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## Assembly committee says taxes not a priority issue

Expats blamed for rampant graft • Move to stiffen Israel boycott law



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is presented with a memento during the graduation ceremony of the 44th batch of police officers of the Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences yesterday. — KUNA (See Page 3)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly committee responsible for setting priorities for the Assembly yesterday said it has not placed a government-sponsored draft law for imposing taxes among its priority issues. Head of the committee MP Ahmad Al-Fadhil said the committee believes that the draft law on taxation, part of the Gulf unified taxation system, shouldn't be placed on the committee's agenda.

The government wants to impose the five percent value-added tax (VAT) as part of the GCC framework agreement. Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates have already started imposing the tax from the start of this year. A majority of lawmakers oppose any form of austerity measures that the government wants to impose to raise non-oil revenues to finance the budget deficit resulting from low oil prices.

MP Safa Al-Hashem yesterday said the imbalance in the demographic structure in favor of expatriates is the main reason

for rife corruption in the country. Hashem was commenting on statements by the prime minister acknowledging that corruption is widespread in the country and is undermining the image of Kuwait abroad. The lawmaker reminded the premier that the population imbalance and the appointment of "strangers" are a major cause of corruption in the country.

She called for the need to draw a roadmap for the employment of Kuwaitis over the next several decades. There are 3.1 million expatriates in Kuwait against 1.4 million citizens. Hashem has made a number of proposals to tax expatriates for all public services, including for "walking on the street", making it difficult for them to obtain a driving license, preventing them from receiving medical treatment at public hospitals and many others.

Separately, five lawmakers yesterday submitted amendments to the Israel boycott law in which it bars any contacts or visits to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories.

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## Saudi Arabia turns to nuclear power; Qatar focuses on self-reliance

DUBAI: Saudi Arabia is fast-tracking an atomic energy program to reduce its dependence on oil, but concerns over nuclear proliferation in the Middle East could put a damper on its ambitious plans. The atomic policy, which limits nuclear activities to peaceful purposes, was approved by the cabinet on Tuesday just days before powerful Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman visits Washington. Saudi Arabia, the world's largest exporter of oil, has framed its nuclear project as driven purely by economics.

The kingdom is struggling to meet fast-rising energy demand and crude prices remain far below their peaks reached before the 2014 market crash. Saudi Energy Minister Khaled Al-Faleh said in October that the nuclear program would start by building two reactors, each producing between 1.2 and 1.6 gigawatts of electricity. But the atomic ambitions of the key US ally and regional power are coming under scrutiny in Washington at a time of growing tensions between the US and Iran over Tehran's nuclear program.

The Saudi cabinet says its nuclear program will be in "full compliance with the principle of transparency" and meet nuclear safety standards "in accordance with an independent regulatory and supervisory framework". The country has accelerated plans to build 16 nuclear reactors over the next two decades, according to officials and analysts, at a cost of around \$80 billion. The reactors are expected to generate 17.6 gigawatts of electricity - 10 percent of the country's power needs - by 2040.

Riyadh is expected to shortlist next month two to three international firms out of five bidders from China, South Korea, Russia, France and the United States, according to Abdulmalik al-Sabery, a consultant in the business development department at King Abdullah City for Atomic and Renewable Energy (KACARE). In December, one firm will be selected to build the first two nuclear reactors, Sabery told Bloomberg News in January. Construction of the reactors will start next year although they are not expected to begin operating before 2027, Sabery said.

Energy consumption in Saudi Arabia has been rising at more than five percent per year although growth slowed in 2017 after the government cut subsidies and hiked prices.

Electricity consumption is expected to double over the next 15 years, reaching 120 gigawatts by 2032, Abdullah Al-Shehri, governor of Saudi Arabia's Electricity and Co-generation Regulatory Authority, told AFP.

Continued on Page 11

## World mourns scientist, cultural icon Hawking

LONDON: World dignitaries, celebrities and academics yesterday mourned Stephen Hawking, the British physicist who died aged 76 after a cosmic career in which his mental genius transcended his physical disability to probe the secrets of the universe. Propelled to stardom by his 1988 book "A Brief History of Time", an unlikely worldwide bestseller, Hawking's genius and wit won over fans from far beyond the rarefied world of astrophysics. As a scientist, he earned comparisons with Albert Einstein and Isaac Newton.

