a micro-housing prototype. "I'm not saying these projects are perfect," he said. "We wanted to show that urban regeneration is a process." —Reuters

News

Trump fires Tillerson, names CIA chief...

Continued from Page 1

Haspel has been reported to have overseen a CIA "black site" in Thailand where Al-Qaeda suspect Abu Zubaydah was waterboarded after the 9/11 attacks. Both Pompeo and Haspel require Senate confirmation to assume their new posts. A hearing for Pompeo is expected in April, Senate leaders said.

Tillerson had a tumultuous tenure at the State Department. He was repeatedly forced to deny he had fallen out with Trump - vowing to remain in the post despite a sensational report that he once dubbed the president a "moron". A respected figure in the oil business, his tenure drew scorn from Trump's opponents, from former diplomats and from the Washington policy elite. During his time in the post, he was faced with an extraordinary array of foreign policy challenges - from North Korean nuclear threats, to Russian intervention in Ukraine, Syria and Western elections, to attacks on US diplomats in Cuba.

But his efforts were often overshadowed by Trump's decidedly un-diplomatic style and his streams of taunting tweets that have stirred international tensions. Tillerson was thousands of miles away on a tour of African countries when Trump made the snap decision to meet Kim, and suspended his schedule on grounds he was "unwell" before cutting short his trip. In a cruel

twist of fate, one of Trump's most public clashes with Tillerson came last October when the president tweeted that his top diplomat was "wasting his time" pursuing contacts with North Korea.

Evans Revere, a former senior US diplomat who dealt with North Korea under President George W Bush, said Trump's move sends "a bad signal about the role of diplomacy". "Tillerson's replacement by ... Pompeo, who is known as a political partisan and an opponent of the Iran agreement, raises the prospect of the collapse of that deal, and increases the possibility that the administration might soon face not one, but two nuclear crises," he said.

Senior White House officials said White House chief of staff John Kelly had asked Tillerson to step down on Friday but did not want to make it public while he was on a trip to Africa. Trump's Twitter announcement came only a few hours after Tillerson landed in Washington. On Monday, Tillerson blamed Russia for the poisonings in England of a former Russian double agent and his daughter. Earlier at the White House, press secretary Sarah Sanders had refrained from saying Moscow was responsible. He appeared to be caught by surprise last week when Trump announced he had accepted Kim's invitation to meet.

Goldstein, in a statement, made clear Tillerson was caught off guard. "The secretary had every intention of remaining because of the tangible progress made on critical national security issues. He established and enjoyed relationships with his counterparts," Goldstein said. "We wish Secretary-Designate Pompeo well," he added. Shortly thereafter, Goldstein himself was fired. — Agencies



The lawn outside the US Capitol is covered with 7,000 pairs of empty shoes to memorialize the 7,000 children killed by gun violence since the Sandy Hook school shooting, in a display organized by the global advocacy group Avaaaz in Washington yesterday. — AFP

Tabtabaei wants PM to testify; Hayef...

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, Islamist MP Mohammad Hayef sent a series of questions to the interior ministry inquiring about decisions by residency officials to exempt certain nationalities from visa restrictions. The lawmaker said that nationals of Iraq, Iran, Bangladesh, Pakistan,

Lebanon and Syria require prior approvals from the interior ministry before they are issued with work permits in the private sector. He asked if the assistant undersecretary has exempted certain nationals of those countries from such a requirement and demanded to know the number of such exemptions from May 15, 2014 till today. Hayef also asked if the assistant undersecretary is authorized to make such exemptions.

Separately, MP Al-Humaidi Al-Subaei said yesterday he has sent 51 questions to the oil and electricity minister and warned that if he fails to answer them in the stipulated period, he will file to grill him.

Bomb targets Palestinian PM...

Continued from Page 1

considered it a "cowardly targeting" of Hamdallah's convoy and held Hamas responsible. There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

Radical Islamists opposed to Hamas also operate within the Gaza Strip and have regularly been behind unrest. The Hamas interior ministry said they had arrested three suspects and begun an investigation. A statement from Hamas condemned the attack, saying it was done by the "same hands" responsible for the assassination of one senior Hamas figure, Mazen Faqha, and the attempted assassination of another last year. Hamas blamed the killing of Faqha on Israel. The second attack, an explosion targeting Hamas' head of security in Gaza, is widely believed to have been the work of radical Islamists. Hamas criticized Abbas' accusation, saying it "achieved the goals of the criminals".

Another senior official, Tawfiq Abu Naim, said "whoever who did this only serves the (Israeli) occupation and is doing what the occupation demands". The explosion came a few hundred metres after Hamdallah's convoy crossed through the Palestinian Authority-run checkpoint into Hamas-controlled territory. Two cars with blown-out windows were being removed from the scene of the explosion shortly afterwards, an AFP correspondent reported.

The visit came as reconciliation efforts between Hamas and Abbas' Fatah party have faltered. Hamas seized Gaza from the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority (PA) in a 2007 near civil war and multiple attempts at reconciliation have since failed. Hamas and Fatah signed a deal in October that was supposed to see the Islamists hand back power in Gaza, but it has all

but collapsed.

While Hamas did hand over control of Gaza's borders to the PA, it maintains full control of the rest of Gaza, with its police force and armed wing still operating throughout the territory. The future of that armed wing, which has fought three wars with Israel since 2008, has proved one of the largest sticking points in implementing the reconciliation agreement.

Hamdallah's government is recognized by the international community, while Hamas is blacklisted as a terrorist organization by the European Union and the United States. The prime minister called for Hamas to allow his government to take control in Gaza. "We are talking about internal security - the police and the civil defense," he said. "Without security there won't be a government."

The UN envoy to the Middle East peace process, Nikolay Mladenov, condemned the attack and said "Hamas has the responsibility to ensure that the government is able to carry out its work in the strip without fear of intimidation, harassment and violence". Mladenov has warned of the consequences of the desperate humanitarian suffering in the strip, saying in January that Gaza "risks exploding in our face again."

The White House was due to hold a conference on the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza yesterday, but no Palestinian officials were expected to attend despite an invitation. The Palestinians were enraged by President Donald Trump's decision to break with long-standing US policy by recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital and have refused to meet with his peace envoys since. Israel has maintained a blockade of Gaza since 2007, which it says is necessary to isolate Hamas, while Egypt has also kept its border with the enclave largely closed. US State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said on Twitter that "Palestinians in Gaza need a real government that will provide basic services - not today's attack on PA officials trying to inaugurate a water treatment plant desperately needed in Gaza." — AFP

7 years on, Syria war shifting gears but still deadly

BEIRUT: Syria enters its eighth year of war tomorrow, free of the "caliphate" but torn apart by an international power struggle as the regime presses its blistering reconquest. The conflict that started on March 15, 2011 as the government of President Bashar Al-Assad cracked down on mostly peaceful protests is raging on relentlessly and getting more complex. According to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, nearly 354,000 people have been killed in seven years. More than half of Syria's pre-war population of 20 million has been displaced.

International efforts have consistently failed to stop one of the deadliest wars of the century: Hundreds of children are still being killed and thousands of people forced from their homes. Assad, who once looked on the brink of losing the office he has held since 2000, was given a new lease on life by Russia's 2015 military intervention and is sealing an unlikely recovery. "Today, the regime controls more than half of the territory. He holds the big cities... it's clear that he has won," said Syria analyst Fabrice Balanche.

The government's latest operation to retake the ground it lost in the early stages of the war is being conducted in Eastern Ghouta, at the gates of the capital Damascus. Government and allied forces have waged an intense air and ground offensive on the rebel enclave, killing more than 1,100 civilians - a fifth of them children - in an assault whose ferocity has shocked the world. Deadly barrel bombs and suspected chemical munitions have been dropped on civilian areas, forcing families to cower in basements and turning entire towns into fields of ruins reminiscent of World War II.

'Scramble for Syria'

The past few months had seen the death of the Islamic State group's "caliphate", an experiment in jihadist statehood that temporarily gave rival forces a shared goal and shifted the focus away from Assad's fate. The proto-state IS declared in 2014 in swathes of Syria and Iraq it controlled was gradually defeated by a myriad different forces, and 2017 saw the caliphate's final collapse. The organization that once

administered millions of people still has a few fighters hunkering down in desert hideouts, but its territorial ambitions have been dashed.

"It is very difficult for IS to get its feet back on the ground," said Joshua Landis, director of the Centre for Middle East Studies at the University of Oklahoma. He warned that the militants would retain the ability to carry out spectacular attacks and suicide bombings. As they invested forces and equipment in the war on the militants, world powers were also staking their claim to increased influence in the region.

After foreign militaries finished wresting back one IS bastion after another, parts of Syria that had seen a relative lull in fighting became the focus once again. "What we are seeing is the scramble for Syria right now," said Landis. "The main trend is going to be the division of Syria" into three blocs, he said, with the lion's share going to the regime, which is backed by Russia and Iran.

Faltering talks

US-backed Kurds hold oil-rich territory in north-eastern Syria covering 30 percent of the country and a motley assortment of Turkey-backed Arab rebels are carving a third haven in the northwest. "Turkish and American influence on the ground, inside of Syria, will continue to spread," predicted Nicholas Heras of the Center for New American Security. "In this way, 2018 will continue the trend of consolidating Syria into zones of control, even as Bashar Al-Assad's forces make gains in some areas of the country," he said.

The regime is now bent on breaking any resistance in Eastern Ghouta, which lies on the capital's doorstep, within mortar range of key institutions. Balanche predicted that the rebel enclave will not hold out very long and that evacuation deals will be reached. "For the regime, 2018 is the year it fully retakes Damascus and its agglomeration," said Balanche, a visiting fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution.

UN-sponsored talks in Geneva as well as Russian-brokered negotiations in Sochi have failed to raise any credible prospect of a political solution to the conflict. The assault on Ghouta marks one of the seven-year conflict's darkest episodes, with the international community apparently powerless to stop the bloodshed. It has left the United Nations virtually speechless, with its children agency UNICEF issuing a blank statement last month to demonstrate its outrage at the carnage in Ghouta. — AFP

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Sports

Federer crushes Krajinovic, to meet Chardy next at Indiana Wells

Path clear for Swiss master to grab record sixth title

CALIFORNIA: World number one Roger Federer needed less than an hour to dispatch Filip Krajinovic at the BNP Paribas Open in California on Monday, mixing overpowering serves and pinpoint groundstrokes to advance to the fourth round of the tournament.

Playing for a third consecutive day due to weather delays in Indian Wells, the 36-year-old Swiss showed no sign of wear en route to a 6-2 6-1 thrashing of the Serbian in the pair's first ever meeting. Federer, who had looked slightly off his game in his rain-disrupted third round match against Federico Delbonis, was his dominant self on Monday, winning 89 percent of his first service points while cracking six aces to just one double fault.

Krajinovic had no answer for Federer's serve or relentless return game and ended up winning just 31 of the match's 93 points. With rivals Rafa Nadal, Stan Wawrinka and Andy Murray electing not to enter the tournament, and Novak Djokovic and Kei Nishikori both out of the running, the path appears clear for the Swiss to win a record sixth Indian Wells title.

Despite the promising outlook, Federer insisted he

was taking it one match at a time. "You can't really look ahead to semi-finals, finals and speculate about who you could play," he told reporters.

"I think that would be a mistake. I am on a good run right now and I want to maintain that. I have to stay sharp." Next up for Federer is a meeting today with France's Jeremy Chardy, who upset his countryman Adrian Panatta earlier on Monday.

In other matches, fifth-seeded Dominic Thiem had to retire with an ankle injury while trailing Pablo Cuevas 6-3 4-6 2-4. Seventh seed Kevin Anderson took down Nicolas Pietrangeli 7-6(1)

7-6(3) and South Korea's Chung Hyeon beat Tomas Berdych 6-4 6-4. Borna Coric of Croatia upset 13th seed Roberto Bautista Agut 6-1 6-3 and Spain's Pablo

Carreno Busta defeated Daniil Medvedev 6-1 7-5.

American Taylor Fritz enjoyed a comeback victory over Fernando Verdasco 4-6 6-2 7-6(1). The 20-year-old has now won 11 of 12 final-set tiebreaks. "I think it speaks to my strengths on court, which is just being clutch and playing my best tennis in the big moments," Fritz said, adding, "... it's probably the stat that I'm most proud about in my tennis career". — Reuters



INDIAN WELLS: Roger Federer of Switzerland attempts a running forehand in his match against Filip Krajinovic of Serbia during the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden in Indian Wells, California. — AFP

“ I am on a good run right now and I want to maintain that ”

Venus knocks out Serena, Wozniacki marches on

INDIAN WELLS: Serena Williams' return to the WTA Tour came to an abrupt end Monday as she crashed out of Indian Wells with a 6-3, 6-4 loss to her sister Venus. Venus closed out the 29th career meeting between the two on her second match point as Serena sailed a forehand long to end the third-round showdown.

It was the first meeting between the sisters since they clashed in the final of the 2017 Australian Open, which Serena won before taking a 15-month hiatus due to her pregnancy. Serena said she is still easing her way back into match fitness. "It wasn't very easy, obviously," she said. "It was good to play and try to get in the rhythm and get into the swing again."

"I can't really replicate the situation no matter how much I do in practice. I make those shots 10 times out of 10 in practice. "It's just the nerves, the anticipation you feel naturally. It's a little bit of everything that comes in a match that just doesn't normally happen."

The 10th seeded Venus moves on to the round of 16 where she will face Anastasiya Sevastova, who defeated 12th seeded Julia Georges 6-3, 6-3. It is rare for the Williams sisters to play this early in a tournament and the earliest they have faced each other since their first encounter at the Australian



INDIAN WELLS: Venus Williams of the United States plays a backhand in her match against Serena Williams of the United States during the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden. — AFP

Open in 1998. They arrived outside the stadium together on a golf cart then walked through the tunnel with Serena entering the court first, as many in the crowd stood and cheered. Venus blasted six aces but had eight double faults in the one hour 26 minute main stadium match in front of a crowd of about 13,000.

Serena is still shaking off the rust after the long layoff as she hit four aces but had her serve broken four times. "I just have a long way to go," Serena said. Despite the loss Serena still leads their career series 17-12.

This was their first encounter with Venus as an aunt and Serena as a new mother after giving birth to her baby daughter, Alexis Olympia,

on September 1. Venus' victory also comes 17 years after an ugly booing incident led to a 14-year boycott of the tournament by the sisters.

It brought closure to the once testy relationship between Indian Wells and the sisters who hail from the Los Angeles suburb of Compton. Serena returned to the tournament in 2015 and Venus a year later. Asked about the incident finally being put to rest, Venus said, "It never crossed my mind." Serena said she is trying not to look too far into the season. "I have a lot to improve on," she said.

Elsewhere, Australian Open champ Caroline Wozniacki benefited from a challenge call in the final game en route to defeating Aliaksandra Sasnovich 6-4, 2-6, 6-3. — AFP

Motul partners for 2018 IMSA Sportscar championship

FLORIDA: Motul has successfully begun a long-term partnership with IMSA with title sponsorship of Motul Petit Le Mans, as "Official Motor Oil" and official lubricant to IMSA and its sister championship. The year kicked off recently with the 56th running of the Rolex 24 at Daytona at the famous Daytona International Speedway in Florida USA.

The historic and prestigious race offers competitors the perfect launchpad into the season, with 24 hours of racing ahead which will demonstrate the reliability, efficiency and performance of their teams. Motul's products, which have long been part of endurance racing, will as well shine once more in front of a knowledgeable and enthusiastic North

American audience. Motul oil has received appreciation around the world for its high-performance and brilliant quality. The brand has evolved over the decades to progress as one of the globally leading lubricants specializing in the formulation, production and distribution of high-tech engine lubricants as well as gaining experience as an official supplier to many racing teams and manufacturers contributing with them towards further technological development.

As early as 1971, Motul was the first lubricant manufacturer to pioneer the formulation of a 100% synthetic lubricant for automotive engines, the 300V lubricant, making use of Esters technology and issued from the aeronautical industry.

ALSAYER Engineering, a subsidiary of ALSAYER Holding is the authorized distributor for Motul in Kuwait. Technologically leading products from Motul lubricants will be available for customers at ALSAYER Engineering's wide network of five centers for tires, oils and paints as well as in authorized dealers, co-ops, garages and Auto-repair shops across the State of Kuwait.



Qabazard defeat Al-Mousa in Kuwait Tennis Open

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Activities of Kuwait Ninth Tennis Open 2018, which started last week under the patronage of President of Arab and Kuwait Tennis Associations, Honorary President of Asian Tennis Association Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Sabah continued at the Tennis Center of KTA, in Yarmouk Sports Club.

This tennis tournament organized and supervised by KTA during the entire tennis season, and attracts a large number of players both citizens and expats in various age groups of both genders including members of the diplomatic core.

Results of Monday were as follows:

Under 11:
• Hassan Jamal def. Abdelrahman Ali 9-4.
• Abdallah Dehrab def. Tariq Masoud 9-3.
• Abdelrahman Al-Abdallah Azuhan Burhan 9-8.
• Khalid Al-Mutairi def. Ahmad Al-Sarraf 9-8.

Under 13:
• Abdelrazaq Abdal def. Devansh Tribani 9-7.
• Yaqoub Mohammad def. Faisal Al-Nassar 9-1.
• Hussein Al-Shatti def. Othman Al-Asari 9-1.

Under 17:
• Suleiman Al-Duwaisan def. Ali Al-Qattan 6-2, 6-1.



Forida Al-Ayyat

• Ahmad Khamis did Satiash Tribani 6-2, 6-0.
• Yousf Al-Majdaly deg. Mohasen Jamal 3-6, 6-3.

Girls Under 18:
Suleiman Al-Duwaisan def. Ali Al-Qattan 6-2, 6-1.
Ahmad Khamis def. Satiash Tribani 6-2, 6-0
Yusuf Al-Majdaly def. Mohsen Jamal 3-6, 6-3, 10-4.

Girls Under 18:
Munira Al-Duaij def. Silina Fadi 9-8.
Forida Al-Ayyat def. Kafni Ranbara 6-0, 6-1.

In the Women's Individuals:
• Sarah Behbehani def. Ayesha Al-Dayoli 9-0.
• Aseel Al-Kandary def. Khalid Al-Awadhi 9-4.

In the Men's Individuals:
• Essa Qabazard def. Hassan Al-Mousa 7-5, 6-3.



Dawood Sayyed Hashim

• Dawood Sayyed Hashim def. Rashid Al-Jaafar 6-0, 6-0.
• Abdelhamed Al-Shatti def. Daniel Nammour 6-2, 6-0.

In the Men's Doubles:
• Dawood Sayyed Hashim and Ahmad Khamis def. Saleh Yousuf and Abdallah Yacoub 6-0, 6-0.
• Mohammad Abdal and Abdelhameed Al-Shatti def. Salama Al-Anbar and Adel Abdallah 6-1, 6-3.
• Ahmad Hussein and Omar Al-Othman def. Mohammad Al-Mazidi and Hussein Al-Mousawi 3-6, 6-3, 10-4.
• Ghazi Al-Kazimi and Mohammad Al-Quzuq def. Mubarak Bakhsh and Ali Bakhsh 6-0, 6-0.
• Hassan Al-Mousa and Abdallah Al-Mukaimi def. Talal Al-Furaihi and Ali Qilli 6-1, 6-0.

In the pioneers individuals over 45:
Bojan Elisic def. Simon Atkinson 6-1, 6-0.

Tissot T-Race Marc Marquez, a tribute to a champion

DUBAI: The Tissot T-Race Marc Marquez combines the sporty body of the Tissot T-Race with design touches which are a homage to the celebrated new Tissot ambassador, Marc Marquez. The youngest ever four-time MotoGP World Champion, one-time Moto2 and one-time 125cc World Champion speeds to victory in his orange team colours, reflected here in pops of bright colour and in exuberant orange stitching on the sporty black rubber bracelet. A sleek watch case in black and grey PVD adds an efficient edge, hinting at the proficiency of Marc Marquez himself.

RACING ATTRIBUTES
Inspired by motorbikes, the Tissot T-Race Marc Marquez incorporates the athletic body of the Tissot T-Race



Limited Edition 2018. A case encircled by a fibre glass ring, pushers engraved with start and go and tyre tread marks all succinctly depict the speed and adrenaline of the race track, while a brake-disc bezel and bracelet that resembles the racers' suits conjure up the atmosphere of race day. Marc Marquez's silk-printed logo is proudly displayed on the glass caseback making this limited edition, with only 4999 pieces available, very special indeed. Presented in a stylish helmet presentation box inspired by the design of Marc Marquez's racing helmet, it will make a significant collector's item for race fans everywhere.

Sports

Houston Rockets roll on as San Antonio Spurs problems deepen

Paul and Carmelo score 21 points to help Thunder

NBA results/standings

Houston 109, San Antonio 93; Milwaukee 121, Memphis 103; Oklahoma City 106, Sacramento 101.