Hawking died peacefully at his home in the British university city of Cambridge in the early hours of yesterday morning.

A university source told AFP that his health deteriorated around Christmas time. "We are deeply saddened that our beloved father passed away today," Hawking's children, Lucy, Robert, and Tim said in a statement. "He was a great scientist and an extraordinary man whose work and legacy will live on for many years."

Queen Elizabeth II sent a message of condolence to Hawking's family, Buckingham Palace said. Prime Minister Theresa May praised the scientist as "a brilliant and extraordinary mind" on Twitter. Tearful well-wishers lined up at the University of Cambridge's Gonville and Caius College, where Hawking was a fellow for more than five decades, to sign a book of condolence. "So many people have come to pay tribute to #StephenHawking we've increased the books of condolence to four. Many beautiful and moving messages," the college wrote on Twitter.

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BEIJING: This file picture taken on Aug 18, 2002 shows world-renowned physicist Stephen Hawking delivering a lecture. — AFP (See Pages 9, 23 & 31)

## Merkel elected to fourth term; Amir sends best wishes

BERLIN: German Chancellor Angela Merkel, bruised by half a year of post-election coalition haggling, was yesterday narrowly confirmed by parliament to her fourth and likely final term at the helm of Europe's biggest economy. Lawmakers in Berlin's glass-domed Reichstag voted 364-315 with nine abstentions for Merkel, who was then formally appointed by President Frank-Walter Steinmeier before taking the oath of office.

The secret ballot suggested 35 MPs of her new right-left coalition bloc voted against Merkel, giving her a thin nine-

vote margin above a simple majority that opposition parties were quick to label a "rocky start" for a spent and joyless governing alliance. "There were more dissenting voices than I expected," said Andrea Nahles, the designated head of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), which long struggled with whether to once more govern in Merkel's shadow.

HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday congratulated Merkel on being elected for a fourth consecutive term. In a cable

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BERLIN: German Chancellor Angela Merkel is sworn in by the President of the Bundestag Wolfgang Schaueble during the government's swearing-in ceremony at the Bundestag yesterday. — AFP

## Britain expels 23 Russian diplomats over spy poisoning

LONDON: British Prime Minister Theresa May yesterday expelled 23 diplomats and suspended high-level contacts with Russia including for the World Cup, saying her government found Moscow "culpable" of a nerve agent attack on a former spy. May said she would be pushing for a "robust international response" when the UN Security Council was to meet later in New York to discuss the attack on Sergei Skripal and his daughter on March 4.

Russia has repeatedly denied any involvement and its London embassy warned that May's response was "totally unacceptable and shortsighted". May told parliament that Russia had failed to respond to her demand for an explanation on how a Soviet-designed chemical, Novichok, was used in the English city of Salisbury. "There is no alternative conclusion other than that the Russian State was culpable for the attempted murder of Mr Skripal and his daughter," she said. "This represents an unlawful use of force by the Russian State against the United Kingdom."

In measures drawn up at a meeting of her national security council earlier Wednesday, May announced that 23 Russian diplomats believed to be undeclared intelligence officers must leave Britain in a week. She suspended all planned high-level contacts, which includes revoking an invitation for Foreign Minister

Sergei Lavrov to visit but said she did not want to break off relations entirely.

May also confirmed that neither members of the royal family or ministers would attend the football World Cup in Russia later this year. And she outlined fresh measures against people travelling to or living in Britain who were responsible for violations of human rights or planned "hostile activities". NATO allies, including the United States, have expressed their support for Britain following the first offensive use of a nerve agent in Europe since World War II.

Along with the UN Security Council meeting in New York, EU Council President Donald Tusk indicated that the issue would be on the agenda of next week's summit of the bloc's leaders in Brussels. May said on Monday that it was "highly likely" that Russia was

Continued on Page 11

# Ghanem, Japanese PM discuss ties, global issues at Tokyo meeting

## Kuwaiti MPs stress deep-rooted ties with Japan

**TOKYO:** Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe both agreed yesterday on the importance of bolstering ties and coordination on matters of global significance. This affirmation came during the two officials' meeting, which was held in the Japanese capital Tokyo.

Prime Minister Abe and Speaker Ghanem, who is heading a parliamentary delegation on an official visit to Japan, also touched on efforts to boost relations within the economic, commercial, and investment domains. The two officials also discussed vital Middle East issues such as the situation in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq. The situation in the Korean Peninsula, counterterrorism efforts, and issues related to the energy sector were also focused upon during the discussions.

### Always ready

Meanwhile, Ghanem met with Chairman of Japan Business Federation for Middle East and North Africa Yasushi Kimura. During their meeting, Yasushi Kimura praised the keen Kuwaiti policies to improve bilateral relations. He commended the Kuwaiti generous human-

### Speaker meets Japan Business Federation's Chairman

itarian aids after the devastating Tsunami, which hit Japan seven years ago.

Ghanem stressed that Kuwait will always be ready to cooperate with Japanese companies on a larger scale especially in the expansive developing plans and futuristic visions of Kuwait in the upcoming 20 years. He confirmed the readiness of the National Assembly to ratify and pass legislations that would help in facilitating and strengthening economic partnership with Japan. Other issues of cooperation in trade, investment, energy, and others were discussed during the meeting.

### Political consensus

The Kuwaiti parliamentary delegation praised the political consensus between Kuwait and Japan in various fields. This came in a press statement by Kuwaiti



Speaker of Kuwait's National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem and his delegation meet with members of the Japan Business Federation for Middle East and North Africa.

MPs following several official meetings that brought together Speaker Ghanem and his accompanying parliamentary delegation with the Japanese Prime Minister, President of the House of Representatives, Chairman of House of Counselors and top Japanese officials. MP Nayef Al-Mirdas Al-Ajmi said that the meetings focused on ways of cooperation and issues of common concern.

He added that Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem had invited his Japanese counterpart to visit Kuwait to strengthen parliamentary relations between the two parties. Meanwhile, MP Abdulwahab Al-Babtain said that the meetings were fruitful, adding that both sides have reached an agreement on a working paper which will be implemented and applied during international forums,

especially the Inter-Parliamentary Union meetings.

In the meantime, MP Mohammad Al-Dallal said the visit is of great importance to the two countries at the level of political, economic and parliamentary relations. He said the Kuwaiti people feel much appreciation and gratitude to Japan for its historical and noble stances in supporting Kuwait's right and resolutions of international legitimacy. He stressed Kuwait's desire to involve Japan in the development plans and projects.

Ghanem, who arrived in Tokyo on Monday on a four-day visit, is accompanied by a delegation, which includes MPs Naif Al-Merdas, Osama Al-Shahin, Khaled Al-Shatti, Khaled Al-Otaibi, Majed Al-Mutairi, Mubarak Al-Harees, Mohammad Al-Dallal, Abdulwahab Al-Babtain and Nasser Al-Dosari. — KUNA



TOKYO: Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem meets with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in Tokyo, Japan yesterday. — KUNA



KUWAIT: President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov is welcomed during his visit to Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiyyah by the Institute's general supervisor Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, and First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. — KUNA

## Turkmen President visits several institutes before leaving Kuwait

**KUWAIT:** President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov visited several institutes in Kuwait before concluding his official visit to the country. The President visited Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiyyah where he was received by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and the institute's general supervisor Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.

President Berdimuhamedov also visited the Arabian Horse Center (Bait Al-Arab) where he was received by

Director of the Center Sheikh Sarah Al-Fahad Al-Sabah and head of the board of trustees Al'a Al-Roumi. Head of the honorary delegation Amiri Diwan Advisor Khaled Youssef Al-Flajj accompanied President Berdimuhamedov in both visits. The Turkmen leader concluded his visit to Kuwait and was seen off at the international airport by Advisor Flajj.

Meanwhile yesterday, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah held talks with his Turkmen counterpart Rasit Meredov at Bayan Palace. The talks tackled means to bolster bilateral relations and cooperation in various domains as well as the latest regional and international developments of common concern. The meeting comes on the sidelines of President Berdimuhamedov's visit to Kuwait. The meeting was attended by ambassador of Kuwait in Turkmenistan, Turkmen ambassador in Kuwait and several foreign ministry officials. — KUNA



President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov is seen during his visit to the Arabian Horse Center (Bait Al-Arab) where he was received by Director of the Center Sheikh Sarah Al-Fahad Al-Sabah.

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Local

# Amir attends, patronizes police officers' graduation ceremony

Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and top state officials attend the graduation ceremony of the 44th batch of graduating police officers from Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attended and patronized yesterday the graduation ceremony of the 44th batch of graduating police officers from Saad Al-Abdullah Academy For Security Sciences. His Highness the Amir was received at the headquarters of the academy by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah and a number of senior officials at the Interior Ministry.