Eastern Conference				
Atlantic Division				
	W	L	PCT	GB
Toronto	49	17	.742	-
Boston	46	21	.687	3.5
Philadelphia	36	29	.554	12.5
New York	24	43	.358	25.5
Brooklyn	21	46	.313	28.5
Central Division				
Indiana	39	28	.582	-
Cleveland	38	28	.576	0.5
Milwaukee	36	31	.537	3
Detroit	30	36	.455	8.5
Chicago	23	43	.348	15.5
Southeast Division				
Washington	38	29	.567	-
Miami	36	32	.529	2.5
Charlotte	29	38	.433	9
Atlanta	20	47	.299	18
Orlando	20	47	.299	18
Western Conference				
Northwest Division				
Portland	41	26	.612	-
Oklahoma City	40	29	.580	2
Minnesota	39	29	.574	2.5
Denver	37	30	.552	4
Utah	37	30	.552	4
Pacific Division				
Golden State	51	16	.761	-
LA Clippers	36	29	.554	14
LA Lakers	30	36	.455	20.5
Sacramento	21	47	.309	30.5
Phoenix	19	49	.279	32.5
Southwest Division				
Houston	53	14	.791	-
New Orleans	38	28	.576	14.5
San Antonio	37	30	.552	16
Dallas	21	46	.313	32
Memphis	18	49	.269	35

LOS ANGELES: James Harden returned from a brief injury hiatus and scored a game-high 28 points as Houston beat shorthanded San Antonio 109-93 at Toyota Center. Although he missed 9 of 11 3-pointers, Harden compensated by shooting 14-for-14 at the free-throw line. He sat out the Rockets' 23-point victory in Dallas on Sunday with a sore left knee. The Rockets completed a grueling stretch of five games in seven days with a 4-1 record, their lone loss coming at



Jennings came off the bench to score 16 points

Toronto last Friday. Houston moved two games ahead of the Golden State Warriors in the pursuit of home-court advantage throughout the Western Conference playoffs.

OKLAHOMA CITY 106, SACRAMENTO 101

Paul George and Carmelo Anthony scored 21 points apiece to help the Oklahoma City Thunder register a 106-101 victory over the Sacramento Kings on Monday at Chesapeake Energy Arena in Oklahoma City. Russell Westbrook added 17 points, 11 assists and 10 rebounds for his 99th career triple-double. Oscar Robertson (181), Magic Johnson (138) and Jason Kidd (107) are the only members of the century club. Corey Brewer contributed 16 points for the Thunder, who shot 45.2 percent from the field and were 16-of-36 from 3-point range. Bogdan Bogdanovic recorded 19 points and eight rebounds for the Kings, who dropped to 1-17 all-time in Oklahoma City.

TRAIL BLAZERS 115, HEAT 99

Damian Lillard and Jusuf Nurkic led the way as the



OKLAHOMA CITY: Jerami Grant #9 of the Oklahoma City Thunder goes to the basket against the Sacramento Kings on Monday at Chesapeake Energy Arena in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. — AFP

Portland Trailblazers beat the Miami Heat at Moda Center for their 10th consecutive win. Lillard collected 32 points and 10 assists while Nurkic contributed 27 points and 16 rebounds as the Trail Blazers' win streak reached double digits. Portland has won 16 of its past 17 games at home. Goran Dragic scored 23 points and Justise Winslow had 15 points and 13 boards for the Heat, who had won in four of their previous five and six of their previous eight outings.

BUCKS 121, GRIZZLIES 103

Khris Middleton's 24 points led seven players in

double figures as Milwaukee handed Memphis its 18th consecutive loss at FedEx Forum in Memphis. Giannis Antetokounmpo added 20 points, six rebounds and four assists despite playing just 27 minutes because of foul trouble. Brandon Jennings came off the bench to score 16 points, Eric Bledsoe chipped in 14 and Tony Snell managed 12 points. John Henson netted 11 and rookie Sterling Brown hit for 10 points. Marc Gasol tallied 17 points to lead six Memphis players in double digits. Jarell Martin, reserve Ben McLemore and Dillon Brooks added 16 each. JaMychal Green scored 11 points and backup Deyonta Davis tallied 10. — Reuters

Smith demands centuries from Australia batsmen

PORT ELIZABERTH: Australia captain Steve Smith has demanded his team's batsmen lift their output and score centuries against South Africa in the wake of their humbling six-wicket loss in the second test at Port Elizabeth.

Australia were restricted to 243 in the first innings at St. George's Park and were bowled out for 239 in the second to give the Proteas an easy victory chase of 101 to level the series at 1-1. While no Australian has managed a century, the home side has had two - rookie opener Aiden Markram scoring a gallant 143 in the loss in Durban and AB de Villiers setting the platform for victory at Port Elizabeth with an unbeaten 126.

"We haven't got a hundred so far in this series, so that's not ideal," Smith told Australian radio station SEN. "Mitchell Marsh probably deserved a hundred in the first test to be fair, but if we're getting batters scoring big hundreds it certainly helps us out a hell of a lot.

"Unfortunately, we haven't been able to do that so far in this series, but we've got a good opportunity to turn it around in the next." After a rollicking home summer against England, the prolific Australia captain has also been down on his own lofty standards.

His highest score was 56 at Durban and he was dismissed cheaply twice in Port Elizabeth. Smith has scored only one ton against South Africa - an even 100 in his first match at Centurion in 2014 - and only three fifties in 14 innings against the same opponents since.

"I've played a lot more now since 2014 and the more you play, the more people have plans to you to try to keep you quiet and those kind of things," Smith said. "It's just a part of batting, sometimes you have to work really hard for your runs and take a little bit longer, and some days you come out and things happen really quickly for you."

The four-test series resumes in Cape Town from March 22 and Australia will be glad for the extended break as all-rounder Marsh races to recover from a groin strain. The Western Australian, who scored 96 in Durban, had a tough test at Port Elizabeth, battling a stomach complaint and dropping a catch in the slips.

He was also fined 20 percent of his match fee for swearing at South Africa fast bowler Kagiso Rabada, who was himself banned for the rest of the series for repeated code of conduct breaches.

"In regards to Mitch Marsh, it's a good break now between now and the next test match and he's telling me he'll be fine but we'll wait and see how things go," said Smith, who also gave a clean bill of health to Australia's pace trio of Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins.

"I think all the quicks are going really well. I haven't heard today, but before today they were all feeling fine, so hopefully with a good 10-day break they can freshen up a little bit." — Reuters

Jets fall to Caps in OT on historic night for Ovechkin

WASHINGTON: Evgeny Kuznetsov scored with 49 seconds left in overtime, and Alex Ovechkin collected the 600th goal of his NHL career earlier as the Washington Capitals defeated the Winnipeg Jets 3-2 Monday night in Washington. Kuznetsov got a breakaway and beat goalie Connor Hellebuyck (40 saves) with a high shot in an overtime where Washington had all seven shots. Ovechkin finished with two goals after not scoring a point in the past three games. However, he scored once in each of the first two periods to become the 20th player ever to reach the 600-goal milestone. In addition, Ovechkin became the fourth NHL player to reach 600 goals in less than 1,000 games - this was the 990th game of his career. Wayne Gretzky, Mario Lemieux and Brett Hull are the others.

GOLDEN KNIGHTS 3, FLYERS 2

Erik Haula, William Karlsson and Ryan Carpenter scored one goal each to lift Vegas past Philadelphia at the Wells Fargo Center. Golden Knights goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury stopped 38 shots in earning his 400th career win, third among active players. It was Vegas' 45th victory this season, an ongoing record for an expansion franchise in the National Hockey League. Claude Giroux and Wayne Simmonds scored for the Flyers and goaltender Petr Mrazek made 26 saves in the loss.

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lied for the Kings as they posted their eighth win in 12 games.

SHARKS 5, RED WINGS 3

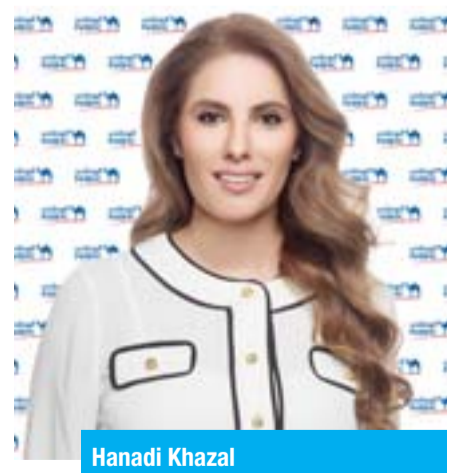
Timo Meier and Chris Tierney both collected one goal and one assist and goalie Martin Jones stopped 23 shots as San Jose beat Detroit. Tierney iced it with an empty netter with 94 seconds remaining in regulation. The Sharks finished a six-game homestand at SAP Center with a 4-2 mark and sit second in the Pacific Division. Jimmy Howard made 29 saves for the Red Wings, who have lost seven straight, including six in regulation. Tyler Bertuzzi collected three assists in the loss.

SENATORS 5, PANTHERS 3

Matt Duchene and Magnus Paaarjavi scored two goals each as Ottawa snapped Florida's franchise-record eight-game home winning streak. Florida's Aleksander Barkov nearly gave the Panthers their first lead of the game when he got a breakaway, shorthanded attempt with 5:51 left in the third period. But Barkov failed to fool Ottawa goalie Craig Anderson, a Broward County resident and a former Panther. After Barkov came up empty, Duchene and Alexandre Burrows scored for Ottawa to snap a 3-3 tie.

RANGERS 6, HURRICANES 3

Jimmy Vesey scored a hat trick, including the go-ahead goal midway through the third period, and Mats Zuccarello added two goals to lead New York to a win over visiting Carolina. The Rangers snapped a three-game losing streak with the win, while the Hurricanes lost for the third time in four games. Vesey scored the go-ahead goal with 7:45 left in the game, beating Scott Darling short-side for his 14th goal of the season. Vesey's goal came less than four minutes after a Victor Rask goal tied the score at three 8:23 into the period. —Reuters



Hanadi Khazal

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Sports

Elkeson strikes to steer SIPG into knockout phase

Suwon Bluewings ends Shanghai Shenhua's unbeaten start

HONG KONG: Shanghai SIPG secured their place in the last 16 of the Asian Champions League yesterday with a goal from Brazilian striker Elkeson sealing a 1-0 win over South Korea's Ulsan Hyundai for Vitor Pereira's team.

Last year's semi-finalists secured their place in the knockout round after Melbourne Victory's win over Japanese champions Kawasaki Frontale 1-0 in the day's other match means the Chinese Super League side cannot finish outside the top two places in Group F.

"Overall, I'm satisfied with the performance," said Pereira, whose side were outplayed in the opening 45 minutes. "All of the players, not only those who have played today, have been fighting together and this is the team spirit we need."

Ulsan dominated the opening period before Hulk powered through the South Korean side's defence five minutes into the second half to cut the ball back for Elkeson to score from close range. The win moves SIPG on to 10 points from four games while Ulsan remain in second on five points, level with Melbourne after their win over Kawasaki.

With a better head-to-head record over the South Koreans and with both Ulsan and Melbourne due to face each other, SIPG cannot finish any lower than second in the group.

Meanwhile, Suwon Bluewings ended Shanghai Shenhua's unbeaten start to their Asian Champions League campaign as second-half goals from Dejan Damjanovic and Choi Seong-guen earned the two-time Asian champions a 2-0 win at Hongkou Stadium.

Suwon sit on seven points, just one behind Group H leaders Kashima Antlers who were held to a 1-1 draw by Sydney FC. In the western half of the draw, Qatar's

Al Duhail maintained their perfect record with a dramatic 2-1 win over Uzbekistan's Lokomotiv Tashkent that ensured the club from Doha will advance to the last 16 from Group B.

Youssef El Arabi scored twice in stoppage time to give the Qatari champions a fourth successive win that guarantees their place in the next phase of the competition.

Iran's Zob Ahan are second in the group with six points, three ahead of Lokomotiv, after their 2-0 win over bottom side Al Wahda from the United Arab Emirates.

Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal, finalists last year, remain winless in this season's competition after a 2-1 defeat by Qatar's Al Rayyan that leaves the club from Riyadh bottom of Group E with only two points.

The standings are headed by Esteghlal of Iran, who are level on six points with Al Rayyan, after they shared a 1-1 draw with Al Ain of the UAE. — Reuters

“Overall, I'm satisfied with the performance”



SHANGHAI: Lee Jong Sung (R) of Suwon Samsung Bluewings takes a tumble as he fights for the ball with Giovanni Moreno (L) of Shanghai Shenhua during the AFC Champions League group stage football match between China's Shanghai Shenhua and South Korea's Suwon Samsung Bluewings in Shanghai yesterday. — AFP

Greek football club president apologises after gun incident

ATHENS: The president of Greek club PAOK yesterday apologised after storming onto the pitch with a holstered gun tucked in his belt, an incident that prompted the indefinite suspension of the championship. "I am very sorry over what happened. I clearly had no right to enter the field of play in this fashion," Greek-Russian businessman Ivan Savvidis said in a statement. Savvidis, who has extensive holdings in Greece and is rumoured to be close to the government of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, was on the run for 24 hours after an arrest warrant was issued following Sunday's incident. His antics have put pressure on Tsipras, who is accused by rivals of allowing Savvidis to continue a rapid rise in the Greek business world in return for political support and help with privatisations. FIFA is demanding swift results in the attempt to restore order, the latest in years of initiatives to stamp out violence and murky dealings in Greece's most popular sport.

Savvidis himself said yesterday that Greek football is "completely sick." "Despite attacks at all levels, I will continue to fight for fair football and honourable refereeing in all matches, so that games are won on the pitch and not in courtrooms," he said.

He denied claims that he had bickered with the referee and an official from PAOK's opponents, AEK Athens, and claimed his foray onto the pitch at his club's Toumba stadium was solely aimed at preventing violence from breaking out. "My only aim was to protect tens of thousands of PAOK fans from provocation, clashes, human victims," he said, even though, owing to a ban on away fans, only home supporters were present. The diminutive, bearded Savvidis was pictured jaw to jaw with AEK's head of football operations, while PAOK's technical director Lubos Michel—a Slovak former FIFA referee—is believed to have threatened match referee Yiorgos Kominis.

PRaise for Tsipras

Savvidis, a 58-year-old tobacco industrialist and a former lawmaker with the party of Russian president



THESSALONIKI: PAOK's Greek-Russian president Ivan Savvidis (C) takes to the pitch carrying a handgun in his waistband (below C), after the referee refused a last minute goal on March 11, during the Greek Superleague football match PAOK Thessaloniki vs AEK Athens in Thessaloniki. — AFP

Vladimir Putin, has applauded Tsipras for "protecting investors".

"Hold onto Tsipras. He is a precondition for future success," Savvidis said in May. "When I saw his speech (in parliament) I felt exactly like when I heard Vladimir Putin in 2000. I want a president like that," he said. Flanked by bodyguards, Savvidis stormed onto the field in the 90th minute after a goal that would have given PAOK victory in the top-of-the-table clash was disallowed for offside.

Police have said Savvidis is not sought over the gun, for which he has a license, but for the pitch invasion, which is a misdemeanour offence not punishable in prison. PAOK and AEK are in a neck-and-neck race for the Super League title, which would be the first for either team for more than two decades. Tsipras has staked his political capital on resolving the crisis, insisting he would disregard any "political cost" to restore order to the league. "We must all decide to ignore the political cost... It's a question of will. Personally, I am determined to go ahead," Tsipras said.

POWERFUL FIGURE

His deputy minister for sport, Yiorgos Vassiliadis, had said after an emergency meeting with Tsipras that the league would "not start again without a new framework agreed by all." Vassiliadis said the government was in close contact with European football body UEFA, which he said had been "shocked" by the incident. He did not rule out the prospect of Greek clubs sitting out next season's European competitions, but insisted the national team would not be affected. FIFA said it "now expects appropriate measures to be taken, and rapidly." It warned a failure to take action "to eradicate" violence could lead to the suspension of the Greek association from the sport's governing body. Dubbed "Ivan the Terrible" by adoring PAOK fans, Savvidis has put the club from the northern port of Thessaloniki back in contention after decades of the championship being dominated by clubs from Athens. Adding to the complications for the government, companies owned by Savvidis are the main sponsors of the Greek league. — AFP



Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE	
Juventus v Atalanta	20:00
beIN SPORTS HD 4	
FRENCH LEAGUE	
Paris Saint v SCO Angers	22:00
beIN SPORTS HD 6	
UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE	
Besiktas v Bayern Munich	20:00
beIN SPORTS	
Barcelona v Chelsea	22:45
beIN SPORTS HD 1	
ASIAN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE	
Buriram United v Andres Tunez	14:00
beIN SPORTS	
Guangzhou Evergrande v Jeju United	15:00
beIN SPORTS	
Kitchee v Kashiwa Reysol	15:00
beIN SPORTS	
Tianjin Quanjian v Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors	15:00
beIN SPORTS	
AFC CUP	
Hwaebul v Benfica de Macau	09:00
beIN SPORTS	
Shan United v Ceres Negros	12:30
beIN SPORTS	
New Radiant v Aizawl	14:00
beIN SPORTS	
Hang Yuen v April 25	14:00
beIN SPORTS	
Home United v Boeung Ket Angkor	14:30
beIN SPORTS	
Persija Jakarta v Song Lam Nghe An	14:30
beIN SPORTS	
Altya Asyr FK v FC Istiklol Dushanbe	14:30
beIN SPORTS	
Johor Darul Takzim v Tampines Rovers	15:45
beIN SPORTS	
Bengaluru FC v Abahani Limited Dhaka	17:30
beIN SPORTS	

Conte's caution fails to harness best of Hazard

LONDON: Chelsea manager Antonio Conte faces a conundrum of balancing his tendency for caution with the English champions' need to score to get past the night of Barcelona in the Champions League last 16 today. Conte's plan to contain and counter-attack on the La Liga leaders nearly worked to perfection in the first leg three weeks ago as Willian put the hosts in front and also hit the woodwork twice.

But one Andreas Christensen error cost Conte's men dear as Barca pounced for a vital away goal when Andres Iniesta set up Lionel Messi to finally net against Chelsea at the ninth attempt and give Barca the upper hand from a 1-1 draw.

However, whilst Willian shone in Conte's strikerless set-up, Eden Hazard was unable to exert the influence he desires on the biggest stage in an unfamiliar centre-forward role. "We need to repeat the game we played at Stamford Bridge and try to exploit the chances to score," Conte told Chelsea TV following Saturday's 2-1 win over Crystal Palace, hinting that he will opt for a similar approach at the Camp Nou.

"It's important to understand that we must be prepared to suffer, if we play with Hazard as number nine,

or if we play with (Olivier) Giroud or (Alvaro) Morata as number nine and Hazard as number 10."

Hazard certainly suffered when deployed once more in a central role as Chelsea were passed off the park by Manchester City in a 1-0 defeat nine days ago. "When you leave the pitch you have the impression that you've ran [a lot], but that you haven't played a game of football," said Hazard as City recorded a Premier League record 902 passes and Chelsea failed to muster a single shot on goal.

"We could have played on for three hours, and I wouldn't touch a ball. For me personally it's difficult to play a good game when you only touch the ball three times."

MISSING MORATA

The root of Hazard's discontent is Conte's lack of faith in either club record signing Morata or Giroud, who was hastily recruited on the final day of the January transfer window as a more physical option.

Hazard's best displays throughout his Chelsea career have come when playing off a focal point, most notably in two Premier League title winning seasons alongside Diego Costa. A fallout with Conte meant Costa was hastily dispatched by the Italian at the end of last season despite playing a huge role in delivering the title.

Morata was bought to replace his Spanish international team-mate and initially struck up an excellent relationship with Hazard. However, an alarming dip in form allied to injury problems has seen Morata make just one start in two months and fail to score since Boxing Day.—AFP

Silva's double takes Man City closer to title

MANCHESTER: David Silva scored two magnificent goals as Manchester City moved a step closer to their first Premier League title under Pep Guardiola with a comfortable 2-0 victory at struggling Stoke on Monday.

After re-establishing a 16-point lead at the top of the table, the latest victory leaves City still with the potential to clinch the title at the start of next month when they host second-placed local rivals United in the Manchester derby.

It took just nine minutes for City to carve open a Stoke side that is looking increasingly certain to suffer relegation this season with every passing week. As has been then case so many times this season, the goal came with devastating pace and precision on the counter-attack after striker Gabriel Jesus had dropped deep and become involved in build-up play. He slipped through a perfect pass for Raheem Sterling, sprinting down the right wing, and the England forward's first-time cross picked out the run of Silva who arrived to convert without hesitation from 12 yards. For a Stoke side with just one victory in their previous 10 league games, it was the stuff of nightmares and, given the ease with which Guardiola's team was moving the ball around, it was hard to see a way back for Paul

Lambert's men. Yet the next meaningful attack came from the struggling hosts and might have resulted in an unlikely equaliser. Xherdan Shaqiri, with the ball on the by-line, pushed it through the legs of full-back Oleksandr Zinchenko and cut it back to the edge of the area for Badiou Ndiaye whose shot was deflected behind for a corner. It was a rare positive moment for Stoke and one that was short-lived with City soon pressing for a second goal.

After 26 minutes, an exquisite Kevin De Bruyne cross appeared to have set up Silva for a chance only for the Spaniard to miskick six yards out, with Fernandinho sending the rebound over.

Jack Butland was forced to beat De Bruyne to a weak back-pass from Bruno Martins Indi, Jesus just missed connecting with a free-kick close to goal and, as the half closed, Butland saved well from Fernandinho before Leroy Sane volleyed wide.

Even when City goalkeeper Ederson was forced into his first serious action of the evening, it was from his own player, as Kyle Walker intercepted Butland's long clearance with a deflection the Brazilian was forced to tip over his crossbar.

By the time Silva claimed his, and City's, second goal from the first attack of the second half, it was difficult to see a route back for the home side.