The ceremony began with the presence of His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad

“Embarking on a new path to protect Kuwait”



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

Al-Sabah, officials from the constitutional court, and National Assembly, as well as family members of graduate officers. Interior Ministry undersecretary for training Major General Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah delivered a speech during the ceremony, commending the graduating officers on their efforts.

Sheikh Faisal said that the officers were now embarking on a new path to protect Kuwait and its people. The Kuwaiti leadership, headed by His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah, expects the best from the officers, said the security official who affirmed that the country's security forces were always ready to lay their lives in service of Kuwait.

He thanked the Kuwaiti leadership for its never-ending support to the nation's police force, adding that the new batch of graduates will become a valuable asset to the Interior Ministry. After the speech, His Highness the Amir began to distribute certificates to graduating officers. His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince were also presented with gifts from the academy. —KUNA



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a memento during the ceremony.



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



Deputy Commander of Kuwait National Guard Sheikh Meshaal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (left) and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah arrives at the venue.

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## Local

# Gulf Bank completes Bootcamp training as part of AJYAL development program

## Intensive week-long training aimed to equip and empower staff members



**KUWAIT:** Further building on its youth development initiatives, Gulf Bank recently completed the Bootcamp training as part of the bank's 4th generation of the AJYAL Development Program. The intensive week-long training for the bank's staff, took place at the Movenpick Al-Bida'a, and was led by several top international trainers and coaches.

The AJYAL Development Program is an iconic initiative developed by the bank with the aim to nurture young Kuwaiti talents early in their career, to develop them into "holistic bankers" and prepare them for future leadership positions at the bank. To enrich the overall training experience, Gulf Bank recently added a mentorship component to the AJYAL Development program, whereby individuals from the program's first three gen-

erations, are involved throughout the overall training programs to share their experiences and provide ongoing counsel and guidance to staff trainees.

The Bootcamp training focused mainly on developing skills such as self-discipline, team building and creative thinking, in addition to unleashing the team spirit that allows staff members to better communicate amongst one another, all in an effort to empower each individual to grow within the Gulf Bank ranks.

Commenting on this initiative, Jennah Al-Mattar, Assistant General Manager for Human Resources at Gulf Bank said: "We strongly believe that every individual has the potential to achieve greatness if provided with the appropriate training, guidance and nourishing environment. At Gulf Bank, this is what we strive to continuously



provide and build on for all the bank's staff members. In this particular instance, the Bootcamp training is targeted towards staff members that have been with the bank for one to three years.

It is our duty as a responsible financial institution to ensure that our employees are well trained and equipped with the skills required to take on higher positions and more extensive roles within the bank and to build on their ever-evolving potential."

"I would like to congratulate each of the staff trainees for successfully concluding this intensive training section of the AJYAL Program, and to thank each trainer, mentor and organizer for contributing their valuable time and knowledge to add further value to their experience," Mattar added.

Apart from the educational sessions and reading requirements, the Bootcamp training also included sports activities early in the day to promote overall health and wellness, in addition to social functions that allowed the staff trainees to meet and engage with Gulf Bank's General Management Team.

Earlier in December, Gulf Bank celebrated the graduation of 15 trainees who completed the 3rd generation of the AJYAL program which comprised of a six month of intensive training program that is designed to cover every facet of banking, from the basic principles of banking; financial economics; banking laws and regulations; corporate and retail finance, to more focused areas such as risk management, anti-money-laundering, banking ethics and customer orientation.

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## KIB sponsors 2018 GCC Forum for Volunteer Groups

**KUWAIT:** In line with its continuous efforts to support civic society organizations and environmental initiatives, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) sponsored the 2018 GCC Forum for Volunteer Groups, which was recently organized by the Environment Public Authority (EPA) under the title "Our volunteering leads to our development."

This environmentally-focused forum called for the creation of a collaborative network between civic society organizations and volunteer groups focusing on environmental protection and ecological conservation in Kuwait and across the GCC. In addition to providing a platform for knowledge transfer and expertise exchange, the forum aimed to promote an open discussion about various environmental issues impacting the GCC. The forum also sought to encourage a collaborative spirit between volunteer groups, actively calling for groups and individuals to work towards sustainable development within the field. In addition to showcasing a number of case studies and success stories

from various volunteer groups from around the region, the forum also called for the development of new environmental projects and the active engagement of students in environmental conservation efforts.

Manager of the Corporate Communications Unit at KIB, Nawaf Najia, said: "Our sponsorship of this forum stems from our belief in the importance of supporting groups and initiatives that promote environmental awareness on a national scale, and across all segments of society. We are always keen on supporting local civic society organizations that are working towards preserving and protecting the environment. We truly wish all the best to those who are passionately and tirelessly working towards protecting the environment and achieving sustainable development, dedicating both their financial and human resources to make this happen."

Najia also noted that under the umbrella of its comprehensive social responsibility program, KIB always seeks to support initiatives that promote active civic involvement within the local community, and is keen on participating in programs which enable youth to play an effective and impactful role in social development. "Youth volunteer work is a crucial element when it comes to building a brighter future for the nation, not just when it comes to the environment, but across all areas as well," he concluded.



## KRCS launches donation drive for Syrians in Ghouta

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) plans to hold a fundraising campaign at the Avenues Mall today to raise donations for civilians trapped in the besieged Syrian enclave of Ghouta. The three-day endeavor urges citizens and residents alike to contribute to this noble cause, the Kuwaiti charity's Secretary-General Maha Al-Barjes said yesterday, pointing out that the people in Ghouta are facing disastrous humanitarian conditions. The KRCS official added that the donation drive resumes an aid campaign the charity has previously launched at its



Maha Al-Barjes

headquarters for the people of Ghouta. On the campaign, she said it encapsulates the humanitarian obligation incumbent upon the Kuwaiti people to stand by their Syrian brethren, amid the misery the people of Ghouta are living in. —KUNA

Local

# Panel seeks to have Kuwaitis dominate all jobs: MP Saleh

## Consultant to phrase tendering documents for railway project

By A Saleh

**KUWAIT:** Head of the parliamentary employment committee Khalil Al-Saleh said the committee has set a plan to 'Kuwaitize' all public sector jobs by 2023 by replacing expatriate employees with Kuwaitis as well as reducing the number of expat employees in the private sector and keeping only those with actually needed specialties.

"We have already started putting the plan into practice and will not stop until we see Kuwaitis dominate all jobs," he added, urging various bodies responsible for employment - the Civil Service Commission, the Public Authority for Manpower, Kuwait Investment Authority and the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development - to work on resolving the problem of unem-

ployment. Saleh urged various ministries to cooperate with the ministry of education in resolving this problem through matching graduates' specialties with the needs of the local labor market. He also urged government bodies concerned with the plan to report to the parliament biannually.

### Railway project

The Public Authority for Roads and Land Transport plans to appoint a consultant in the third quarter of this year to phrase all tendering documents needed for the railway project, said the authority's board member Saud Al-Hadbah, noting that the first phase of the railway project will run from the Saudi borders to downtown Kuwait City, and that the project will be executed according to public-private-partnership (PPP) conditions. Hadbah said the project's civil works will be

given to the selected consortium including developers, contractors and financiers. Notably, the first phase's estimated cost is around KD 900 million and is expected to be launched by 2023. The second 43-km long phase will run further to the north, reaching the Iraqi borders.

### Shadadiya university

Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Khaled Al-Roudhan said it is expected to hand over the Shadadiya university project on Oct 15, 2018. He also stressed that the project's main contractor was responsible for the delay, not the industry authority, as a result of relocating the site to avoid obstructing the GCC railway route as well as the 18 months the Municipal Council took to approve the project's blueprints. Roudhan explained that the contractor had

asked to extend the time needed to conclude all the project works till Oct 15, 2018.

### Public projects

The government has adopted new measures to be taken to avoid delaying public projects under construction or planning, well-informed sources said. The sources added that the government urged all contractors to list the obstacles they face in executing their projects, suggest solutions and set a schedule to overcome them and continue executing the projects. "Concerned companies are required to do so within a month to avoid being subjected to very strict legal measures," the source explained, noting that the expected penal measures include deducting a sum from the contract's value, in addition to more penalties in case of further delays.

## No explosives found with 'stock exchange' woman

By Hanan Al-Saadoun, Meshaal Al-Enezi and Agencies

**KUWAIT:** The interior ministry commented on a video clip that went viral on social media yesterday, showing a woman standing outside the Kuwait Stock Exchange's building while holding a sign with words written on it suggesting that she held a bomb. The woman - a Kuwaiti citizen - was apprehended and taken to Sharq police station for questioning. No explosives were found with the woman.