This effort was as pleasing on the eye as the first, after Fernandinho won the ball and played in Silva who exchanged perfect passes with Jesus. It was left for Silva to finish, over the body of Butland as the goalkeeper rushed out, capping a performance that was all the more remarkable given the Spaniard has recently been returning to his homeland on a regular basis to spend time with his new-born son.—AFP

13 Venus knocks out Serena, Wozniacki marches on

14 Houston Rockets roll on as San Antonio Spurs problems deepen

15 Greek football club president apologises after gun incident



Man Utd suffer shock exit

Ben Yedder goals send Sevilla into q-finals for first time in 60 years



MANCHESTER: Manchester United's Belgian striker Romelu Lukaku (C) has a shot by Sevilla's French defender Clement Lenglet during a last 16 second leg UEFA Champions League football match between Manchester United and Sevilla at Old Trafford in Manchester, northwest England yesterday. — AFP

MANCHESTER: Manchester United crashed out of the Champions League as Wissam Ben Yedder struck twice in four second-half minutes to send Sevilla into the quarter-finals for the first time in 60 years with a stunning 2-1 win at Old Trafford yesterday.

The Spaniards progressed by the same score on aggregate after a goalless first-leg draw. The visitors were deserving winners as they controlled the game throughout but had to wait for Ben Yedder's introduction as a substitute to add a clinical finish.

Ben Yedder put Sevilla in front 16 minutes from time when he blasted into the bottom corner before heading in a second shortly after. Romelu Lukaku reduced United's arrears, but it was too little, too late with United boss Jose Mourinho's decision to once again drop Paul Pogba certain to be scrutinised.

Mourinho sprang a surprise before kick-off by

recalling Marouane Fellaini at the expense of Pogba, who had also been dropped for the first game. Jesse Lingard also returned in place of Juan Mata in Mourinho's only other change from the side that beat Liverpool 2-1 at the weekend.

And Lingard nearly had an instant impact as he teed up Lukaku on the edge of the box, but the Belgian's effort drifted high and wide. Sevilla dominated the vast majority of the first leg only to be denied by some stunning saves from David de Gea.

However, it was wayward finishing rather than the Spanish number one that prevented the visitors making the most of their ascendancy for most of the match.

Joaquin Correa headed just over from a corner before Luis Muriel and Franco Vazquez fired off target when well-positioned on the edge of the area. Indeed, of Sevilla's 10 efforts on goal in the first period only one

weak Muriel effort forced De Gea into making a save.

FELLAINI GAMBLE BACKFIRES

Mourinho's gamble on Fellaini appeared to have largely backfired as he failed to impose his physical presence on Sevilla's ball players in midfield. Yet, the Belgian nearly made the breakthrough with United's best move of the opening period when he latched onto Alexis Sanchez's layoff and his powerful effort was turned behind by Sergio Rico.

The second period began in the same vein as the first with Sevilla on the front foot, and only a brilliant last-ditch tackle by Eric Bailly denied Correa a clear sight of goal. Chances kept coming for Sevilla as Muriel then turned a dangerous Pablo Sarabia cross inches wide.

Pogba, who cost United a then-world record £89 million (\$116 million) in 2016, was eventually introduced

just after the hour mark with Fellaini sacrificed. However, even the Frenchman couldn't kickstart the hosts and they were eventually made to pay.

Ben Yedder had only been on the pitch for two minutes after replacing Muriel, when he finally broke the deadlock in the tie with brilliant finish low into De Gea's bottom left-hand corner.

Mourinho responded by throwing on Anthony Martial and Juan Mata, but their attacking edge was needed far earlier as Ben Yedder soon put the outcome beyond any doubt when he forced home a corner at the far post despite a despairing effort by De Gea. Sevilla should even have added to their lead as Clement Lenglet and Correa came close. Lukaku finally got United on the board six minutes from time when he swept home a corner. But it was too little avail as United have now failed to reach the quarter-finals for five straight years. — AFP

Superb Dzeko goal sends Roma into quarter-finals

ROME: Roma beat Shakhtar Donetsk 1-0 yesterday to reach the Champions League quarter-finals for the first time since 2008 as a magnificent finish by Bosnia striker Edin Dzeko sent them through on away goals.

Roma celebrated only their second win in six meetings with the Ukrainian side and got revenge for a 6-2 aggregate defeat by Shakhtar at the same stage of the competition in 2011, although they endured a nervy finish. Having trailed 2-1 from the first leg, Roma looked bereft of ideas for much of the contest at the Stadio Olimpico before Dzeko broke the deadlock in the 52nd minute following a tepid first half devoid of goal-mouth action.

Shakhtar came close to extending their overall advantage when Roma defender Alessandro Florenzi headed a floated free kick into the box inches wide of his own far post. Roma's solitary glimpse of goal in the opening half came in the 28th minute when

visiting keeper Andriy Pyatov palmed away a fizzing low cross by Aleksandar Kolarov to deny Dzeko a simple tap-in from close range.

The home side came out with renewed purpose in the second half and Dzeko delighted Roma fans when he broke the deadlock with a trademark clinical finish. The Bosnian took a defence-splitting pass from midfielder Kevin Strootman into his stride and beat the offside trap before he steered the ball into the far corner with the outside of his foot past the advancing Pyatov.

Dzeko curled a shot from the edge of the penalty area inches wide in the 62nd minute before Shakhtar centre back Ivan Ordets was shown a straight red card in the 79th for hauling down the Bosnian when he was through on goal. Despite being a man down, Shakhtar launched a late onslaught and had several dangerous raids down the left flank but the home team's defence held on until the final whistle. — Reuters



ROME: Shakhtar Donetsk's Argentinian forward Facundo Ferreyra (C) fights for the ball with Roma's Croatian defender Aleksandar Kolarov and Roma's Italian midfielder Daniele De Rossi (R) during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 second leg football match AS Roma vs Shakhtar Donetsk yesterday. — AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 14, 2018

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Zain Life, a new portfolio of digital solutions for a smarter way of living

Zain launches an array of innovative, flexible digital services

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading telecommunications company in Kuwait, announced the launch of Zain Life, a new brand that offers customers a portfolio of innovative and flexible digital services and solutions in the areas of Smart Homes, Digital Entertainment, and Customer Experience.

The announcement was made during a press conference held at Zain's main headquarters in Shuwaikh, which witnessed the attendance of Zain Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer Eaman Al-Roudhan, Zain Kuwait's Chief Technical Officer Nawaf Al-Gharabally, Zain Kuwait's Chief Enterprise Business Officer Hamad Al-Marzouq, Zain Kuwait's Marketing Director Moataz Elsayed, and Zain Kuwait's Corporate Communications and Relations Director Waleed Al-Khashti. The conference was accompanied by a live demo of the announced services and solutions.

The launch of Zain Life comes under the umbrella of Zain's strategic vision to reinforce its digital transformation leadership, offering unparalleled services and solutions in the fields of Smart Homes through a number of security devices designed to revolutionize home security, as well as digital entertainment solutions through the PlayStation VR device. The new brand also offers new solutions in the Customer Experience sector through the all new Zain Smart Branch - the first of its kind self-service machine launched by a telecommunications company in Kuwait.

Eaman Al-Roudhan commented, "Today we launch the all-new Zain Life brand, which consists of a portfolio of flexible digital services that include an array of innovative packages, further enriching Zain's leadership in offering the latest digital transformation applications. We will be continuously enriching our Zain Life brand with more services and solutions this year and during the upcoming years. This will include smart solutions in the areas of education, health, entertainment, and youth empowerment".

Al-Roudhan continued: "Zain's digital transformation journey began two years ago with our partnership with the Ministry of Electricity and Water through the Smart Meters project. We consider ourselves an active partner in creating the future of smart life in Kuwait, as well as empowering the community through the use of advanced technologies such as IoT and more".

Al-Roudhan added: "our customers, from both the consumer and business segments, are well informed and always aspire to try the latest smart solutions available. For that, we were keen on designing the first packages of Zain Life with digital transformation applications such as smart home solutions and more, as well as enhancing our customers' experience, making it easier and more flexible".

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

The Smart Homes sector is one of the main elements of the digital transformation being undertaken



KUWAIT: Zain Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer Eaman Al-Roudhan (second right), Zain Kuwait's Chief Technical Officer Nawaf Al-Gharabally, Zain Kuwait's Chief Enterprise Business Officer Hamad Al-Marzouq, Zain Kuwait's Marketing Director Moataz Elsayed, and Zain Kuwait's Corporate Communications and Relations Director Waleed Al-Khashti (right) during the press conference to announce the launch of Zain Life yesterday.

by telecoms around the world, particularly with respect to securing homes and protecting them against theft with the use of modern technologies. Zain is working on designing new plans to match these transformation processes, starting with Zain Life.

The Zain Life brand offers a smart home security kit, which provides a unique home safety experience through several surveillance solutions that monitor the home and notify the user as soon as any unusual activity inside the home is identified. These solutions include a smart camera, motion sensor, door/window sensors, and smart smoke detector, which all can be controlled and managed through a single smartphone app.

The smart camera notifies the user immediately once any motion is sensed or any sound is made inside the house, and the user will receive an instant notification on their smartphone via the integrated app wherever they are. The camera can record video in 720p, work in HD at night, and send/receive two-way audio. Users can also watch a live feed from the camera on their smartphone at any time and place.

Zain Life's smart home security kit also includes motions sensors, which can sense any motion inside the house once a person moves in front of them, after which the user will be notified immediately on their smartphone. Customers can place the sensors at any location inside the home. The smart home security kit also includes separate door/window sensors, which can notify users once any doors or windows are opened or broken.

In addition to the smart camera and motion sen-



KUWAIT: Zain Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer Eaman Al-Roudhan.

sors, Zain Life's smart home solutions also features a smart smoke detector, which immediately detects smoke inside the house and triggers an alarm. The smart smoke detector is superior to traditional smoke detectors in that it immediately sends a notification to the user's smartphone once smoke is detected, which offers the user more time to respond to the incident.

Zain Life's Digital Entertainment offering offers digital gaming via virtual reality applications provided by Sony's PlayStation VR. The device takes the gamer into the virtual world and features a wearable 5.7" OLED display with 360 view technology. The device is also equipped with 3D sensing devices that monitor the gamer's movements and translates them into in-game action.

Zain's Smart Branch offers Zain customers new service options that were previously not available through a self-service machine, and works automatically through advanced technology without the need of the presence of an employee.

Equipped with a smart interface, the Smart Branch recognizes a customer's identity through the advanced face recognition feature, where the branch scans the customers civil ID and matches their photo with their face on-the-spot.

Of the many new services offered by Zain's Smart Branch, the most notable is the SIM card replacement feature, which is the first service of its kind provided by a self-service machine. Customers can order a replacement for their lost or ineffective SIM cards and receive a new one immediately without the need of visiting a traditional branch. The Smart Branch also offers a variety of other services including recharging lines, bill payment, managing accounts, and buying devices from Zain's Online Store. Zain Life's Smart Home Starter Kit is available for KD 2.5 per month and requires an active data plan of at least KD 10 per month.



Business

In huge shakeup, China to merge banking, insurance regulators

Leaders look to address concerns over growing debt pile

BEIJING: China unveiled plans yesterday for the biggest shakeup of government in at least a decade, including the merger of its banking and insurance regulators to better handle financial risks as leaders look to address concerns over a growing debt pile.

The sweeping changes were presented to the National People's Congress two days after President Xi Jinping tightened his grip on power with the legislature's approval of constitutional amendments abolishing presidential term limits and expanding the authority of the Communist Party over the country's affairs.

State Councilor Wang Yong told delegates of the parliamentary session underway in Beijing that the bureaucratic shuffle was needed to make government more effective and efficient.

The reforms "eliminate systematic and institutional deficiencies that have prevented the market from carrying out a decisive role in resource allocation," Wang said. At the top of the reform list is the government's proposed change combining the insurance and banking regulators into one agency, according to the proposal introduced at the annual session of the rubber-stamp parliament.

The new regulator will be capable of "holding the bottom line to prevent systematic financial risk", the parliament document says. The responsibilities of the two separate regulators currently overlap in some areas, leaving regulatory roles unclear, the document says.

"China's whole regulatory system will change

directions, from sector oversight to oversight of specific financial activities," said Betty Wang an economist at ANZ Bank.

"It will promote coordination and information sharing between different regulators," she said.

The two merged regulators will hand off duties such as proposing laws to the People's Bank of China in a sign that the central bank is beefing up its regulatory role.

China is in the midst of a battle against financial risk, as credit in the world's second largest economy has exploded since the financial crisis a decade ago. Financial regulators have cracked down on

major companies—even taking over Anbang Insurance this year—to get a handle on building risk and unwieldy debt that some analysts worry pose a serious threat to China's financial stability.

'Revolutionary' reforms

Liu He, President Xi Jinping's top economic advisor, is overseeing that battle on financial

risk and praised the reforms as "revolutionary" in an editorial published in the Communist Party mouthpiece People's Daily yesterday.

"We should understand the necessity of promoting this deep transformation," Liu wrote of the reforms. Analysts applauded the moves. "The government is taking steps in the right direction for reining financial risks and debt deleveraging," Tao Dong, vice chairman for Greater China at Credit Suisse Private Banking in Hong Kong, told Bloomberg.

China is also establishing a national market super-



BEIJING: A delegate listens to speeches during the Xinjiang delegation meeting during the ongoing annual meeting of the National People's Congress in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. —AFP



Overhaul to help handle financial risks

visory management bureau to ensure a "fair competition in the market". The new bureau will bring together a number of separate departments under one roof, regulating everything from businesses to quality supervision to food and drug safety, according to the document.

The proposed changes put forth in the document

are expected to be approved by the National People's Congress legislature, which ends its session next Tuesday.

The draft also includes a new immigration bureau and changes to the tax system. In total, China will have 26 ministries and commissions when the changes are formally approved. —AFP

Trump blocks Broadcom's bid to buy Qualcomm

SAN FRANCISCO: US President Donald Trump yesterday blocked an unsolicited bid by Singapore-based Broadcom to take over smartphone chipmaker Qualcomm, citing national security concerns.

Trump issued an order barring the proposed mega-acquisition, saying there is credible evidence such a deal "threatens to impair the national security of the United States," according to a White House statement. The order came despite Broadcom's assurances that it would complete its move to the United States by early April, ahead of a previously-planned Qualcomm shareholder vote on the \$117 billion deal—meaning any national security concerns were moot.

"Broadcom strongly disagrees that its proposed acquisition of Qualcomm raises any national security concerns," the company said, adding that it was reviewing the order. The Treasury Department said in a letter over the weekend that Broadcom had violated a Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States order on three separate occasions by failing to give advance notice before taking actions such as lodging takeover-related securities filings in the United States.

A CFIUS investigation of the proposed acquisition so far has "confirmed" national security concerns earlier identified by US officials, according to the letter. Trump ordered Broadcom and Qualcomm to "immediately and permanently abandon the proposed takeover."

The rival chip giants were told to notify CFIUS in writing that all aspects of the order had been fol-

lowed. "This deal was a bad idea from the start," said analyst Patrick Moorhead of Moor Insights and Strategy. Broadcom shares closed the trading day up 3.5 percent to \$262.84 and gained slightly more in after-market trades. Qualcomm shares sank 4.4 percent to \$60.04 in the after-market.

Battling boards

Qualcomm has been maneuvering for weeks to rebuff Broadcom's unwanted advances, and had asked CFIUS to look into national security implications of a merger. Concern over China's potential influence, and rising US protectionist sentiment, hung over the Singaporean firm's hostile takeover bid.

Qualcomm rejected multiple Broadcom offers during weeks of parries and thrusts between the two firms since the proposed deal emerged in November. Qualcomm, which makes most of the world's microprocessors for smartphones, postponed its annual shareholders' meeting after secretly requesting the national security review of Broadcom's bid.

Qualcomm announced late Monday that the new meeting date will be March 23, and that the six Broadcom-backed candidates vying for spots on the 11 person board are off the ballot.

"Under the terms of the presidential order, all of Broadcom's director nominees are also disqualified from standing for election as directors of Qualcomm," the California-based company said in a statement. CFIUS noted that a Broadcom-Qualcomm merger could weaken Qualcomm's leadership in the field.

This would likely help Chinese competitors such as telecommunications firm Huawei, particularly in the emerging 5G blazing fast wireless internet, where a stronger China could present a national security issue. While they are rival chip companies, Broadcom and Qualcomm are very different in their approaches to the market, according to Moorhead. —AFP

RWE books strong 2017 ahead of mega deal with EON

FRANKFURT: German energy firm RWE said yesterday it beat forecasts with higher net profits last year, firming the group's position ahead of a massive asset swap with rival EON that could redraw the sector. The Essen-based company reported net profits of 1.9 billion euros (\$2.3 billion) for 2017, boosted by a windfall refund of a tax on nuclear fuel it had been paying since 2011.

Analysts surveyed by Factset had predicted a result of 1.2 billion euros. RWE's performance last year compared with a massive loss of 5.7 billion euros in 2016, when it was forced to write down the value of some assets due to lower wholesale electricity prices.

The group's operating, or underlying profit increased 7.0 percent, to 5.8 billion euros, on the back of revenues 2.7 percent lower at 44.6 billion. It said better results in its power generation and energy trading divisions and a continued cost-cutting drive had paid off, while renewable-energy subsidiary Innogy also upped its performance.

The group also cut its net debt by 2.5 billion euros, to 20.2 billion. "All of this forms a good basis for the future as we move forward with a sharp focus on our core business: ensuring security of supply," chief executive Rolf Martin Schmitz said in a statement. RWE's financial report comes the day after it confirmed plans for a massive asset swap with rival EON that would see the competitor firm take over RWE's stake in Innogy.

The deal is the latest step in the gradual German "Energiewende" or energy transition away from nuclear and fossil fuels and towards renewables. After further exchanges of cash and assets the deal,



ESSEN: The headquarters of German utility company EON in Essen, western Germany. —AFP

slated for completion by the end of 2019, will see RWE focus on energy generation with both renewables and traditional fossil fuel and nuclear plants.

Meanwhile EON will specialize in retail customer relationships and managing energy networks.

If approved by competition authorities the transaction would make RWE Europe's third-largest renewable energy producer. On the fossil fuels side of the business it is also becoming slightly cleaner, with natural gas outweighing coal and nuclear at 40 percent of RWE's production capacity last year.

In its current form, RWE forecasts an adjusted net profit of between 700 million euros and 1.0 billion for 2018, down from 1.2 billion euros last year. "2018 will merely reflect the full impact of the very low levels of electricity prices seen in past years," the group said. Meanwhile adjusted operating profits are also expected to fall, to between 4.9 and 5.2 billion euros compared with 2017's 5.8 billion.

RWE plans to offer shareholders a 1.50-euro dividend for the year including a one-off special dividend of 1.0 euro. 2018's ordinary dividend should increase to 0.70 euros, the firm said. —AFP

EXCHANGE RATES

Al-Muzaini Exchange Co.

ASIAN COUNTRIES	
Japanese Yen	2.817
Indian Rupees	4.633
Pakistani Rupees	2.719
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.931
Nepali Rupees	2.900
Singapore Dollar	230.070
Hongkong Dollar	38.357
Bangladesh Taka	3.596
Philippine Peso	5.786
Thai Baht	9.632

GCC COUNTRIES	
Saudi Riyal	80.240
Qatari Riyal	82.644
Omani Riyal	781.445
Bahraini Dinar	798.990
UAE Dirham	81.946

ARAB COUNTRIES	
Egyptian Pound - Cash	19.500
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	17.048
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.208
Tunisian Dinar	127.150
Jordanian Dinar	423.880
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	2.005
Syrian Lira	0.000
Morocco Dirham	33.300

EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES	
US Dollar Transfer	300.700

Euro	372.570
Sterling Pound	419.780
Canadian dollar	235.110
Turkish lira	79.450
Swiss Franc	319.050
Australian Dollar	238.150
US Dollar Buying	299.500

GOLD	
20 Gram	260.52
10 Gram	133.18
5 Gram	67.43

Dollarco Exchange Co. Ltd

Rate for Transfer	Selling Rate
US Dollar	300.350
Canadian Dollar	234.450
Sterling Pound	418.635
Euro	371.770
Swiss Frank	286.375
Bahrain Dinar	798.740
UAE Dirhams	82.175
Qatari Riyals	83.405
Saudi Riyals	80.990
Jordanian Dinar	424.900
Egyptian Pound	17.116
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.930
Indian Rupees	4.629
Pakistani Rupees	2.717
Bangladesh Taka	3.606
Philippines Peso	5.777
Cyprus pound	17.880

Japanese Yen	3.810
Syrian Pound	1.585
Nepalese Rupees	2.895
Malaysian Ringgit	77.715
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	47.885
Thai Bhat	10.605
Turkish Lira	78.615

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
Europe		
British Pound	0.411745	0.419245
Czech Korune	0.006530	0.015830
Danish Krone	0.045659	0.050659
Euro	0.364900	0.372400
Georgian Lari	0.122200	0.12200
Hungarian O.001096	0.001286	
Norwegian Krone	0.034696	0.039896
Romanian Leu	0.062499	0.079349
Russian ruble	0.005272	0.005272
Slovakia	0.008928	0.018928
Swedish Krona	0.032383	0.037383
Swiss Franc	0.310522	0.321522
Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.228310	0.240310
New Zealand Dollar	0.213690	0.223190
America		
Canadian Dollar	0.228545	0.237545
US Dollars	0.296600	0.301020
US Dollars Mint	0.297100	0.301020

Asia	
Bangladesh Taka	0.003190 0.003774
Chinese Yuan	0.046044 0.049544
Hong Kong Dollar	0.036268 0.039018
Indian Rupee	0.004182 0.004823
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000018 0.000024
Japanese Yen	0.002731 0.002911
Korean Won	0.000272 0.000287
Malaysian Ringgit	0.073121 0.079121
Nepalese Rupee	0.003000 0.003170
Pakistan Rupee	0.002530 0.002820
Philippine Peso	0.005673 0.005973
Singapore Dollar	0.223502 0.233502
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001605 0.002185
Taiwan	0.010143 0.010323
Thai Baht	0.009253 0.009803

Arab	
Bahraini Dinar	0.790939 0.799439
Egyptian Pound	0.014082 0.019800
Iranian Riyal	0.000083 0.000085
Iraqi Dinar	0.000202 0.000262
Jordanian Dinar	0.419500 0.428500
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000 1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000149 0.000249
Moroccan Dirhams	0.022682 0.046682
Omani Riyal	0.774721 0.780401
Qatar Riyal	0.078305 0.083245
Saudi Riyal	0.079100 0.080400
Syrian Pound	0.001274 0.001494
Tunisian Dinar	0.121850 0.129850
Turkish Lira	0.073147 0.083447
UAE Dirhams	0.080444 0.082144
Yemeni Riyal	0.000977 0.001057

Business

Honda Alghanim reveals all-new 2018 Accord

Car named 2018 North American Car of Year • Event at Marina Crescent filled with activities



KUWAIT: Honda Alghanim, the exclusive distributor of Honda cars, motorcycles and marine equipment in Kuwait, revealed the all-new 10th generation Honda Accord 2018, which has been named the 2018 North American Car of the Year, during a three-day event of fun-filled activities and prizes held across the fountain at the Marina Crescent in Salmiya.