### No extradition for maid's killer?

The Lebanese public prosecution made a recommendation to keep the case of Nader Essam Assaf - who is accused of killing Filipina maid Joana Daniela Demafelis - in Lebanon, and rejected Kuwait's request for extradition. The prosecution said as Assaf is Lebanese, the case is under the jurisdiction of Lebanon and recommended not to hand him over. Al-Rai reported yesterday.

### Public funds' squandering

Minister of Interior Sheikh Khaled Jarrah Al-Sabah said Tuesday he referred to Public Prosecution reports by State Audit Bureau, parliament and the interior ministry's investigation committee over alleged squandering in ministry's hospitality provision. Sheikh Khaled, also Deputy Prime Minister, said he made the decision after the reports concluded there was an alleged public fund squandering as well as forging official documents.

Sheikh Khaled said a number of senior employees were suspended until end of interrogation, the ministry said in a statement. He said the ministry conducted an internal investigation after the State Audit Bureau concluded there were violations in hospitality provision in fiscal years 2014-15 and 2015-16. The ministry investigation reached same results concluded by Audit Bureau and Parliament's Budget and Final State Committee, that there was an alleged waste in public fund, explained the minister.

### Basement fire

Fire broke out in the basement of a building used as a carpentry shop. Firemen carried out rescue operations and tackled the blaze. They found the fire was in some wood and foam that spread to the first floor. Residents were evacuated and power was cut off. No injuries were reported.

### Food inspection

Food and nutrition authority inspectors closed down three fishmongers' outlets at Salmiya market for displaying foul fish for sale, said the authority's director Essa Al-Kandari, adding that inspection managers in various governorates will be reshuffled. Speaking after an inspection tour of Hawally markets, Kandari said inspectors aim to boost the awareness of all vendors dealing with food items. He also noted that the tour included seafood restaurants, Hawally slaughterhouse, a number of restaurants and the fish and the vegetable markets at Salmiya market.

### Insult

The comprehensive court sentenced Abdelaziz Al-Fadhli to eight months in jail with KD 1,000 to suspend the sentence for insulting former health minister Dr Ali Al-Obaidi. From Feb 24, 2016 until Sept 23, 2017, Fadhli - through his social media account called "Sheikh" - kept insulting Al-Obaidi as a public employee.

### Smuggling foiled

Kuwait International Airport customs officers arrested a British man for attempting to smuggle 32 liquor bottles on arrival from her country. She was sent to concerned authorities.

### Thieves caught

Farwaniya detectives arrested two men, Kuwaiti and Syrian, for stealing items from camps. Detectives received several complaints about the theft of power generators and other items from spring camps, so investigations were carried out, and both suspects confessed to the thefts. They were sent to concerned authorities.

### Doctor assaulted

Nacem police charged a juvenile of beating a doctor at Jahra Hospital. The young man is being summoned to face charges. Meanwhile, Ahmadi detectives are looking for six unidentified persons who severely beat an employee at the interior ministry, breaking his nose in the process.


### Scam


A Lebanese man accused a compatriot of cheating when he sold him chewing gum claiming it is a weight-reducing product, but the man discovered what he bought was regular gum in the shape of capsules. He bought three boxes for KD 60, although they actually cost KD 1 each. A security source said the man lodged a complaint and the accused is being sought.

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With Pompeo's rise, uncertainty deepens for Iran nuclear deal

## Duterte to withdraw Philippines from ICC after 'outrageous attacks'

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BARDONECCHIA: In this photo, a migrant from Ivory Coast looks at signs on his way to the Colle della scala (Col de l'Echelle) - a snow-covered pass to cross the border between Italy and France, near Bardonecchia, Italian Alps. —AFP

# Finland is world's happiest country

## Burundi comes last, US drops four places

VATICAN CITY: Finland is the world's happiest country, according to an annual survey issued yesterday that found Americans were getting less happy even as their country became richer. Burundi came bottom in the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network's (SDSN) 2018 World Happiness Report which ranked 156 countries according to things such as GDP per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, social freedom, generosity and absence of corruption.

Taking the harsh, dark winters in their stride, Finns said access to nature, safety, childcare, good schools and free healthcare were among the best things about in their country. "I've joked with the other Americans that we are living the American dream here in Finland," said Brianna Owens, who moved from the United States and is now a teacher in Espoo, Finland's second biggest city with a population of around 280,000. "I think everything in this society is set up for people to be successful, starting with university and transportation that works really well," Owens told Reuters.

Finland, rose from fifth place last year to oust Norway from

the top spot. The 2018 top-10, as ever dominated by the Nordics, is: Finland, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Switzerland, Netherlands Canada, New Zealand, Sweden and Australia. The United States came in at 18th, down from 14th place last year. Britain was 19th and the United Arab Emirates 20th. One chapter of the 170-page report is dedicated to emerging health problems such as obesity, depression and the opioid crisis, particularly in the United States where the prevalence of all three has grown faster than in most other countries.

While US income per capita has increased markedly over the last half century, happiness has been hit by weakened

social support networks, a perceived rise in corruption in government and business and declining confidence in public institutions. "We obviously have a social crisis in the United States: more inequality, less trust, less confidence in government," the head of the SDSN, Professor Jeffrey Sachs of New York's Columbia University, told Reuters as the report was launched at the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Sciences. "It's pretty stark right now. The signs are not good for the US. It is getting richer and richer but not getting happier."

Asked how the current political situation in the United States could affect future happiness reports, Sachs said: "Time

will tell, but I would say that in general that when confidence in government is low, when perceptions of corruption are high, inequality is high and health conditions are worsening ... that is not conducive to good feelings." For the first time since it was started in 2012, the report, which uses a variety of polling organisations, official figures and research methods, ranked the happiness of foreign-born immigrants in 117 countries. Finland took top honours in that category too, giving the country a statistical double-gold status.

The foreign-born were least happy in Syria, which has been mired in civil war for seven years. "The most striking finding of the report is the remarkable consistency between the happiness of immigrants and the locally born," said Professor John Helliwell of Canada's University of British Columbia. "Although immigrants come from countries with very different levels of happiness, their reported life evaluations converge towards those of other residents in their new countries," he said. "Those who move to happier countries gain, while those who move to less happy countries lose." —Reuters



### Migrants happiness included in survey for the first time

## Syria war: Accusations of torture, executions

BEIRUT: The Syrian regime has been accused several times of torture and summary executions in its jails during the conflict that is entering its eighth year. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights says at least 60,000 people have died from torture or harsh conditions in regime custody since the conflict began in March 2011. The Britain-based war monitor says half a million people have passed through regime jails.

Damascus has strongly denied the allegations against it and has pointed to gross abuses by its opponents, both jihadists and other rebels. Several thousand people have died in prisons run by jihadists or other rebels, who have also carried out summary executions not only of government troops but also of civilians, the Observatory says. Here is a summary of the allegations against the regime:

#### 'Torture archipelago'

In July 2012 US-based group Human Rights Watch said Syria was holding tens of thousands of detainees in a "torture archipelago". It documented 27 detention facilities nationwide it said were used to hold people swept up in the government's crackdown on protesters. "Almost all" described experiencing or witnessing torture, including "prolonged beatings, often with objects such as batons and wires", HRW said. Other methods included "holding the detainees in painful stress positions for prolonged periods of time, often with the use of specially devised equipment, the use of electricity, burning with car battery acid, sexual assault and humiliation, the pulling of fingernails and mock execution."

#### Photographer reveals abuses

In 2014 a former Syrian military photographer codenamed "Caesar", who defected, revealed 55,000 photos which gave a glimpse of some of the abuses being committed in Syrian jails. The digital images of 11,000 dead detainees showed emaciated bodies and "Caesar" described seeing corpses with "deep wounds and



ZAMALKA, Syria: A wounded Syrian man waits for treatment at a makeshift clinic during Syrian government air strikes on Zamalka, in the rebel enclave of Eastern Ghouta. —AFP

burns and strangulations". "They were starved to death and their bodies looked like skeletons. These people died of starvation," Caesar said, adding he had never seen anything like it except for images taken during the Nazi regime in World War II.