Attended by a myriad of young car enthusiasts and families, Honda Alghanim showcased the completely redesigned and reengineered as well as technically and technologically-advanced 2018 Honda Accord. The reveal was complemented by numerous activities and events held throughout the three days of the launch, awarding winners in these activities with valuable prizes.

The 2018 Honda Accord earned the prestigious 2018 North American Car of the Year award, which is judged by professional automotive journalists from the United States and Canada, and honors excellence in innovation, design, safety features, performance, technology, driver satisfaction and value.

The new car sets itself apart in its dramatically lower and wider appearance that creates a more aggressive and athletic stance, in addition to an enhanced performance, making it the most fun-to-drive, refined and fuel-efficient Accord.

Refined and Distinctive

The new 2018 Accord is without a doubt the most refined, distinctive, muscular and stylish Honda Accord ever. Packed with full of clever ideas, we continue to push the limits of innovation with new turbocharged engine options. European-inspired fastback design, the all-new Accord sets a new standard for sophistication and excitement.

What's New in the 2018 Accord

Most of the engineering and design of the new Accord is new. The car is 29% ultra-high-strength steel, a more rigid and lightweight body, enhancing the efficiency of the aerodynamics.

With its European-inspired design, the new Accord sets new standards for quality. Stylish with clever ideas, streamlined, attractive and stylish, the interior of the



Honda Accord features a variety of sports details such as a red-light control button, use of chrome in the front, sides and rear, a leather-lined steering wheel, front LED lights, 18-inch alloy wheels to enhance the driving experience in every trip.

Diversified Trims

The 2018 Accord comes in a variety of distinguished trims which comprise the Accord EX, Accord Sport and Accord LX. Each of these trims comes in unique design, a wide range of exterior and interior colors, as well as in available engine and speed transmission options.

Performance and Engines

Drivers can feel that unique Honda Powertrain Technology instantly as soon as

they step foot on the accelerator. Its new turbocharged engine to give the latest Accord the power and economy to match its looks. Customers can choose between a powerful and refined 247 hp VTEC Turbo or the efficient but still powerful 198 hp VTEC Turbo, both featuring the Earth Dreams Technology which gives the perfect balance of performance and economy. The 2.0 engine is equipped with a slick 10 auto-transmitter and 1.5 with a smooth CVT automatic.

Exterior Design

The new Accord design features a lower rooftop to give it a coupe look with four doors, as well as longer and lower engine hood, a shorter rear box, and sharp, curved sidelines giving the 10th generation Accord a more sporty and luxurious feel. The front of the car is designed to be wider with LED headlamps, while the fastback roof design improves by 3 percent.

Interior Design

Honda did not only focus on the exterior eye-catching design. It made large improvements and enhancements to deliver an enjoyable driving experience and full view of the exterior. Seats were designed to be lower, adding to the sport feel of the car, and decreased the thickness of roof pillar by 20% to increase the driver's vision ability. The supportive, contoured seats will reveal why the Accord has one of the most spacious cabins in its class, with a wide, sweeping dashboard, simple driver-friendly layout and great all-round visibility. The design also creates a calm, quiet space so drivers and passengers can just relax and enjoy the drive.

Comfort and quality also comes with soft touch materials and premium details. The interior design includes lots of helpful tech-

nology like the dual-zone climate control, heated and ventilated front seats with electronic parking brake, and automatic brake hold function to make every journey that little bit more enjoyable.

In addition, the Accord has many thoughtful features like a lower opening trunk to make loading and unloading easier, versatile 60:40 split folding rear seats and a clever emergency trunk release.

Technology and Safety

The Accord incorporates the new 8" Display Audio in-car information system which keeps the driver and passengers in touch with all the things they love in life, like their music and friends, all within one central touch-screen display. Featuring hard keys for those essential controls, in addition

to the ability to control the interior temperature, ventilation and heat of the front seats with electronic parking brake, and automatic brake hold function to make every journey that little bit more enjoyable.

When it comes to safety, the most significant feature of the Accord is the CMBS radar sensor in the front grille which can sense a vehicle ahead of the driver. The system activates a warning beep, causes automatic application of the brakes and the e-pretensioners to tighten the front seat. Adaptive Cruise Control with Low-Speed Following This function maintains a set cruising speed and following distance relative to the vehicle in front of you. If the detected vehicle comes to a stop, the function will decelerate and stop your vehicle without you having to keep your foot on the brake. Once the car in front starts moving again simply tap the accelerator to resume the operation.

The Accord is of course designed with the Honda SENSING system, the most advanced suites of safety technologies available, designed to keep drivers and passengers safer. With its Lane Keeping Assist System, the car keeps drivers in the middle of their lane, providing a less stressful driving experience by reducing the need for steering correction movements and driving effort on the motorway.

Customers can today explore the new Honda Accord 2018 in Honda Alghanim's at its showrooms in Al-Rai and Shuwaikh areas. Customers can take any of these cars on a test drive by visiting one of the two Honda Alghanim showrooms located in Al Rai and Shuwaikh. The Honda Alghanim showroom in Al-Rai area operates from 9:00am to 10:00pm, Saturday to Thursday, and from 9:30am to 10:00pm on Fridays. The Shuwaikh showroom operates from 9:00am to 10:00pm every day.

The cars service center waiting lounge offers entertainment and comfort for customers, digital satellite TV, free wireless internet, relaxing massage chairs a PlayStation 4 corner and more. The service center operates 7 days a week, from Saturday to Wednesday from 7:30am to 8:30pm, from 7:30am to 6:30pm on Thursdays, and from 2:00pm to 7:00pm on Fridays.



Business

Cadillac Alghanim gives customers world-class opportunity in Kuwait

Cadillac buyers may win a luxury package to 2018 FIFA World Cup Finals

KUWAIT: With the 2018 FIFA World Cup fast approaching, Cadillac Alghanim is giving its customers the chance to win a once-in-a-lifetime trip to the finals of the tournament in Russia, offering a five-star experience that matches the luxury standards of a premium brand such as Cadillac.

From the 1st of March, customers will have the opportunity to win either one of three all-inclusive five-star trips to attend the FIFA World Cup Final in Moscow or one of five all-inclusive five-star trips to attend one of the semi-final games, with every purchase of a new Cadillac model. In addition to the eight grand prizes, customers purchasing a new Cadillac will also enjoy a variety of other incentives, dependent on the model.



'Daring Greatly Gets You to the World Cup' initiative

Commenting on the campaign, Mohamed El Talkhawi, General Manager of Cadillac Alghanim, said: "Cadillac is the epitome of luxury and we are committed to providing our customers in Kuwait with the best possible experience. By giving the chance to win a premium trip to the must-see World Cup, we are offering an unforgettable opportunity to our customers. Our customers crave exclusive, premium experiences and it doesn't get more exclusive and special than an event that only happens every four years."

Running in time with the 70th anniversary of Cadillac

Alghanim, the new offer will apply on the full 2018 Cadillac product lineup in Kuwait, consisting of the brand's SUV, sedan and V-series offerings. This includes the flagship SUV, the 2018 Escalade, which features a new 10-speed automatic transmission and bold new interior and exterior color options. The Escalade has long defined spacious premium driving with its modern design, powerful capabilities and sumptuous amenities that keep luxury firmly in the driver's seat.

For those looking for a sophisticated crossover, Cadillac's answer is the XT5. Powered by a 3.6-liter V6 engine and advanced all-wheel drive, the XT5 combines spacious luxury and high-tech convenience features to create an ideal crossover. A lightweight construction elevates efficiency and driving performance while the new design and structure increases interior space without adding bulk.

Built with one of the industry's most advanced body structures, the 2018 CT6 has all the size, prestige and tech-

nology of a large luxury sedan, while offering the driving dynamics and efficiency of a mid-size sport sedan. The CT6 is equipped with an Active Chassis system and either a 3.0L Twin Turbo or 3.6L V6 engine. In terms of large premium sedans, the redesigned spacious and comfortable 2018 XTS offers confident handling and performance, enjoying technical, chassis and appearance changes to heighten the appeal of this elegant sedan.

Also taking pride of place in the Cadillac Alghanim showroom, the 2018 CTS displays precise craftsmanship, ingenious technology and assured performance. With the standard 2.0L Turbo engine, the CTS is designed to make the most of handling and stability in all driving conditions. The more compact of the two models, the 2018 ATS is one of the most connected cars in the segment and the centerpiece of Cadillac's expanded and elevated portfolio, boasting exterior appearance upgrades, technology features and streamlined trim levels.

Tested at the track and ready for the road, Cadillac's V-series models are proof of the brand's promise of passion without compromise. The Cadillac CTS-V sedan combines luxury and power in one machine, powered by a super-charged 6.2L V-8 engine, that delivers 640 hp (477 kW), 630 lb-ft of torque (855 Nm), mated to a paddle-shift eight-speed automatic transmission.

"Our full lineup of Cadillac models caters to individuals who dare to stand out from the crowd and live their passions, while taking into account a variety of needs and lifestyles," El Talkhawi added.

In addition to the opportunity to win an all-inclusive break to the FIFA 2018 World Cup in Russia, incentives for Cadillac Alghanim customers purchasing 2018 Cadillac models include an iPhone X with the purchase of the 2018 XT5 as well as trade-in offers for 2018 ATS, CTS and Escalade. All models are offered at competitive starting prices.

The battle of Android smartphones: Huawei Mate 10 Pro vs Samsung Galaxy S9+

KUWAIT: Samsung's long-awaited Galaxy S9 and Galaxy S9+ have finally been introduced, making their debut at the annual Mobile World Congress trade show in Barcelona. But, will Samsung's latest launch unpack a worthy contender in the war of the Android smartphones? We look at how the Samsung Galaxy S9+ compares with one of its main competitors, the Huawei Mate 10 Pro, one of the most innovative and powerful smartphones available on the market. Heralding a new decade of smartphone development, the Huawei Mate 10 Pro devices deliver the ultimate intelligent experience and AI-powered intelligent camera by providing more comprehensive mobile intelligence.

Innovation or upgrade?

At first glance, there's no visible difference between the Galaxy S9 and S9+ and its predecessors, the Galaxy S8 and S8+. On the surface, the new phone appears to be an S8 or S8+ with a few modifications, such as shifting the fingerprint sensor to sit below the camera and away from its previously flawed location on the side. There's no change in the S9+'s screen size or resolution either, with the same 6.2-inch AMOLED display and an 18.5:9 aspect ratio as the S8+.

Of course, the processor is faster - the bare minimum spec upgrade expected - but at 2.8GHz versus the S8+'s 2.3 GHz, it's the minimum expected jump and not too far from the Mate 10's 2.4 GHz, either. However, Huawei one major advantage over the Galaxy S9 - it's Kirin 970 chipset. The Kirin 970, Huawei's new smartphone system-on-a-chip (SoC), combines an 8-core CPU, a new generation 12-core GPU, and a dedicated Neural Processing Unit (NPU) to power AI computing. The performance of the Kirin 970 offers users a significantly faster intelligent experience and the NPU is unparalleled, with 25 times that of a CPU and 50 times the efficiency of a CPU.

Lights, camera, action!

Samsung's biggest upgrade, the company claims, is its "camera re-imagined". It has only now introduced a powerful 12 MP dual aperture camera, which means it can move between an f/1.5 or f/2.4 aperture. Features also include phase detection autofocus, optical image stabilizer (OIS) and LED flash. But, here's where Huawei dominates beyond the imagination. Not only does its Leica-camera equipped device have a dual camera, both are fitted with f/1.6 aperture lenses to capture more light for low-light photography - already a first for dual-camera smartphones. Moreover, the Mate 10's second camera comes with a 20MP monochrome sensor, which makes it possible to up the photos snapped at 12M to 20 MP quality.

However, one element the new Samsung Galaxy S9+ is missing is true innovation. And that's where Huawei steps in. Huawei's Mate 10 Pro brings to life the first intelligent camera - a true smartphone innovation. It's not just about hardware, the Mate 10 Pro's Artificial Intelligence (AI)-powered real-time scene and object recognition with real-time auto settings enables the camera to automatically adjust and choose settings to help users capture better photographs in a range of different environments. It also captures detailed



AI-powered Bokeh Effect for a more natural and detailed transition between the background and subject and the AI-powered Digital Zoom of up to six to 10x brings far-off text into clearer focus.

Would you rather be smart or intelligent?

The Galaxy S8+ and Galaxy S9+ both have the same 3,500 mAh powerful battery capacity, while Huawei's Kirin 970 processor chip holds a 4,000 mAh battery that can charge the phone to 58% in just 30 minutes. Again, the Mate 10 Pro isn't just about the specifications - but rather intelligent management of its resources through its advanced AI-powered battery management technology to maximize power efficiency and increase battery life.

Conclusion: Too little, too late.

As most reviews have highlighted, the Galaxy S9+ does not capture true innovation, but is an improved and more powerful version of the Galaxy S8+. It is not a strong contender when compared with Huawei's Mate 10 Pro, which has shown true masterful innovation and made the first leap from the smart era to herald in the AI revolution. The Huawei Mate 10 Pro wins the comparison in our eyes.



Q-Store launches 'win a Tesla' promotion in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Q by Al-Yaqout, Kuwait's first mega lifestyle store has launched a mega consumer promotion, giving a chance to everyone to win a brand new Tesla electric car Model S. This is the first time in Kuwait that any company has launched a raffle draw promotion for the fully electric luxury Tesla Car.

For every KD 5 spent at Q-Store, customers get a chance to enter the draw on a Tesla Model S. In addition to the Q-Store, the Tesla promotion has been extended to all brands of Al-Yaqout Group, including all branches of Kahve Duniyas, the world's famous Turkish coffee chain, all outlets of BK German Bakery (Backerei Kohn) located inside The Sultan Center and at Equate Head Quarters, select branches/kiosks of Bayara fresh premium dried fruits, nuts, and spices all outlets of Q-Express, the consumer electronics and home appliance stores located inside The Sultan Center.



KAICO (Alshaya & Alsagar) signs a big deal for Geely with Al-Refai Car Rental

KUWAIT: KAICO announced the signing of a big deal with Al-Refai Car Rental Establishment to add Geely SUV to their fleet of rental vehicles. Mohammed Osman, Geely Sales Manager commented that this deal is one of the most distinctive and informed decision taken by Al-Refai Establishment in the field of car rental. Al-Refai is unique compared to other competitive car rental companies by offering integrated sports vehicles (SUVs) with full options and benefits that are not available in most cars offered for rent by competitive car rental companies. Those benefits include Geely's high end luxury specifications such as: Navigation system, panoramic roof, leather seats as well as the highest standards of safety, technology.

Khalil Al-Refai, owner of Al-Refai said: "Geely cars have witnessed a remarkable improvement since 2014, the date of signing the first deal with Geely. We were impressed with the after sales service as well as the excellent follow-up of Alshaya and Alsagar service teams.

Our experience encouraged us to renew our fleet of Geely cars making us the only company to rent the latest Geely

range: The 6-cylinder Emgrand GT, large family sedan with many features as well as the Emgrand SUV X7 sport vehicle that offers extraordinary specifications are enviable products in the rental fleet.

Geely is committed to continue its strong presence & grow in Kuwaiti market by providing the best range of car specifications at reasonable prices and also undertakes to provide the best after-sales service, maintenance and spare parts to its valuable customers at all times.



Technology

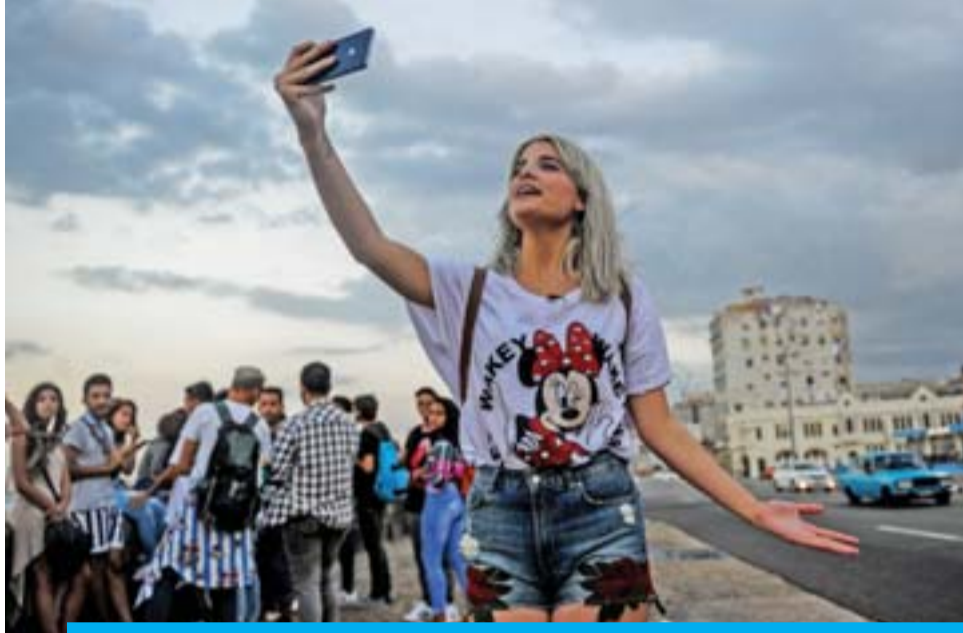
Poor Internet access is no limit to Cuban YouTubers

Internet content disseminated through 'the Package'

HAVANA: Frank Camallerys paces Havana's Malecon esplanade with a telephone at the end of a pole, seducing thousands of internet users with images of Cuba despite the communist island's limited web access. Like other local stars of YouTube, and nearly the entire population of the island, the 19-year-old communications student has no internet at home.

So posting a video means a trek across Havana to a plaza where he can get access to wifi for a dollar an hour. It takes more than half an hour to upload his latest production to YouTube, which generally begins with his cheerful greeting: "Hello everyone, this is a new adventure in Cuba." Camallerys is among about 50 young Cubans who have become internet celebrities. His Camallerys Vlogs, launched a year ago, now have more than 7,000 followers. "Create a video, walk two or three kilometers to put it online, then wait 40 minutes while it uploads: that shows very well how much I like this," Camallerys says. The public faces similar obstacles, unlike in much of the world where social media are easily accessed through mobile phones or home wifi.

In Cuba, internet content is disseminated through what's known as "the Package": a USB loaded with digital content which passes from hand to hand. The distributors get the content from the regular internet and then offer it to homes for the equivalent of one dollar to people who can then download novels, the latest FC Barcelona soccer match, or American NBA basketball. A dollar a day is roughly the average monthly wage for a government worker, but those in private enterprises can make far more. The Package menu is updated weekly. Emma Lopez, 18, knows well the benefits of the USB. "The first time,



HAVANA: A Cuban youtuber records her youtube program at Havana's Malecon.

my video was viewed by three people, until the Package began circulating and it helped me progress so that I eventually went countrywide," she says.

Package and Backpack

Her channel, Emma Style, gives makeup tips to young Cubans, but adapted to a reality in which they might not have access to all the products. Cuba's economy remains under a United States trade embargo and state firms still account for 85 percent of the economy. "If

you don't have a brush, use your fingers" to apply eyeshadow, Lopez advises in her show. These mini-stars of the internet find audiences well beyond the Caribbean island.

"Normally when a YouTuber starts out, he hopes to have support of the population. But among my followers, a small percentage live in Cuba," says Pedro Veitia, 24, of the Pedrito el Paketero channel. "There are perhaps 50 of us in Havana," he says of the small Cuban YouTuber community. According to figures cited by the government of President Raul



HAVANA: A group of Cuban youtubers walk along the Havana Malecon. — AFP photos

Castro, 4.5 million people on the island have internet access.

Unofficial estimates show the Package has nine million users in a Cuban population of 11 million residents, says Max Barbosa, a professor of communication at the University of Havana. Officials have the right to control people's access to content but they tolerate the Package and have even tried to compete with it by launching "the Backpack," which is similar but with cultural content. "Even if they don't have internet to be connected all the

time or to generate content, merely saying 'I want to be a YouTuber,' even by alternative means like the USB, is praiseworthy," Barbosa says. Their challenge now "is to start to create experiences more linked to the Cuban reality, to strike up a direct dialogue with the Cuban followers," he adds. That's a goal Lopez aspires to. "We don't seek to be known as Cuban YouTubers just because it's complicated for us or because we live in a communist island. We want to be recognized for our content," she says. — AFP

S Dakota urges SC to click 'buy' on Internet sales tax

PIERRE: The woman walked into Cash Hogen's hardware store last fall to ask a single question about a KitchenAid mixer on display: What did the manufacturer call that color scheme? "Tangerine," replied Hogen. And with that, the woman walked out. It is a kind of customer interaction that happens often these days, said Hogen, who has run his store in Pierre, South Dakota's downtown historic district since 1983. People come in to look at a product, ask a question or two, then leave, presumably to search for it more cheaply online. Retailers even have a name for the practice: "show-rooming." "It's just a gut feeling that she's not buying it from me," he said.

One reason customers shop elsewhere, Hogen says, is that even when he can compete on price, he has to charge sales tax, which ups the ultimate price of his merchandise. The mixer, for example, normally has a \$399.99 price tag in Hogen's store, on top of which he has to charge \$26 in state and local sales taxes. Some online retailers sell the mixer at the same price or lower, with no sales tax and free shipping.

That sales tax differential is at the core of a case that will come before the US Supreme Court on April 17, and the stakes are high not only for store-keepers like Hogen, but also for online retailers, for state governments and for bargain-hunting consumers. The case stems from a South Dakota law passed in 2016 by legislators at the state capitol building a few blocks from Hogen's store that requires out-of-state online retailers to collect state sales taxes.

The state enacted the law knowing it would be challenged, due to a 1992 Supreme Court ruling in the case of Quill Corp v. North Dakota, which held that states cannot require retailers to collect sales taxes unless they have a "physical presence" in the state. Passing a law certain to draw fire was "the nuclear option," said Republican state Senator Deb Peters, a prominent supporter of the measure, but legislators considered it necessary as internet sales continue to rise.

After the law was enacted, the state preemptively sued four online retailers. Overstock.com Inc, Wayfair Inc and Newegg Inc contested the lawsuits, while the fourth company, Systemax Inc, decided not to. After losing in lower courts, South Dakota appealed to the Supreme Court, which announced in January it would hear the case.

The state will argue that the legal precedent dates back to the days of catalog sales and is no longer relevant in the internet age. A ruling in favor of South Dakota could funnel up to \$13 billion a year of new tax revenues into the coffers of affected US state governments, according to a 2017 federal government report. It would also make it harder for consumers to find deals online where they can avoid paying sales tax. Hogen is following the

Supreme Court action, but while a favorable ruling for the state might help him, he said, he knows a single court ruling cannot reverse the e-commerce trend. "If this sales tax thing goes through, it's not going to end internet shopping," he said. "That's here to stay."

'Physical presence'

The rugged, rural, Republican-led state of South Dakota is notoriously stingy when it comes to spending taxpayer dollars. It has no income tax and relies heavily on sales taxes for revenue. The state estimates it loses up to \$50 million a year in sales tax on internet purchases, which now account for 8.4 percent of sales nationwide, according to US Census Bureau data.

The new law requires out-of-state online retailers to collect sales tax if they clear \$100,000 in sales to South Dakota residents or have 200 separate transactions with customers in the state. Wayfair, Overstock and Newegg did not respond to requests seeking comment. Amazon.com Inc, the dominant internet sales company, has not taken a position in the legal battle and declined to comment for this story.

Amazon has already agreed to collect sales taxes in all 45 states that impose them. The company has not generally collected taxes for items sold on its website by third party vendors, which constitute about half of total sales on the platform, although two states have now enacted laws to require it to do so.

The South Dakota law does not directly affect some other large online retailers, such as Walmart Inc. and Macy's Inc, because they have brick-and-mortar stores in the state and so were already required to collect sales tax.

Other states have also wrestled with how to collect out-of-state taxes from e-tailers, including New York, which passed a law in 2008 that sought to stretch the definition of "physical presence" without running afoul of the Supreme Court precedent. The amount of money states stand to gain from taxing online sales is uncertain. A widely-cited 2009 study by the University of Tennessee, updated in 2012, estimated that \$23 billion a year in state and local revenue was being lost nationwide to internet commerce in 2009 and would increase every year. But data from states that have tried to capture online sales tax revenue suggest that number may be high.

In New York, for example, the state has said in court papers that between the 2008 passage of its law and February 2012, e-tailers remitted \$360 million in sales tax. The University of Tennessee study had estimated that, by 2012, New York could collect nearly twice that amount in a single year by applying state and local sales taxes to internet purchases. In fiscal 2017, South Dakota took in just over \$1.4 billion in sales taxes, according to the state's Department of Revenue, which accounted for 71.7 percent of the state's total revenue.

Only Washington state and Tennessee have a higher proportion of sales tax to total tax revenue, according to the Tax Foundation. Despite South Dakota's predictions of major gains, Governor Dennis Daugaard acknowledged in an interview that "it's really quite difficult to know" exactly how much additional revenue the state will gain if it wins at the Supreme Court. — Reuters

Crypto investors look past risks, flock to London

LONDON: Dozens of stallholders, pitching anything from a happy retirement to commercial property to the future of electronics, set up shop in central London last weekend to pitch their wares. The companies and their salesmen were not there to part ways with the actual product, however. They just wanted to encourage buying into the digital coin craze that is raising billions of dollars.

At what organizers claimed to be Britain's first large-scale "Crypto Investor Show", attendees were looking to get in on the next initial coin offering (ICO). The talk of Silicon Valley, ICOs are a mostly unregulated funding mechanism for start-ups to raise capital by creating and then issuing their own virtual coins or tokens. Last year, they raised a record sum as interest in cryptocurrencies like bitcoin surged.

"I came here to learn about ICOs. You have to do your research, but I would invest, it's the upcoming thing," said 30-year-old Shahzad Anwar, who installs electric charging points and had travelled down from the central England town of Solihull with his brother to attend. "To me, stocks and shares and bonds are over, they are done," he said, as attendees listened to a pitch at a nearby stall for an ICO wanting to raise tens of millions of dollars to build and race a supercar. Another promised to build a network of rest homes for the elderly. Regulators say ICOs are highly speculative and investors should be prepared to lose everything. Unlike stocks, most ICOs do not confer ownership rights in the underlying business, just the possibility that the tokens will be worth more in future. Supporters say ICOs are revolutionizing the capital-raising industry, a crowd-funding alternative that gives ordinary people the chance to invest in start-ups, normally the preserve of the venture capitalist elite.

From circulating on tiny online chatrooms a few years ago, cryptocurrencies and ICOs have moved to the mainstream, with public



TOKYO: Koichiro Wada (L), president of Japan's virtual currency exchange Coincheck, and board member Yusuke Otsuka bow at the beginning of a press conference in Tokyo on March 8, 2018. The hack of Coincheck — resulting in the disappearance of NEM cryptocurrency worth 530 million USD — was one of the largest of its kind, and prompted authorities to search the firm's office last month. — AFP

advertising common. Some companies have pushed back, however. Facebook said it would ban all crypto adverts because of the risks to investors. Twitter said it was taking measures to prevent cryptocurrency-related accounts from running scams on its platform.

General public

London regularly hosts conferences on blockchain, the technology underpinning cryptocurrencies, where tech wizards exchange ideas, but the London show was geared towards the general public as well as experts. The crowds arrived, some families for a day out, touring the stalls and listening to panelists. As well as marketing, there were sessions that discussed the risks.

Several attendees who worked in the industry said they were disappointed with the ICOs on offer, with staff hired for the day to hand out flyers and with little understanding of blockchain technology, or if it was even relevant to their idea. "Don't fall for some of the marketing out there ... [You have to ask] is it actually solving a problem or is it just making one up?" said Linda Leaney at Globcoin, which claims to be a stable cryptocurrency backed by global currencies and gold.

Apple, Google see reputation of corporates tumble

SAN FRANCISCO: Apple Inc and Alphabet Inc's Google corporate brands dropped in an annual survey while Amazon.com Inc maintained the top spot for the third consecutive year, and electric carmaker Tesla Inc rocketed higher after sending a red Roadster into space. iPhone maker Apple dropped to 29th from its previous position of No 5, and Google dropped from 8th to No 28. Apple had ranked No 2 as recently as 2016, according to the annual Harris Poll Reputation Quotient poll released on Tuesday.

The poll, conducted since 1999, surveyed 25,800 US adults from Dec 11 to Jan 12 on the reputations the "most visible" corporate brands.

John Gerzema, CEO of the Harris Poll, told Reuters in an interview that the likely reason Apple and Google fell was that they have not introduced as many attention-grabbing products as they did in past years, such as when Google rolled out free offerings like its Google Docs word processor or Google

Maps and Apple's then-CEO Steve Jobs introduced the iPod, iPhone and iPad. "Google and Apple, at this moment, are sort of in valleys," Gerzema said. "We're not quite to self-driving cars yet. We're not yet seeing all the things in artificial intelligence they're going to do."

Meanwhile, Amazon.com held on to the No. 1 spot, which it has held for five years with the exception of 2015, when it slipped to No 2. Gerzema attributed Amazon's ranking to its expanding footprint in consumers' lives into areas like groceries via its Whole Foods acquisition. Elon Musk's Tesla climbed from No. 9 to No. 3 on the strength of sending Tesla Roadster into space aboard a SpaceX rocket - despite fleeting success delivering cars on time on earth, Gerzema said. "He's a modern-day carnival barker - it's incredible," Gerzema said of Musk. "This 'The Right Stuff' attitude is able to capture the public's imagination when every news headline is incredibly negative. They're filling a void of optimism."

For its part, Facebook Inc's reputation



improved in the 2018 study, despite being the target of questions from US lawmakers about the role of social media in Russia's efforts to influence the U.S. presidential election in 2016. Facebook ranked 51st, its best showing since 2014 when it ranked 38th, the highest the firm ever ranked in the poll.

This year, film production company The Weinstein Co made its debut at 99th out of 100 on the list after more than 70 women accused co-founder Harvey Weinstein of sexual misconduct, including rape. — Reuters

Health

Dentist drills through stigma that hold back Indonesia's disabled

10 million people in Indonesia with some form of disability

MEDAN: Ten years ago, at the dental clinic Annita Foe runs in the Indonesian city of Medan, she watched a homeless, wheelchair-bound patient struggle to hoist herself into the chair. After giving a free check-up, the dentist asked what else she could do to help the woman, crippled by polio as a child. That simple question launched Foe on a personal mission to support people with disabilities and transform attitudes.

"I was shocked - I had never seen anyone like that before," said Foe, 53, who is vice president of Yayasan Surya Kebenaran International, a foundation that runs health clinics and provides other basic services for North Sumatra's poor. "She said, 'If you want to help, help my friends who don't have legs.'" Foe told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

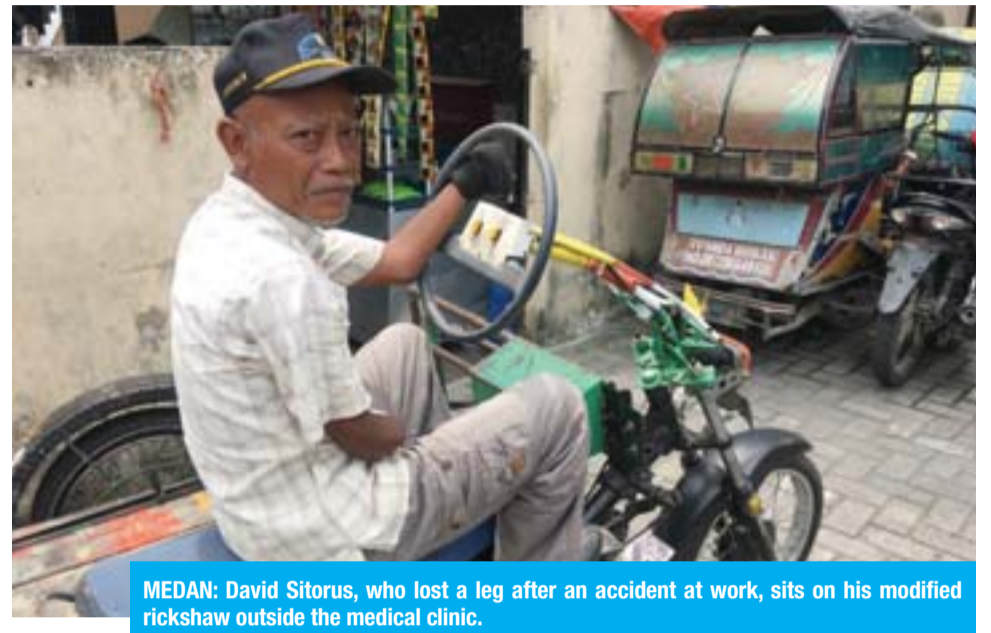
Since then, Foe has mobilized funding and expertise to provide some 8,000 prosthetic limbs to hundreds of people disabled by birth defects, disease or accidents across the country. She arranges visits by German and Dutch surgeons once a year who perform operations and help people in need of prosthetic limbs. She also organizes free healthcare, food aid and job training, and puts on social events that bring together people with disabilities in Medan.

There are about 10 million people in Indonesia with some form of disability, according to a 2017 report by Australia's Monash University. Many are still struggling to be accepted by a society that has largely failed to provide services and assistive devices to make life easier for the disabled. While attitudes vary across the archipelago, having a disabled child often brings shame and stigma, with some communities blaming a curse or bad luck due to past behaviour.

That can deter the parents of disabled children from registering the birth, said Irwanto, head of the psychology department at Atma Jaya Catholic University in Jakarta who goes by one name only. Some parents hide disabled children away in cramped rooms at home, while others are entrusted to orphanages or under-funded state-run institutions. With little in the way of community-based support, government rehabilitation centers for the disabled and mentally ill often suffer from



MEDAN: Dentist and charity worker Annita Foe (left) poses alongside David Sitorus outside a medical clinic. — Reuters photos



MEDAN: David Sitorus, who lost a leg after an accident at work, sits on his modified rickshaw outside the medical clinic.

overcrowding and undignified conditions. Patients are sometimes even beaten and kept in chains or stocks with no treatment or support, despite this being banned, several disability experts said.

Without a birth certificate or identity card, many disabled Indonesians cannot access public services like education and healthcare, and often fall into extreme poverty as adults. "I felt huge embarrassment, especially because of the way people looked at me," said David Sitorus, 43, who lost a leg in 1994 while working as a contractor for an electricity company. "It was difficult for me to adjust and earn a living."

Sitorus, who had a prosthetic leg fitted in 2009 with financial help from Foe's foundation, now drives a modified becak, a type of rickshaw, to earn money to support his wife and two daughters in Medan. "It was a happy and proud moment when I got my prosthetic leg," he said. "My self-confidence came back."

Indonesian attitudes to people with disabilities have slowly evolved over the past decade, said

Thushara Dibley, deputy director of the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre, who has researched the disability movement in Indonesia. In keeping with a global shift, Indonesians are now less likely to see disability as a problem to be overcome with

“ There are still significant challenges ”

medical treatment or charity, but as a condition with implications for social issues and rights, said Dibley, who has also run training for Indonesian disability activists.

"Although the situation for people with disabilities is far from ideal and there are still significant challenges ... the changes that have happened and the work done by advocates over the last decade is pretty phenomenal," she said. As part of this process, Indonesia ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2011. A new national disability law that revamped existing legislation was passed in 2016 with input from many activists.

The law ensures that the needs of the disabled are taken into account in all decisions made by government departments. It is now also mandatory for government institutions to have people with disabilities make up about 3 percent of their staff, said disability researcher Irwanto, who was left wheelchair-bound after a medical accident in 2003. Eva Kasim, a senior policy analyst at Indonesia's Ministry of Social Affairs, said implementation of the 2016 law was an "ongoing process" and would take time. The new terminology it employs

will help shift attitudes and improve rights for the disabled, she said. The ministry has helped establish an association for parents of children with disabilities so they can share knowledge and experiences. Meanwhile, a rapid response unit set up by the ministry is working with police and local authorities to stop mistreatment at state-run institutions, Kasim said.

Maintaining the involvement of disability advocates in policymaking at all levels is crucial, activists said. Many Indonesian towns and cities suffer from crumbling, under-funded infrastructure and transport networks, so introducing disabled access is a huge challenge. Where wheelchair ramps and elevators have been put in, they must be kept in good order, Dibley said. Wide pavements that are wheelchair-friendly and tactile paving for the visually impaired must not be taken over by street vendors, she added.

Activists also called for more funds to be allocated to education, which would allow more children with disabilities to enroll at local schools, breaking down stereotypes. — Reuters

CLINIC

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What's On

ACK hosting its 2018 Annual Career Fair



The Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) announces the hosting of its 2018 "ACK Career Fair" that will be held on March 19th and March 20th of this year on campus, in the Aviation Hangar from 10 am to 4 pm. The Fair will host more than 40 leading companies from different sectors in Kuwait in order to provide multiple networking, career and internship opportunities for ACK students and alumni. The event also, is open to the public.

ACK would like to thank all participating companies and especially the Platinum Sponsors, such as: Kuwait Finance House (KFH), National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), Boubyan Bank, Limak Insaat Kuwait SPC, Ooredoo Kuwait and the Gold Sponsors: Manpower and Government Restructuring Program, Schlumberger, National Aviation Services (NAS), Kuwait International Bank, AL Wazzan Catering Co, Jassim Transport & Stevedoring Co KSCC. (JTC).

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LOYAC concert for Al-Basri band



In collaboration with the National Council for Culture, Arts & Literature (NCCAL), LOYAC's Academy for Performance Arts (LAPA) recently organized a concert for the 'Al-Basri' band on their first visit to Kuwait. The concert was held at Abdul Hussein Abdul Redha theatre where the band performed a variety of Iraqi folkloric songs following playing the Kuwaiti folkloric song 'Ya Mal' as an overture. Speaking on the occasion, LOYAC's

chairperson, Fare'a Al-Saqqaq stressed that LAPA always takes part in activities organized by NCCAL to support them in presenting various forms of other cultures' creativity. She added that art has significant messages of awareness conveyed by artists.

On his part, the band leader, Dr Hameed Al-Basri expressed his joy for performing in Kuwait for the first time and thanked Kuwait, NCCAL and LOYAC for the opportunity. Al-

Basri band was founded in Baghdad in 1976. It performed several concerts in Baghdad and other Iraqi cities until it was re-founded in Yemen in 1979 then moved to Syria in 1985 where it recorded over 30 songs for the Syrian TV and Radio. The band also took part in several Arabic and international festivals in Lebanon, Libya, Cyprus, Russia, Germany, Austria, Sweden, Denmark, France and several Dutch cities.



TIES announcements

You are cordially invited to another session of our series about some prophets and messengers of Allah (SWT) tomorrow, March 15th, at 7:00 pm. In this class, we will discuss the transformation of people who believed in Ayyoub's message after his recovery, the appointment of Ayyoub's successor, and his death. We will elicit many important lessons from the events that unfolded after his recovery. We will also discuss the various types of vows, some misconceptions about them, the implication of failing to fulfill them, and some guidance on how to both avoid them and execute them once made. Finally, we will explore the pillars of worship, their benefits and

their impact on our psyche.

Arabic Club

TIES is creating a great opportunity for Arabic Learners to interact with native speakers. In these meetings, we will read and discuss books, practice drills, play language games, try food and watch short Arabic movie clips. The event is scheduled for Monday, March 19 from 10am-12pm.

Umrah and Madina Trip

The TIES Center is organizing a minor pilgrimage to Mecca and a visit to Medina from March 28-31 (three nights). The cost of 215 KD includes airfare to Jeddah and from Medina, bus transportation to Mecca and Medina, accommodation in a 5-star hotel walking distance from the Kaaba (breakfast included), and visa. Women under the age of 45 must have a mahrem.

KTPA celebrates International Women's Day



Kuwait Tamilosai Poets Association (KTPA) convened their 143rd monthly literary meet to celebrate International Women's Day on 2nd March at The Kohinoor Party Hall, Souk Al Sabah Area, Fahaheel-Kuwait. The Function began with the recitation of Tamil Anthem at 10 am in the hall re-named as "Arunthamizh Pulavar Avvaiyaar Pukazharankam" well decorated to remember and remind the glory of legendary ancient, renowned Lady Tamil Poet "Avvaiyaar".

KTPA's Medical wing Secretary-Nurse Josephine Robert presided over the meet keeping senior member Mohana Kavisay Sekar as front stager on the Dais. Custodian Committee Member Poet Vittukatti Masthan started the meeting with his impressive beginning note. President Robert delivered the welcome address and sang beautifully the theme song. Furthermore, the members enthralled the audience with their mind provoking poems and melodious sweet songs. Vice President- Engr Somasundaram explained the urgent needs to conserve water in his valuable speech. An awesome poem was recited

on "Natural resources" by Poet Aaroor Sivaraman.

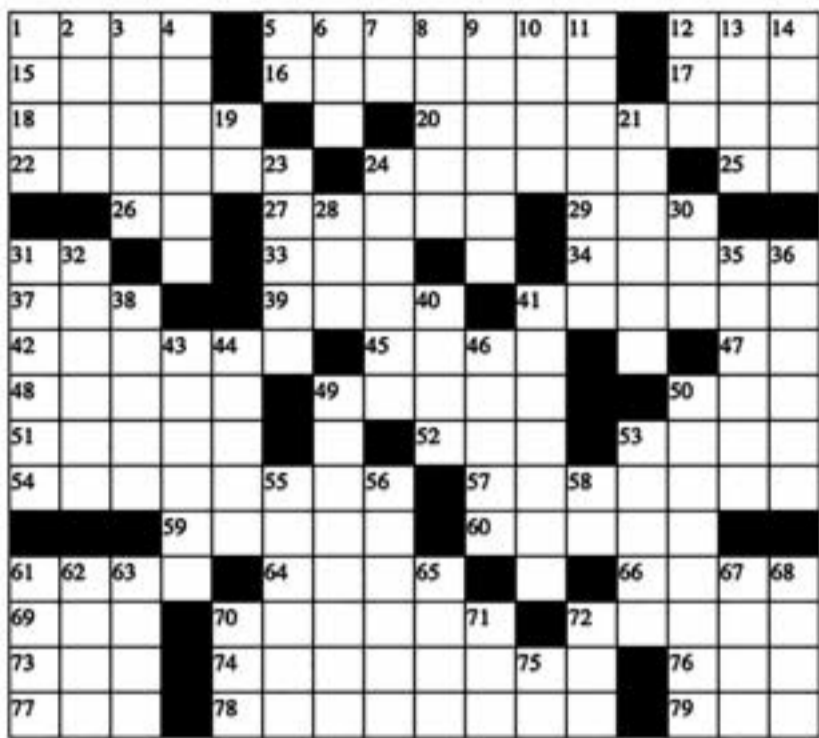
Prominent Kuwaiti Writer-Journalist Mrs Muna Al Fuzai, Columnist-"Kuwait Times" English Daily graced the function as The Chief Guest of Honor amidst the enthusiastic warm welcome by the gathering. She was felicitated with the award title "Valiant Victorious Writer" for her continuous courageous constructive contribution in the Media field. She was abundantly praised by all. Professor Mark, GUST University whom attended the function as co-chief guest was also honored in the event. All the lady members and girl children were dignified by Muna in the course, which imparted immense joy and wonderful feelings. A petition duly signed by KTPA's members to publish a weekly Tamil edition of newspaper in Kuwait, was requested and handed over to Madam Muna on behalf of over a lakh of residing Tamil Community. A majestic parade organized and enacted by all of the lady members carrying the Kuwaiti and Indian National Flags mesmerized the audience. The function concluded with a delicious lunch served to all by 2:30 pm.



On celebrating the 'White Coat Ceremony', Businessman Majdi Qambar and his wife Dr Amani Shu'aib extend their heartiest congratulations to their daughter, Nour who is a student in The Royal Surgeons College. They wish her all the very best.

Stars

CROSSWORD 1857



ACROSS

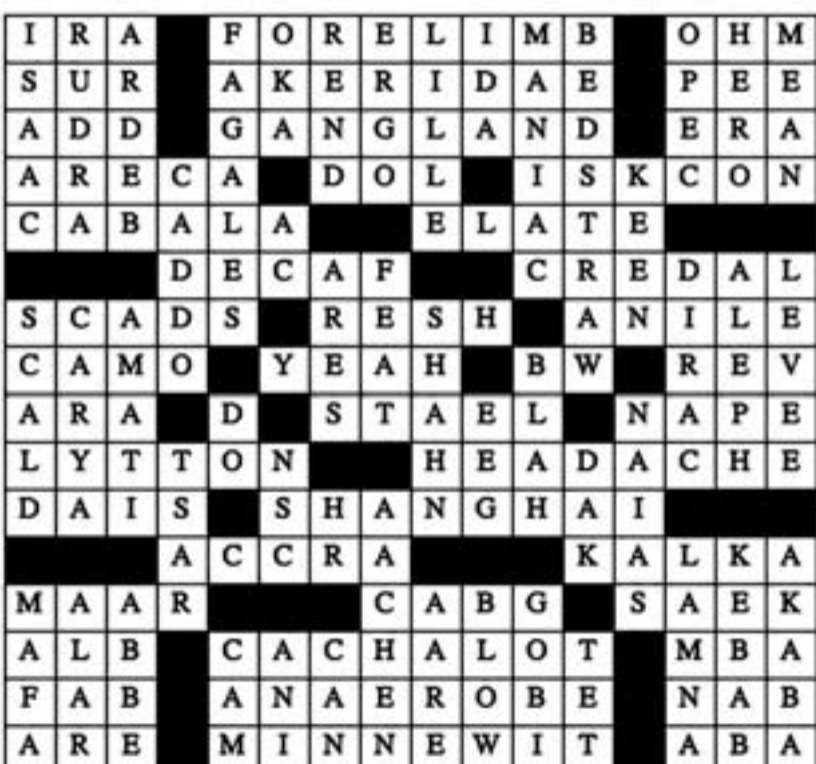
1. Acute lung injury characterized by coughing and rales.
5. The first of the Old Testament patriarchs and the father of Isaac.
12. A flexible container with a single opening.
15. A member of the Siouan people formerly living in the Missouri river valley in NE Nebraska.
16. A turner with a narrow flexible blade.
17. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
18. Italian violin maker in Cremona.
20. Capable of being shaped or bent or drawn out.
22. A state in the United States in the central Pacific on the Hawaiian Islands.
25. (Akkadian) God of wisdom.
26. An associate degree in nursing.
27. Green algae common in freshwater lakes of limestone districts.
29. Japanese ornamental tree with fragrant white or pink blossoms and small yellow fruits.
31. A state in midwestern United States.
33. Relating to or characteristic of or occurring in the air.
34. A bachelor's degree in literature.
37. An associate degree in applied science.
39. The basic unit of money in Ghana.
42. In or of the month preceding the present one.
45. Freedom from difficulty or hardship or effort.
47. The ratio of the circumference to the diameter of a circle.
48. Sound of any kind (especially unintelligible or dissonant sound).
51. The Teutonic god of thunder.
52. Black tropical American cuckoo.
54. Of or relating to or characteristic of Antigua or its people.
57. (zoology) Lacking a tail or taillike appendage.
59. The lofty nest of a bird of prey (such as a hawk or eagle).
60. American professional baseball player who hit more home runs than Babe Ruth (born in 1934).
61. Not only so, but.
64. South American armadillo with three bands of bony plates.
66. The arch of bone beneath the eye that forms the prominence of the cheek.
69. Belonging to or on behalf of a specified person (especially yourself).
73. Electronic equipment that provides visual images of varying electrical quantities.
74. A line that marks the side boundary of a playing field.
76. A cgs unit of work or energy.
77. Large brownish-green New Zealand parrot.
78. Of or relating to or resembling the physical or orbital characteristics of a planet or the planets.
79. A nucleic acid consisting of large molecules shaped like a double helix.

DOWN

1. A woman hired to suckle a child of someone else.
2. Avatar of Vishnu.

3. An Indian tree of the family Combretaceae that is a source of timber and gum.
4. 100 satangs equal 1 baht.
5. A very poisonous metallic element that has three allotropic forms.
6. (computer science) A measure of how densely information is packed on a storage medium.
7. An intensely radioactive metallic element that occurs in minute amounts in uranium ores.
8. Essential oil or perfume obtained from flowers.
9. A victory cheer.
10. By bad luck.
11. Tropical American feather palm having a swollen spiny trunk and edible nuts.
12. The Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the Dali region of Yunnan.
13. (usually followed by 'to') Having the necessary means or skill or know-how or authority to do something.
14. (Greek mythology) Goddess of the earth and mother of Cronus and the Titans in ancient mythology.
19. Being one more than one.
21. Denoting a quantity consisting of 12 items or units.
23. Small tropical American tree bearing edible plumlike fruit.
24. The chief official in charge of a prison.
28. Step on it.
30. Being one more than two.
32. A room or establishment where alcoholic drinks are served over a counter.
35. The capital of the state of Kansas.
36. Relating to or characteristic of a tribe.
38. An unbroken period of time during which you do something.
40. The United Nations agency concerned with atomic energy.
41. A tricycle (usually propelled by pedalling).
43. (Old Testament) The first of the major Hebrew prophets (8th century BC).
44. Become one.
46. The capital and largest city of Yemen.
49. A city in western Lithuania on the Baltic Sea.
50. (of persons) Seized and detained unlawfully, often for ransom.
53. Republic in northern Europe.
55. A nitrogen-containing base found in RNA (but not in DNA) and derived from pyrimidine.
56. Put (things or places) in order.
58. A colorless and odorless inert gas.
62. A republic consisting of 26 of 32 counties comprising the island of Ireland.
63. Small buffalo of the Celebes having small straight horns.
65. A rapid series of short loud sounds (as might be heard with a stethoscope in some types of respiratory disorders).
67. Acquire or gain knowledge or skills.
68. Primitive chlorophyll-containing mainly aquatic eukaryotic organisms lacking true stems and roots and leaves.
70. Of southern Europe.
71. Provided with artificial light.
72. (computer science) The smallest discrete component of an image or picture on a CRT screen (usually a colored dot).
75. A silvery soft waxy metallic element of the alkali metal group.

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Aries, a deep need and desire to be shown respect could cause you to do something you wouldn't normally do; remember that some people are only takers and can't give without resentment. A social event interests you but you could undergo problems if you accept. Going against the wishes of a controlling person could result in an unpleasant confrontation; be aware that you're the one in charge of your life. The energy of improvement is prominent at this time; this pertains to your environment as well as yourself. You're at your best when working with others who admire your practical views and effective methods. Someone complements your looks and fine belongings; this confirms that you have found the correct path to abundance and health. Aries.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Taurus, a certain circumstance threatens to block your journey of evolution and enlightenment. You learn a hard lesson involving someone older and very difficult. Even a feeling of being blocked doesn't stop the progress you make today; your ambitions and determination are most admirable. You become aware of someone trying to thwart you behind your back; this person soon understands you're a force to be reckoned with. You could feel stressed because someone doesn't appreciate your political or religious views; this person is well known for being a closed-minded fanatic. Looking back over your life shows you how far you have come; positive changes are empowering. You spend the evening with a person who loves and respects you. Taurus.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Gemini, an urge to travel or spend more time outside is indicated. Routine seems almost offensive and you work hard to find new, refreshing ways to do things. You're able to gain understanding about what makes something work. As a new cycle starts for you, intimacy and close relationships become more important; you become thankful for your connection to those you can trust with anything! You could find yourself being too concerned about what people think. You step in and make a bad situation better for those involved; you're a true friend. A group you're a member of holds a special event you find yourself deeply involved in; your talents and approach to things become valuable. Good food, fun and friends for you tonight. Gemini.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Cancer, taking a different path may not serve your best interests at this time; think this one over very carefully. Compassion for others is prominent and could lead you to help someone you barely know. Circumstances occur that demand you become more conservative. You could feel shy about confiding in someone that wants to help; listen to this and do what feels right! You consider a hardship a teacher and friend instead of feeling sorry for yourself; you have come to understand that this is a far more productive way of thinking. Someone seems petty, complaining about nothing. You want things to be balanced and not favoring one side; a boss or supervisor may disagree with this opinion. You accept an invitation to join friends in a fun outing. Cancer.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Leo, daydreams could be prevalent as you force yourself to work on a domestic task; you could actually come up with a fabulous new idea. Reality doesn't appeal to you until you learn something new about your situation; there's nothing like good news to snap you back into reality. You're able to complete something someone else started and gain the respect of someone on your team; enjoy this well-deserved praise. Someone who enjoys high drama tries to pull you into it; you make your feelings against this well known. Taking the high road means more to you now than ever. You're tapped into the feelings of someone you care for and this makes you happy. You decide to step out with someone new and discover some very interesting information. Leo.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Virgo, feeling stressed out seems prominent but you're able to deal with this by focusing on the tasks at hand. You accept an invitation from someone who always lifts your spirits. An interesting new recipe entices you enough that you go shopping for the required ingredients. A mentor contacts you regarding investments or another new endeavor you definitely want to know more about. You may decide to have a massage later when you just need a little help getting over the hump. You're forming a new attitude about, and opinion of, someone who's slowly winning you over; this could be to your advantage. Wanting more out of life leads you to a certain place for more information about getting it. You demand some time to yourself this evening. Virgo.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Libra, your opinions are highly respected and appreciated by someone you have gotten out of some trouble. A kind person comes to your rescue when you find yourself in need of something you can't take care of. Changes through the years have made you who you are now; you work really hard not to have regrets an event you attend let's people see who you really are; this is very complimentary for you! Taking a certain role at the right time creates positive energy. Learning something new holds your attention; this could indicate organic gardening or some other type of interaction with things that're alive. Nothing makes you happier than being able to broaden your knowledge. Someone tries to engage you in an argument about something controversial. Libra.



Scorpio (October 23-November 19)

Scorpio, you could feel a need to remove yourself from someone on an emotional level; this could be best for both parties. You have an opportunity to become involved in some major drama; you can avoid having anything to do with this if you choose. Your independence extends to the growth you're experiencing in spiritual areas; new beliefs aren't welcomed by those who're close-minded. An elder or someone in authority rubs you the wrong way causing insult and some pretty negative energy! Your mood is one of being talkative and causal, even when your work is involved. You're in a good place regarding an investment you researched heavily; this could indicate finances or investing time and energy. Relish your many successes tonight. Scorpio.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Sagittarius, you have a strong need to grow things; this could indicate gardening, children or pets. When you let a need be known, someone steps up; this person also benefits from your assistance. You figure out how to make your dreams come true. Making professional or domestic decisions should be held off on until a better time. You do a beautiful job representing your company and receive praise for a job well done. You experience a rare moment of self-acceptation. Looking at your own life and taking a different view proves interesting. A break in routine is indicated. Being kind to someone you dislike is hard, but you manage it. An exotic person from a foreign land captivates you. A peaceful evening spent with someone dear brings laughter. Sagittarius.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Capricorn, you long for the stimulation of new theories and ideas; you could find this in a most unexpected place. If you want drama, it's made available with a capital d! Keeping your distance from petty people and their issues is what you have wanted, isn't it someone would like to rattle your cage regarding politics, religion or some other controversial topic; you're able to keep your cool while standing your ground! You come across modern ideas as you research a certain topic; this could pertain to methods of spiritual or physical healing. As the day unfolds you see progress in the area of health. Someone shares a funny story. Plans for the evening come together easily. You're able to laugh, spend valuable time with like-minded people. Capricorn.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

Aquarius, your mind is on go; ideas, theories, possibilities of all kinds are abundant. The fast progress you make is impressive and you become more certain you have made a correct choice. You're happy listening to new ideas from many places about how to make things work better; like-minded people have a lot of power! Your journey up the career ladder is rising to new heights and you're finally beginning to feel secure; congratulations! You become certain you're capable of attracting any outcomes you desire. An interesting career move could become known; when it rains, it pours! You couldn't care less about opinions; cold, hard facts are your seek. A new invention that could change the lives of many is presented later tonight. Aquarius.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Pisces, your planning and budgeting skills shine brightly as a long-awaited event takes place; your exemplary representation of the company doesn't go unnoticed. Energy flows easily as you clearly explain things to interested parties; being involved on this level recharges your self-esteem and confidence. There may be a sensitive topic of conversation at home; if you avoid this remember that it keeps coming up and doesn't see to go away! Not reaching personal goals doesn't mean failure; every attempt is a step in the right direction. You unknowingly help someone that you have barely met; isn't it amazing how karma works without our being aware later, you try something new with a friend; new memories being made become treasures. Pisces.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Public Library

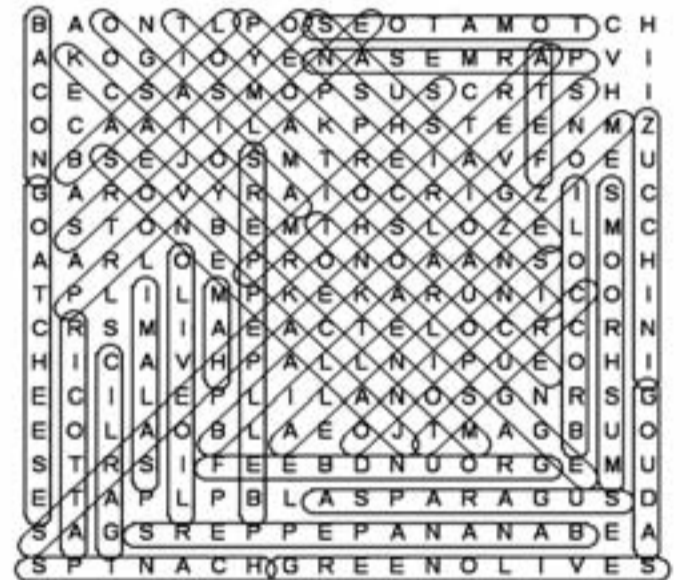
Find and circle all of the words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a secret message - a Henry Ward Beecher quotation.



- | | | | |
|-----------------|--------------|-------------|-----------------|
| APPLIED SCIENCE | ENCYCLOPEDIA | HAGAZINES | QUIET |
| ARTS | FICTION | MATHEMATICS | READ |
| BIOGRAPHY | FINES | MUSIC | RECREATION |
| BOOKS | GEOGRAPHY | NEWSPAPERS | RELIGION |
| BORROW | HARDCOVER | NOVELS | RENEW |
| BRANCH | HISTORY | PAPERBACK | RESERVE |
| CATALOG | INFORMATION | PERIODICALS | SHelves |
| CHAIRS | INTERNET | PHILOSOPHY | SOCIAL SCIENCES |
| CHECKOUT | LANGUAGES | PHOTOCOPIER | TABLES |
| COMPUTERS | LIBRARIAN | TECHNOLOGY | |
| DICTIONARY | LIBRARY CARD | | |
| DUE DATE | LITERATURE | | |

Yesterday's Solution

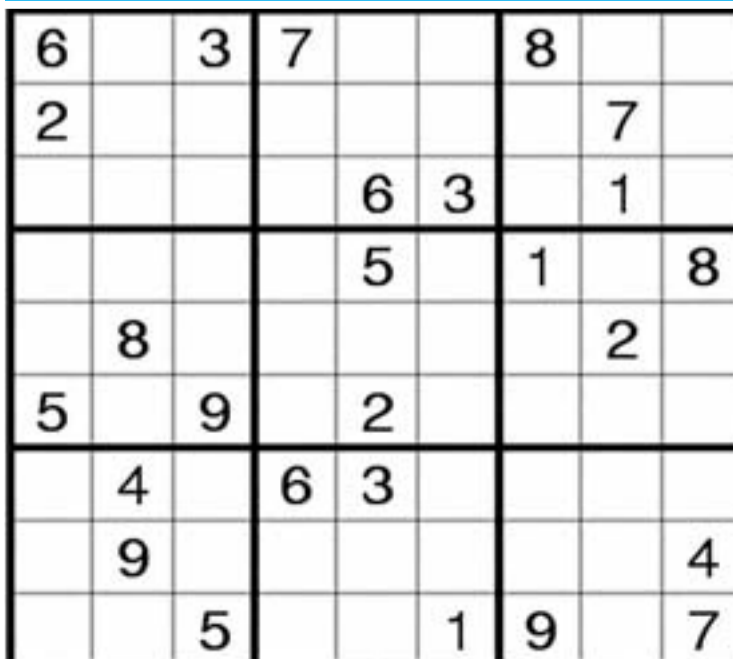
Pizza



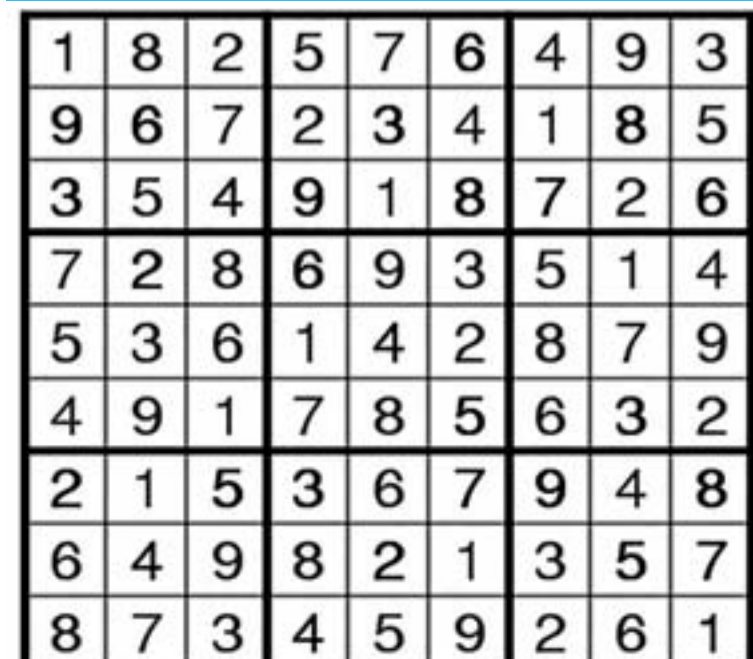
- | | | | |
|------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| ARTICHOKE HEARTS | CRUST | JALAPENOS | PROVOLONE |
| ASIAGO | EGGPLANT | MONTEREY JACK | RICOTTA |
| ASPARAGUS | FETA | MOZZARELLA | SALAMI |
| BACON | GARLIC | MUSHROOMS | SAUSAGE |
| BAVANA PEPPERS | GOAT CHEESE | OLIVE OIL | SHRIMP |
| BASIL | GOURDA | CYSTERS | SPINACH |
| BELL PEPPERS | GREEN OLIVES | PARMESAN | TOMATO SAUCE |
| BLACK OLIVES | GROUND BEEF | PEPPERONI | TOMATOES |
| BROCCOLI | HAM | | ZUCCHINI |

The hidden words are: ANCHOVIES CHICKEN MEATBALLS PINEAPPLE

Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution



Classifieds

Wednesday, March 14, 2018

Kuwait Times
 Now you can browse
www.kuwaittimes.net
 e-mail: info@kuwaittimes.net

STATE OF KUWAIT
 DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION
 METEOROLOGICAL DEPARTMENT



Tel: (+965) 161 Ext: 6819 - 6817
 Fax: (+965) 24348714
www.met.gov.kw



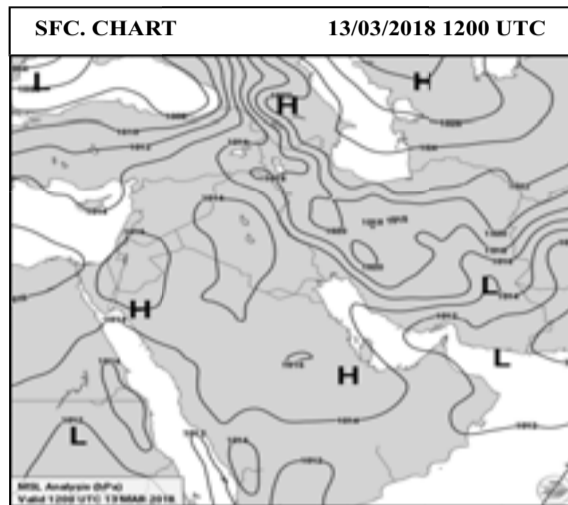
Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY NIGHT: Fair with light to moderate north westerly wind to variable wind, with speed of 06 - 28 km/h.

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

WEATHER WARNING No Current Warnings

STATION	MAX. REC.	MIN. EXP.
KUWAIT CITY	30 °C	20 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	30 °C	15 °C
ABDALY	30 °C	13 °C
BUBYAN	00 °C	00 °C
JAHRA	31 °C	14 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	30 °C	17 °C
SALMIYAH	28 °C	20 °C
AHMADI	00 °C	00 °C
NUWASIB	28 °C	16 °C
WAFRA	30 °C	13 °C
SALMY	28 °C	14 °C



4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Wednesday	03/14	Relatively hot	31 °C	15 °C	VRB-SE	06 - 26 km/h
Thursday	03/15	Relatively hot and Clouds will increase gradually with a chance for scattered light rain	32 °C	17 °C	S-SE	10 - 40 km/h
Friday	03/16	Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times causing rising	32 °C	18 °C	SE-NW	15 - 40 km/h
Saturday	03/17	Relatively hot	31 °C	17 °C	VRB-NW	15 - 35 km/h

TOMORROW PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	04:41
Sunrise	06:00
Zuhr	11:57
Asr	15:22
Sunset	17:55
Isha	19:12

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	29 °C
MIN. Temp.	19 °C
MAX. RH	50 %
MIN. RH	18 %
MAX. Wind	N 39 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

REQUIRED
 For a reputed Co.
 • A/C Mechanic - 1 No.
 • Electrician - 1 No.
 Both must having driving licence & min. 3 yrs experience in Kuwait.
 Salary depends after interview.
 Cont. No: 66579917
 between 8am to 4pm

EMERGENCY
 112
 Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is **1889988**

Embassy of India Kuwait
Annual Maintenance Contract (AMC)
 for computers/printers/scanners installed in this Embassy
 Embassy of India, Kuwait invites bids from interested companies from 1st to 22nd March, 2018 for Annual Maintenance Contract (AMC) for computers/printers/scanners installed in this Embassy. Details of scope of work, requirements etc. are available on Embassy's website www.indembkw.org under "Press Release"
 All offers should be sent in a sealed cover marked "Offer for AMC for Computers/Printers/Scanners - To be opened by addressee only" and addressed to the "Head of Chancery", Embassy of India, Daeya, Diplomatic Enclave, Arabian Gulf Street, Safat 13015, Kuwait.
 The offer must be delivered at the Embassy on or before 1200 hrs. on 22nd March, 2018.
 Embassy of India, Kuwait

Airlines			
American Airlines	22087425	Sri Lanka Airlines	22424444
	22087426	Egypt Air	22421578
Kuwait Airways	171	Swiss Air	22421516
Jazeera Airways	177	Saudia	22426306
Jet Airways	22924455	Middle East Airlines	22423073
FlyDubai	22414400	Lufthansa	22422493
Qatar Airways	22423888	PIA	22421044
KLM	22425747	Bangladesh Airlines	22452977/8
Royal Jordanian	22418064/5/6	Indian Airlines	22456700
British Airways	22425635	Oman Air	22958787
Air France	22430224	Turkish Airlines	22453820/1
Emirates	22921555	Aeroflot	22404838/9
Air India	22438184		

Directorate General of Civil Aviation Home Page (www.kuwait-airport.com.kw)
DIAL 161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Wednesday 14/3/2018				Departure Flights on Wednesday 14/3/2018			
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
JAI	572	Mumbai	00:05	AIC	976	Goa/Chennai	00:05
JZR	607	Kochi	00:10	JZR	528	Asyut	00:15
JZR	539	Cairo	00:50	JAI	573	Mumbai	00:30
KAC	102	London	00:50	MSC	406	Sohag	00:30
PGT	858	Istanbul	00:55	FDB	072	Dubai	00:35
THY	772	Istanbul	00:55	MSC	412	Asyut	01:00
DLH	625	Bahrain	01:45	JAI	571	Mumbai	01:05
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50	JZR	504	Luxor	01:30
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	JZR	142	Doha	01:45
QTR	1086	Doha	02:20	KAC	677	Dubai	01:50
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	KAC	285	Dhaka	01:55
KLM	446	Bahrain	02:30	KAC	417	Manila	02:00
WAN	548	KTM	02:40	KAC	363	Colombo	02:00
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	THY	773	Istanbul	02:30
KKK	1268	Istanbul	02:55	PGT	859	Istanbul	02:30
RJA	644	Amman	03:05	DLH	625	Frankfurt	02:45
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:10	AXB	396	Kozhikode	02:55
FEG	931	Alexandria	03:15	ETH	621	Addis Ababa	03:05
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15	UAE	854	Dubai	03:40
QTR	1076	Doha	03:50	QTR	1087	Doha	03:40
KAC	796	Madinah	03:50	KLM	446	Amsterdam	03:55
KAC	382	Delhi	04:15	KKK	1269	Istanbul	03:55
KAC	1544	Cairo	04:25	OMA	644	Muscat	03:55
KAC	418	Manila	04:25	THY	765	Istanbul	04:00
UAE	873	Dubai	04:25	MSR	607	Luxor	04:05
KAC	784	Jeddah	04:35	ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:05
KAC	284	Dhaka	04:50	MSR	613	Cairo	04:15
FDB	069	Dubai	04:55	LMU	5511	Cairo	05:00
JZR	609	Hyderabad	05:10	QTR	1091	Doha	05:05
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:20	KAC	205	Islamabad	05:20
JZR	143	Doha	05:25	QTR	1077	Doha	05:30
THY	770	Istanbul	05:25	FDB	070	Dubai	05:45
KAC	332	Trivandrum	05:40	KAC	303	Mumbai	06:05
KAC	344	Chennai	05:50	JZR	560	Sohag	06:25
KAC	302	Mumbai	06:10	JZR	786	Riyadh	06:25
KAC	362	Colombo	06:25	THY	771	Istanbul	06:50
KAC	678	Dubai	06:30	JZR	164	Dubai	06:55
WAN	338	Alexandria	06:40	RJA	645	Amman	07:05
KAC	206	Islamabad	06:50	GFA	212	Bahrain	07:15
BAW	157	London	07:10	KAC	167	Paris	07:35
FDB	053	Dubai	07:35	KAC	501	Beirut	08:00
KAC	384	Delhi	08:00	KAC	171	Frankfurt	08:00
KAC	358	Kochi	08:05	THY	6376	Dubai/Istanbul	08:10
UAE	855	Dubai	08:35	KAC	165	Rome	08:15
JZR	605	Ahmedabad	08:45	FDB	054	Dubai	08:35
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	09:05	KAC	787	Jeddah	08:40
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05	BAW	156	London	08:55
QTR	1070	Doha	09:10	KAC	117	New York	09:00
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	JZR	534	Cairo	09:10
IRC	6552	ABD	09:50	KAC	561	Amman	09:40
KIS	6032	Mashhad	10:00	ABY	126	Sharjah	09:45
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	KAC	671	Dubai	09:45
IRA	665	Shiraz	10:40	KAC	101	London	09:45
WAN	114	Bahrain	11:00	ETD	9882	SGN	09:50
AXB	890	Mangalore/Bahrain	11:10	UAE	856	Dubai	10:00
IRM	1188	Mashhad	11:15	KAC	515	Tehran	10:00
QTR	1074	Doha	11:20	KAC	541	Cairo	10:00
JZR	165	Dubai	11:30	ETD	302	Abu Dhabi	10:10
WAN	134	Doha	11:55	KAC	773	Riyadh	10:10
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55	KAC	617	Doha	10:15
IAW	157	Al Najaf	12:00	QTR	1071	Doha	10:20
RBG	553	Alexandria	12:15	KAC	155	Istanbul	10:25
KAC	286	Dhaka	12:35	FDB	056	Dubai	10:35
KAC	798	Taif	12:45	JZR	778	Jeddah	10:40
JZR	561	Sohag	12:45	ZAV	4101	QA	11:00
KAC	742	Dammam	12:50	GFA	214	Bahrain	11:25
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	IRA	674	Lar	11:40
MSR	610	Cairo	13:00	WAN	953	Baku	12:00
CLX	792	Luxembourg	13:20	JZR	776	Jeddah	12:00
KAC	774	Riyadh	13:40	MSC	404	Asyut	12:15
KNE	231	Riyadh	14:10	QTR	1075	Doha	12:30
SVA	500	Jeddah	14:15	JZR	606	Kochi	12:45
KAC	618	Doha	14:15	MSC	411	Asyut	12:55

Lifestyle | Gossip

Poldark's Eleanor Tomlinson announces debut album

Poldark star Eleanor Tomlinson has unveiled the first details for her debut album 'Tales From Home'. The 25-year-old actress - who has made her name as Demelza



Poldark in the BBC One period drama - has announced that her anticipated LP will be released in May this year, and will feature a number of folk inspired covers. Eleanor has worked with the show's soundtrack composer

Anne Dudley on the record, which will include fresh interpretations of tracks like Simon & Garfunkel's 'Homeward Bound', and 'Hushabye Mountain' from 'Chitty Chitty Bang Bang'. Dudley - who was awarded the Outstanding Contribution to British Music award at the 2017 Ivor Novello Awards - has produced the album, having worked with the likes of Sir Elton John, Tina Turner and Robbie Williams in the past. 'The Fully Monty' composer Dudley has previously recorded with the likes of Elton John, Tina Turner and Robbie Williams, and Eleanor has heaped praise on her work. She said: "I'm incredibly excited to announce the release of my debut album Tales From Home. To have the opportunity to perform some of my favourite songs with Anne Dudley's brilliant new arrangements has been wonderful, not to mention working alongside my brother Ross. I would like to thank the 'Poldark' fans who inspired me to make this album. Without their support, this would not have been possible." Fans first got a taste of her talent when she sang in the show, and Dudley previously hailed her skills as a singer. She said: "She's one of these people who when she sings it's so natural. Her parents are both very good singers so she has it in her genes."



Joan Armatrading announces 21st album

Joan Armatrading will release her 21st album 'Not Too Far Away' later this year. The 67-year-old singer songwriter has enjoyed a career spanning four decades, and she is set to bring out a new collection of original material on May 18. In a press release confirming the exciting news, the record was described as being able to "take the deeply personal and make it universal", and as a "love album of intensity". Featuring tracks like the haunting 'Cover My Eyes' and anthemic 'Any Place', the LP boasts the fact that once again Joan wrote, sung, arranged and produced it in its entirety, and played all instruments besides the drums, which she programmed. To support 'Not Too Far Away', Joan will embark on a 31-date UK tour later this year, kicking things off with two nights at the Milton Keynes Stables in September, and finishing the run on October 17 at the St Davids Hall in Cardiff. In 2007, Joan made history when her album 'Into The Blues' debuted in the top spot of the US Billboard Blues Chart, making her the first UK female artist to earn that achievement. The influential star - who has been nominated for three Grammys and two Brit awards - has been hailed by fans and critics alike in the past, and in 1996 she was recognized with an Ivor Novello Award for Outstanding Contemporary Song Collection.

Jack White hits out at DJ Khaled

Jack White has slammed DJ Khaled claiming he doesn't understand what he does. The 'Another Way To Die' rocker argued that the music producer's 2017 hit single 'Wild Thoughts' is simply a straight copy of Santana's 1999 hit 'Maria Maria' and Khaled has not actually done anything with it. Jack told Rolling Stone magazine: "It's just Santana's song in its entirety." The 42-year-old rocker added sarcastically: "It was nice of DJ Khaled to sit down and write and perform and record that - that was good of him! He's an incredibly talented man. There's no doubt about that. He does so much!" Khaled performed the track with Rihanna and Bryson Tiller at the Grammys in January, introducing the track by saying: "They said I'd never perform at the Grammys. They played themselves." Jack has now responded, explaining: "He said, 'They told me I would never be on the Grammys.' Really? Like, 'Hey, man, like, I know you're headed to lunch, but I just wanted to let you know that you'll never be on the Grammys!'" Khaled, 42, who is currently a celebrity ambassador for Weight Watchers, has previously addressed speculation as to what his role is in making music. He shared: "When I work with artists, I try to bring the greatness out of them. They're already great, but I want the greatest ... I'm in Quincy Jones mode." Jack also appeared to take a swipe at his ex-wife and former White Stripes bandmate Meg White in the interview. The 'Lazaretto' hitmaker said he "highly doubts" the White Stripes will ever reunite, adding: "In a lot of ways, The White Stripes is Jack White solo."



Casablancas says Ed Sheeran's success is 'cultural brainwashing'



Julian Casablancas has suggested Ed Sheeran's overwhelming success is a result of "cultural brainwashing". The Strokes front man - whose current band The Voidz will release their second album 'Virtue' on March 30 - took aim at the 'Perfect' hitmaker and pointed out that lots of talented, less mainstream artists may not get the attention they deserve. Speaking to Vulture, Julian hit back at the publication's reporter suggested a reason for Ed being more popular than lo-fi musician Ariel Pink was down to the former "trying to be pop". The 'Last Nite' singer argued: "Everything you're saying sounds 100 percent like cultural brainwashing. Because if you grew up in a world where Ariel Pink was popular then you would say 'I don't see how Ed Sheeran can be popular.' "People grow up with norms knocked into their heads. And I'm not trying to diss Ed Sheeran or any pop star. Ed Sheeran seems like a nice, cool guy and I have nothing against his music. Let him sell a billion records. "I'm just saying I don't understand why there can't be a world where Ed Sheeran gets 60 percent of the attention and Ariel Pink gets 40 percent. Now it's almost like Ed Sheeran gets 99.5 percent of it." Julian compared Ariel Pink to the late David Bowie, suggesting he "will be one of the best-remembered artists of this generation" even if people don't realize it just yet. He added: "My mission is the same as it's been from day one, which is to try to make something that has artistic value and bring it to the mainstream. Nothing about that has changed. "I strive to build a world where the Velvet Underground would be more popular than the Rolling Stones. Or where Ariel Pink is as popular as Ed Sheeran."

Hamill gets emotional seeing Yoda while filming Star Wars: The Last Jedi

Mark Hamill got emotional when he saw the Yoda puppet while filming 'Star Wars: The Last Jedi'. The 66-year-old 'Star Wars' legend reprised his role as Luke Skywalker in the eighth installment of the popular sci-fi franchise, and in a surprising scene, the little green Jedi Master makes an appearance and speaks with Hamill's alter-ego. And now, with the Blu-ray copy of the movie set for release at the end of the month, the Star Wars Legacy Twitter feed published a behind-the-scenes clip, which shows Hamill getting teary-eyed when he first sees Yoda being brought to life again by puppeteer Frank Oz. The clip is captioned: "Mark Hamill getting emotional upon seeing yoda is precious (sic)" While watching Yoda come to life, Hamill turns to filmmaker Rian Johnson, and says: "Oh my God. It's really getting to me. "I am still jealous he hasn't aged a day." Yoda - who has featured in six of the eight movies so far - was created by 'The Muppets' creator Jim Henson for the original movies but in two of the prequels, the character was created using CGI. The character died during 'Episode VI: Return of the Jedi' but was seen as a Jedi-Force ghost alongside Obi-Wan Kenobi and Anakin Skywalker at the end of the film and now in 'The Last Jedi'. He was pivotal in teaching Luke the ways of the Force and instantly became a fan favorite character. Yoda has also appeared in the animated TV spin-off series 'Star Wars: The Clone Wars'. Recently, John



Boyega who stars as stormtrooper-turned-Resistance fighter Finn in the new trilogy revealed he wants to see a Yoda origin story. Boyega said: "I think they need to go back to the Old Republic, how they do in the games, and discover what's going on there. "There's some cool stuff in the 'Star Wars' universe they can use, there's cool fan theories they can use that could be part of the movies too, I mean, why not? Personally, I want to see a Yoda origin story."

The Rolling Stones announce two new dates for No Filter tour



The Rolling Stones have announced two more UK dates for their 'No Filter Tour'. The rock group - which includes Sir Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Charlie Watts and Ronnie Wood - are set to wow crowds at St. Mary's Stadium, Southampton on May 29 and Ricoh Stadium, Coventry on June 2, adding to their previously dates announced for May and June in London, Manchester, Edinburgh and Cardiff. The tour has received an overwhelming response so far, with the group having already added a third London date. The 'Satisfaction' hitmakers famously played the Pyramid Stage at Glastonbury Festival in 2013 and also sold out two unforgettable nights at London's Hyde Park, 44 years after they played the landmark location for free. Guitarist Keith said: "It's such a joy to play with this band there's no stopping us, we're only just getting started really." Whilst frontman Mick added: "This part of the 'No Filter' tour is really special for the Stones. We are looking forward to getting back onstage in the summer and playing to fans in the UK and Ireland. It's always exhilarating going to cities we haven't played for quite a while and also some new venues for us like Old Trafford and The London Stadium." Drummer Charlie said previously: "The Stones audience is the glue that keeps us together. The best and most satisfying moment is when you are reaching the end of the show and they are all going nuts." With bassist and rhythm guitarist Ronnie adding at the time: "When I look out at the sea of people when we play all I can see is smiles. It's heart-warming and I'm glad we make people happy. Music makes me happy, and it makes them happy ... its infectious." Tickets for the two new dates of the tour - Southampton and Coventry - go on general sale on Thursday.

Chad and Carey Hayes are rewriting Die Hard 6 script

Chad and Carey Hayes have been hired to rewrite the 'Die Hard 6' script. The two scribes - who are best known for 'The Conjuring' - have been hired by Twenty-First Century Fox to rewrite the highly anticipated sixth installment of the popular action franchise starring Bruce Willis. The Tracking Board reports. Len Wiseman is still on board to produce and helm the new movie - which is currently titled 'Die Hard: Year One'. Although not much is known on the plot of the film, it has been dubbed a "part-prequel, part-sequel" and will see Willis reprising his role as the wisecracking police detective John McClane. Half of the movie will see McClane as a rookie police officer in the early 1980s, with the rest of the movie being set in the present day. Willis, 62, first starred as McClane in the 1988 classic movie - which was based on author Roderick Thorp's novel 'Nothing Lasts Forever' - and was last seen as the iconic character back in 2013 in 'A Good Day To Die Hard'. At the end of February, Willis revealed that the film is still going ahead and the script had been written, but it appears the Hayes brothers are working on a rewrite. Casting is already underway to find a younger McClane and Wiseman said last year: "The right casting for



this role is crucial. "Those bare feet have some very big shoes to fill." In the last film, McClane and his son Jack (Jai Courtney) had to complete a mission which took them into the heart of the Russian organized crime. Willis said at the time: "I'm really pleased to continue to be asked back to do other versions and other incarnations of 'Die Hard'. "The first one really is ... That's all there is. Everything else is just trying to be as good as that film." The franchise has five movies to date under the banner of the 'Die Hard' and have Willis has reprised his role in every film to date.

Lifestyle | Feature

In Colombia, birders find their version of Eden

Despite his small stature, 10-year-old Juan David Camacho has big dreams: pacing through Colombia's jungle with binoculars in tow, he aims to spot all the bird species his country offers. It's a mighty goal: Colombia boasts the greatest number of bird types on the planet — 1,920, or 19 percent of those on the planet—a veritable paradise for birders. "We leave very early with our cameras, binoculars and tripods and we watch the birds until around noon, in silence," says the young boy—continuing to scan the area to make sure he doesn't miss a rare specimen perched on a branch in the forests near Cali.

Since his father first took him birdwatching three years ago, his love of searching for feathered friends has come to rival even his passion for football, a favored pastime in Colombia. Once a month he journeys through the tropical forests surrounding Cali, the country's third largest city with some 2.5 million residents. Nestled in the heart of the southwest's massive green expanse, the Valle del Cauca, and the Andes Mountains, the area counts 562 species of birds, "much more than anywhere in Europe", according to expert Carlos Wagner.

War zones

Camacho has already seen 491, capturing 200 of them in photos, the boy told AFP. In February he delivered a lecture—"Three years of passion for birds"—at the International Bird Festival, which brings some 15,000 people to Cali. Too short to reach the lectern on the stage,



Luis Camacho (left) and Angela Marquez accompany their son, Colombian birdwatcher Juan David Camacho (center), 10, at the Cloud Forest of San Antonio, in the rural area of Cali, department of Valle del Cauca, Colombia. — AFP photos

teensy turquoise, yellow and anise-colored bird. Spotting a rare condor is young Camacho's current quest—the iconic bird of the Andes is dwindling in numbers, making it hard to sight. Once he has traversed all of Colombia, the boy wants to expand his birding universe to other countries, he says—adding that he aspires, of course, one day to become an ornithologist. — AFP



A White-necked Jacobin (*Florisuga mellivora*) is photographed at the Cloud Forest of San Antonio.



Two Buff-tailed coronets (*Boissonneaua flavescens*) are photographed at the Cloud Forest of San Antonio.



Colombian birdwatcher Carlos Mario Wagner, 40, looks at a bird guide book, at the Penas Blancas forest in the rural area of Cali, department of Valle del Cauca.

including 18 hummingbirds," said the 66-year-old woman with a smile. She says 1,000 visitors per year come to her La Conchita finca, or rural holiday estate.

'Magic!'

Further up on the mountain, at the Alejandria finca, clouds of hummingbirds in a dizzying spectrum of colors flutter among red saucers of sweet water, while others feast on bananas placed strategically on bamboo platforms. A French family from Amiens, north of Paris, marvels at the spectacle: "In our northern plains, trees have disappeared because of intensive farming," says Marc Bulcourt, 62, a retired nurse. "We see fewer and fewer birds, but here it's magic!" A multicolored tanager, one of Colombia's 79 native bird species, zips over.

"Any observer wants to see it at least once before dying!" says Wagner, pointing to the



A Flame-rumped tanager (*Ramphocelus flammigerus*) is photographed at the Cloud Forest of San Antonio.



A booted racket-tail hummingbird (*Chlorophanes spiza*) is photographed at the Cloud Forest of San Antonio.

he grabbed the microphone to discuss the expeditions he has made with his parents, a computer scientist and a lawyer. Huge swaths of Colombia's territory remain to be explored: for decades they have been deemed too dangerous to travel because of the country's drawn-out armed conflict. An ongoing peace process with former FARC guerrillas has birders like Wagner hoping access will someday be improved.

The 40-year-old expert, who heads the bird festival in Cali, says the variety of ecosystems in the area—ranging from mountainous to tropical—allowed a great diversity of species to evolve. Wagner grew up in the surrounding countryside near the San Antonio forest, site of the first large-scale ornithological expedition in the area, which New York's Natural History Museum carried out in 1910.

Bird tourism

Threatened by deforestation, this 900-hectare (2,225-acre) Eden was ranked as an "Area of Importance for Bird Conservation" in 2004 by BirdLife, a major British non-profit. But because Colombia did not legally recognize the designation, there was no guarantee it would be respected, said Wagner. Along with other birders and ecologists, he is working to sensitize residents in the area of the importance of preservation, no small feat. "We are great romantics, but farmers have needs: they cut

down trees to cultivate," he said.

And though Colombia is a bird kingdom, observation tourism is poorly developed. The government, however, is growing aware of the potential source of income: in the future the tourism ministry projects nearly 15,000 observers might descend on the Latin American country per year to birdwatch, bringing in \$9 million. Most birders traveling to Colombia currently originate from the United States, Canada, Argentina and the United Kingdom. In the San Antonio forest, a dozen places and guides already welcome observers, at a rate of 15,000 to 20,000 pesos (approximately five to 6.50 dollars) per visit.

Olga Gomez, who raises rabbits, has transformed her small one-hectare farm into a bird paradise, complete with flowers to seduce winged visitors. "We've seen up to 25 species,



A Blue-winged Mountain Tanager (*Anisognathus somptuosus*) is photographed at the Cloud Forest of San Antonio.



A Green Honeycreeper (*Chlorophanes spiza*) is photographed at the Cloud Forest of San Antonio.



A Brown Violetear hummingbird (*Colibri delphinae*) is photographed at the Cloud Forest of San Antonio, in the rural area of Cali, department of Valle del Cauca, Colombia.



A Purple-throated Woodstar (*Calliphlox mitchellii*) is photographed at the Cloud Forest of San Antonio.



Colombian birdwatcher Carlos Mario Wagner, 40, uses binoculars at the Penas Blancas forest in the rural area of Cali, department of Valle del Cauca, Colombia.





Traditional Malaysian honey hunter Zaini Abdul Hamid fixing a ladder for harvesting bee-nests atop a giant Tualang tree in the greater Ulu Muda forests in Sik, northeast of the Malaysian state of Kedah. — AFP photos



Traditional Malaysian honey-hunters sorting honeycombs collected from bee-nests from atop a giant Tualang tree.



Traditional Malaysian honey hunters offering Maghrib prayers before harvesting bee-nests from atop a giant Tualang tree.



A traditional Malaysian honey-hunter squeezing honeycombs to collect honey on a makeshift table in the greater Ulu Muda forests in Sik, northeast of the Malaysian state of Kedah.



An empty bucket to be filled with harvested honey from bee-nests atop a Tualang tree.



Traditional Malaysian honey hunter Abdul Samad Ahmad carrying wood to make ladder for harvesting bee-nests from atop a giant Tualang tree.



Traditional Malaysian honey hunters Zaini Abdul Hamid (right) and Abdul Samad Ahmad (left) travelling on a boat across the Pedu lake to harvest bee-nests in the greater Ulu Muda forests in Sik, northeast of the Malaysian state of Kedah.

Malaysia's honey hunters defy angry bees to harvest treetop treasure

On a moonless night deep in the Malaysian rainforest, two men perched precariously on high branches use a smoking torch to draw thousands of bees from a treetop hive, braving the angry swarm to collect their prized honey. The honey hunters, as they are known, are rag-tag groups of villagers who head to remote corners of the jungle every year in search of the rare nectar, hidden in towering tualang trees. "This is the real thing," said Abdul Samad Ahmad, 60, who has been harvesting honey in this way for more than 20 years.

"There's a lot of nutrition in this honey. You can make it into medicine, for your cough or cold." Like New Zealand's manuka honey, also hailed for its supposed medicinal qualities, Malaysian tualang honey is expensive, fetching 150 ringgit (\$38) a kilo—a huge amount for people from poor, rural communities. But the generations-old practice faces myriad threats, from environmental destruction and falling bee numbers to a lack of interest among the young. The die-hard hunters remain optimistic—for them, there is no greater buzz than climbing trees 250 feet (75 meters) tall to gather honey made by bees gorged on sweet nectar from exotic jungle flowers.

'Sting until your body is swollen'

The honey-collecting season in northern Malaysia's Greater Ulu Muda forest runs from February to April, when giant honey bees arrive from other parts of Asia to make their hives in the trees that stretch high above the rainforest canopy. On a recent trip, Abdul Samad and six others travelled far into the forest, boarding two small boats and sailing across a lake to reach a tualang. They nailed branches up its trunk a few feet apart to create a makeshift ladder, replacing old ones from the previous year. As night fell, after layering up and donning thick jackets, the group lit vine roots twisted together to create a smoking torch.

They clambered up the tree, hitting the torch against the trunk as they approached a hive. A flood of embers showered below, and a team member called out to the bees: "Come down, black sweet, come down." A swarm of bees rushed out, chasing the sparks of light-granting the hunters precious moments to cut through the hive and fill a bucket with chunks of honeycomb. The men worked through the night, slowly moving around the tree's many hives and only stopping just before dawn, having collected 43 kilograms (94 pounds) of honey. The hunters were stung numerous times but continued working, insisting they are used to the pain.

One of the group, Zaini Abdul Hamid, said he and his fellow hunters are not aware of any deaths resulting from the risky pastime, "but if you're in the wrong place, at the wrong time, the bees will sting you until your body is swollen".



A period of twilight as traditional Malaysian honey hunters fix a ladder for harvesting bee-nests atop a giant Tualang tree.

Vanishing forests

Demand for tualang honey exceeds its limited supply, and the bounty is split equally among the group, who sell it in their village or to dealers from out of town. None of those on the recent expedition were younger than 45, with some in their 60s, and they said younger people from their villages have no interest in taking up honey-hunting. "They're not brave," said Mohamad Khairi Mohamad Arshad, while Zaini lamented that the younger generation "prefer to play with their gadgets—we asked them to come, but they're not interested".

The hunters said it was common to see four to five groups from a single village harvesting from tualang trees in the 1960s, but these days there are far fewer. The number of bees in the Ulu Muda forest also appears to have fallen in recent years, with heavy logging regularly reported and some blaming the destruction of their natu-

ral habitat. The problem may also be global. Experts have long been sounding the alarm about declining honey bee populations worldwide, blaming climate change and disease as well as habitat destruction.

No comprehensive studies have been done on bee populations in Ulu Muda, but Makhdzir Mardan, a bee expert from Universiti Putra Malaysia, said that on an expedition into the forest in 1983 he had spotted 128 hives on a tree, while now you could expect to find 40 at most. As they trekked deeper into the jungle, the honey hunters mourned the loss of the bees' habitat, particularly the flowers they feed on. "The places where the bees look for food are disappearing," said Mohamad Khairi Mohamad Arshad, 50. "If there aren't a lot of flowers, then the bees will not come." — AFP

Empty shoes, empty schools: US gun law activists plan two days of theater

A makeshift memorial made up of 7,000 pairs of shoes will take shape on the lawn of the US Capitol yesterday, as gun control activists dramatize the number of children killed in the United States by gunfire since the 2012 Sandy Hook school massacre. The monument is being built on the day before a massive, nationwide walkout by students

demanding tougher laws on gun ownership, part of a campaign that emerged after the killing of 17 students and staff at a Florida high school a month ago.

"This is really about putting the human cost of refusing to pass gun control at the doorstep of lawmakers," said Emma Ruby-Sachs, deputy director of Avaaz, a US-based civic organization that planned the shoe memorial. The Capitol is the home of the US Congress. Today's #ENOUGH National School Walkout, organized by the activists who helped plan the Women's March in Washington for the past two years, will begin at 10 am local time (1400 GMT). Students across the country will walk out of their classrooms for 17 minutes to commemorate the 17 victims who lost their lives after the Feb 14 shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

The massacre was the deadliest school shooting since 20 children and six adults were shot dead at Sandy Hook elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut, more than five years ago. The walkout

has won the support from many school districts and civil rights organizations, including the American Civil Liberties Union. More than 2,500 walkouts are scheduled across the country, according to the organizer's website.

Some schools will allow students to participate and have encouraged them to exercise their free speech rights under the First Amendment of the US Constitution. A few have threatened to suspend students if they disrupt class by leaving. "When students protest at schools, our school staff will respond appropriately and allow our students to be heard," said Robert Runcie, superintendent for public schools for Broward County, Florida, where Parkland's Marjory Stoneman is located.

About 1,300 people younger than age 18 are killed by gunfire in the United States every year, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Dozens of colleges and universities across the country, including at least three Ivy League schools, have said their application processes will not consider dis-

ciplinary action taken against high school students who engage in protests.

At the Capitol yesterday, activists and volunteers will begin at dawn placing 7,000 pairs of donated children's shoes side by side in a trapezoid shape to commemorate those who have died since the Newtown massacre. Donors include actresses Susan Sarandon and Bette Midler, and talk show host Chelsea Handler. The memorial is reminiscent of a monument on the Danube River near the Hungarian Parliament in Budapest commemorating thousands of people, including Jews, killed by fascists in the 1940s. Many Canadian cities have marked the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women on December 6 with similar "shoe memorials." — Reuters



In this file photo taken on October 21, 1991 (from left to right): Victor Skrebneski, Audrey Hepburn and Hubert de Givenchy pose together at the Galliera Museum in Paris during a reception honoring 40 years of Givenchy's fashion.—AFP photos



In this file photo taken on July 11, 1995 French fashion designer Hubert de Givenchy, flanked by his secretary Jeannette (left), acknowledges applause at the end of his Fall/Winter 1995/1996 high-fashion collection show in Paris.

HEPBURN AND GIVENCHY, THE FRIENDSHIP THAT CHANGED FASHION



In this file photo taken on January 28, 1982 French aristocrat and fashion designer Hubert de Givenchy poses with the Golden Thimble award of French Fashion in Paris.

Theirs was one of the most beautiful friendships in fashion history—yet the life-long partnership between the film star Audrey Hepburn and the fashion designer Hubert de Givenchy almost never happened. The aristocratic French creator, whose death at 91 was announced Monday, at first refused to dress the young Belgian-born actress when they met in 1953, he told AFP. Only when she took him to dinner and charmed him, did he relent.

"When Audrey came to me to ask me to make her dresses for the film 'Sabrina', I didn't know who she was and I thought she was Katharine Hepburn," he said. "Then she arrived, so graceful, young and bubbly and dressed like a young girl would be today," he said of her two years ago as an exhibition about their friendship, "To Audrey with love", opened in the Dutch capital, The Hague.

"She was wearing cotton trousers, ballerinas and a T-shirt revealing her belly button, with a Venetian gondolier hat in her hand," he recalled. Having only launched his own label the previous year, "I was in no position to take on such a big wardrobe for 'Sabrina' and I told her that I couldn't dress her," saying that he did not have enough "petites mains" seamstresses in his studio. But Hepburn would not take no for an answer, and invited him to dinner, "which was a really surprising thing for a young well-brought-up woman to do in those days."

Final gift

Then over the course of the meal, Givenchy, who was only two years her senior, fell under her charm and he ended up asking her to drop round to his Paris studio the next morning. "She persuaded me and how wise I was to accept," Givenchy told AFP. Opposite Humphrey Bogart and William Holden in "Sabrina" Hepburn wore a Givenchy ivory ball gown with black embroidered flowers that has gone down in film history. From then on she asked the designer to make all the clothes for her films, and in 1954, the year "Sabrina" was released, she wore one of Givenchy's dresses to accept her best actress Oscar for "Roman Holiday".



In this file photo taken on October 3, 1997 French fashion designer Hubert de Givenchy (center) poses for photographers together with ballet artists in Bolshoy theatre in Moscow.

"Audrey's style came with a really different silhouette, really of the moment," Givenchy said of his muse, who he dressed right up to her death in 1993. Their friendship was based on much more than clothes, however, and Givenchy said he never tried persuade her to wear anything other than "what she liked and what she could wear." "His are the only clothes in which I am myself. He is far more than a couturier, he is a creator of personality," Hepburn once said of her friend, who was at her bedside at the end of her life in Switzerland. In those final days he gave her a navy quilted coat, telling her, "When you are unhappy, wear this and it will give you courage."—AFP



In this file photo taken on February 2, 1952 French aristocrat and fashion designer Hubert de Givenchy waits backstage during the 1952 spring/summer collection in Paris.



In this file photo taken on October 21, 1991 French designers Yves Saint-Laurent and Hubert de Givenchy (right) pose together in the Galliera Museum during a reception honoring Givenchy for his 40 years in fashion.



In this file photo taken on November 23, 2016 French fashion designer Hubert de Givenchy poses at the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague during a retrospective of the designer's work at the exhibition To Audrey With Love.



In this file photo taken on July 04, 1957 French fashion designer Hubert de Givenchy reads a magazine aboard a flight in Beauvais.



In this file photo taken on June 7, 2011 (left to right) Spain's Queen Sofia, Spanish minister of culture Angéles González-Sinde and French fashion designer Hubert de Givenchy attend the inauguration of the Cristóbal Balenciaga museum in the northern Spanish Basque village of Getaria.



In this file photo taken on May 24, 2002 French fashion designer Hubert de Givenchy and Somali-born model Iman pose for photographers as they arrive at the amFar (American Foundation for Aids Research) benefit party in Mougins, near Cannes.



In this file photo taken on May 20, 2010 French fashion designer, aristocrat and founder of Fashion label Givenchy, Hubert de Givenchy poses before a speech at Oxford University Union, Oxfordshire.



In this file photo taken on March 01, 1987 French fashion designer Hubert de Givenchy cuts printed material with scissors at the office of his fashion house in Paris.

Lifestyle

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 14, 2018



A surfer looks at Northern Lights on March 9, 2018 in Utakleiv, northern Norway, Lofoten islands, within the Arctic Circle. — AFP

Met Opera sacks legendary conductor Levine after abuse probe

New York's Metropolitan Opera announced Monday it fired legendary conductor James Levine, for decades the face of its orchestra, after finding "credible evidence" that he sexually abused younger musicians. The leading US opera house had already suspended Levine in December after allegations first became public against him. Levine guided the Met's orchestra for 40 years as music director.

The Met said it has "terminated its relationship" with Levine, who retired in 2016 amid failing health but until the scandal had remained a frequent presence as a conductor. "The investigation uncovered credible evidence that Mr. Levine had engaged in sexually abusive and harassing conduct both before and during the period when he worked at the Met," the opera house said in a statement. The three-month investigation concludes a spectacular fall from grace for a musician often hailed as one of the top US conductors of his generation. Fittingly perhaps, his final Met appearance was conducting Verdi's "Requiem" in December.



In this file photo US conductor James Levine and the Boston Symphony Orchestra perform Hector Berlioz's 'Damnation of Faust' during a rehearsal at the Salle Pleyel in Paris. — AFP

The opera house said it was "committed to ensuring a safe, respectful and harassment-free workplace for its employees and artists." The Met, however, also absolved itself of blame after criticism that it could have acted before longstanding allegations about Levine made headlines amid the growing spotlight in the United States on sexual abuse by powerful men. "Any claims or rumors that

members of the Met's management or its board of directors engaged in a coverup of information relating to these issues are completely unsubstantiated," it said.

The Met, which like many major US music institutions has a constant challenge of shoring up its finances, has acted quickly to move past the taint of Levine. It has brought forward the appointment of Levine's successor, youthful French Canadian Yannick Nezet-Seguin, who will become music director with the upcoming season.

Allegations of sex cult

Levine, 74, was said by younger musicians to have sexually abused them when they were vulnerable students and he was the charismatic visiting instructor, with most cases dating decades ago. In an investigative piece published this month by The Boston Globe, former students at the Cleveland Institute of Music described Levine as a cult-like figure who not only coerced them into sex but controlled their lives.

Quoting former students, the newspaper said that Levine would pressure them to cut off ties with the outside world and pledge loyalty to him as he led meetings that involved everything from studying opera scenes to anonymous sex.

"I thought it was sex for my improvement, sex to make things better," violinist Albin Iffsch, who was a 20-year-old student when he said the abuse took place in 1968, told the newspaper. "Obviously that's not what it was, but we were led to believe that." Levine's downfall began in December, when the New York Post reported on a 2016 police report in which a teenager alleged decades of abuse by the conductor starting when the victim was 15 at the Ravinia Music Festival near Chicago—one of a number of classical institutions that has since cut ties with Levine.

The conductor in an earlier statement called the allegations against him "unfounded," saying he was not an "oppressor or an aggressor." Levine is one of the most prominent musicians to see his career ended in the #MeToo era, initially triggered by the furor over alleged widespread abuse by Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein. Other musicians who have quit or lost positions over alleged abuse include hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons and Charles Dutoit, until recently the principal conductor of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in London. But some in the music industry expect more cases to come out, seeing how rock culture in particular is so intertwined with sexual inhibition. — AFP

Glenstone to become one of America's biggest private art museums

Glenstone, the museum of modern and contemporary art just outside Washington, announced Monday a massive expansion set to open October 4 that would make it one of America's largest such private institutions. Tucked away on more than 230 acres (93 hectares) of rolling meadows and woodlands in Potomac, Maryland, Glenstone first opened to the public in 2006 with funding from billionaire Mitch Rales and his wife Emily.

The former fox hunting estate's natural setting is meant to encourage contemplation for visitors, who can marvel at the art and architecture for free. Dubbed the Pavilions, the new 204,000-square-foot (18,950-square-meter) building designed by architecture firm Thomas Phifer and Partners features a ring of gallery rooms arranged around a large central water court.

An extra 100 acres of landscaping by PWP Landscape Architecture include two recently installed outdoor sculptures. It's a dramatic expansion from the original, 30,000-square-foot building that increases gallery space by nearly six times and can boost visitor capacity from 25,000 to 100,000 per year, though the number of daily visitors will be limited to ensure a more intimate experience with the art. Nestled in the landscape, the Pavilions looks like a traditional hill town rising out of the earth.

"Throughout this transformation, we've maintained a single mission: to create a seamless integration of art, architecture and landscape and make it available free of charge to

all who wish to visit," Glenstone founder Mitch Rales said in a statement. Visitors can get a sneak peek at the ongoing construction in May—the exact opening date is unknown for now—with a show featuring work by Paris-born French American artist Louise Bourgeois, known for her giant metal spiders that have spun their webs across the globe.

'Experience unlike any other'

That show will take place in the original building—the Gallery. The entire museum will be closed in September before the grand reopening the following month. At the Pavilions, 13 different spaces will present works from the Rales collection. While some of the rooms will show single-artist installations, others will include temporary exhibitions of pieces by various artists.

Among those set to participate in the inaugural installations are Bourgeois, Michael Heizer, Roni Horn, On Kawara, Brice Marden, Lygia Pape, Martin Puryear and Charles Ray. Most of the work was created after World War II and spans a wide range of media, from paintings and photographic prints to sculptures and installations. "We've worked carefully to create a visitor experience unlike any other, providing each visitor with an unhurried, contemplative engagement with the artworks," said Emily Wei Rales, the museum's co-founder and director. — AFP



In this aerial shot taken in November 2017 and released to AFP on March 12, 2018 the Glenstone Museum Gallery and Pavilions are seen in Potomac, Maryland. — AFP