#### Extermination

In February 2016, UN investigators said that "the mass scale of deaths of detainees suggests that the government of Syria is responsible for acts that amount to extermination". A year later, human rights organisation Amnesty International said as many as 13,000 people were hanged between 2011 and 2015 at the notorious Saydnaya military-run prison near Damascus. It said the mass hangings came on top of the 17,700 people it had already recorded as having perished in regime prisons since the start of the conflict in March 2011. Amnesty said it had interviewed 84 witnesses, including guards, detainees and judges, and alleged a pattern of repeated summary executions, mostly of civilians. In May 2017, Washington claimed that Damascus had built a "crematorium" at Saydnaya to cover up thousands of prisoner deaths. —AFP

## Blue House to jail house: South Korea criminal precedents

SEOUL: Most former South Korean presidents of recent decades have had their retirements interrupted or terminated by legal troubles. Yesterday's interrogation of Lee Myung-bak, who occupied the presidential Blue House from 2008 to 2013, means that every living former head of state has now been convicted, charged or investigated for criminal offences. One even killed himself after being questioned. Here are details of their cases.

#### Chun Doo-hwan

Chun, a former army general who ruled from 1980 to 1988, served prison time in the 1990s for charges including treason and bribery. Chun was convicted of staging a military coup in 1979 to seize power after the death of longtime army dictator, Park Chung-hee, and of receiving bribes worth millions of dollars from local businessmen. Now 87, he was initially sentenced to death, before the penalty was commuted to life in prison by the country's highest court in 1997. He was released eight months later when the then president Kim Young-sam pardoned him.

#### Roh Tae-woo

Roh, Chun's successor who served from 1988 to 1993 and also a former general, was convicted of similar offences, including both treason and bribery, at the same trial. He was initially sentenced to life in prison, reduced to 17 years on appeal. Now 85,

Roh also received a presidential pardon and walked free on the same day as Chun in 1997, albeit from a different prison.

#### Roh Moo-Hyun

Roh, a liberal who served from 1998 to 2003, killed himself in 2009 while being probed over graft. A former human rights lawyer and the mentor of current president Moon Jae-in, he enjoyed huge popularity among liberal young voters. But the graft probe targeting him as well as his family-described by Roh's supporters as a politically motivated move orchestrated by Lee Myung-bak, who was president at the time-tarnished the reputation of the former leader whose role model was former US president Abraham Lincoln. Roh threw himself off a cliff three weeks after his interrogation by prosecutors. Moon, who had served as his chief of staff, later said that the shock suicide prompted him to seek elected office himself.

#### Park Geun-hye

Park, 66, was impeached last year amid a massive corruption scandal involving her secret confidante, Choi Soon-sil, and is currently being tried on dozens of charges ranging from abuse of power to corruption. Park is accused of offering policy favours to top businessmen who helped enrich Choi including Samsung heir Lee Jae-yong. Park is the daughter of the late dictator Park Chung-hee, and Choi's father, a shady religious figure, acted as her mentor until his death in 1994. The ousted president is also accused of letting Choi, who has no title or security clearance, handle state affairs including cabinet nominations and policy and even her daily wardrobe choice. The verdict is due in April, and prosecutors have sought a 30-year jail sentence. —AFP

International

# With Pompeo rise, uncertainty deepens for Iran nuclear deal

## CIA ex-chief could have more influence with Trump

WASHINGTON: It is unclear how Mike Pompeo becoming US secretary of state may affect the Iran nuclear deal given that there is only one voice that counts in President Donald Trump's administration: his own. Trump's choice of the Central Intelligence Agency director to replace Rex Tillerson means an Iran hawk who fiercely opposed the 2015 pact as a member of Congress will now be in charge of the US diplomacy trying to strengthen, and perhaps save, it.

Former US officials and serving European officials were at a loss to gauge how the switch would affect negotiations between the United States and three European powers - Britain, France and Germany - that are also parties to the agreement. Some said Washington may take a harder line under Pompeo and the Europeans may be under more pressure to offer concessions, while others suggested his views on the deal have evolved and he may be better placed to influence Trump to keep it.

US, British, French and German officials are due to meet on the deal in Berlin today. "Any officials negotiating with the Europeans right now will get a much more aggressive set of requirements from Pompeo," said Richard Nephew, a former White House and State Department official who worked on Iran during the Obama administration. "The odds of them coming up with a thoughtful compromise by May just got a lot longer," he added. Trump on Tuesday singled out the Iran nuclear deal as one of the main differences he had with Tillerson. "I think it's terrible, I guess he thinks it was OK," Trump said.

Trump delivered an ultimatum to the European powers on Jan 12, saying they must agree to "fix the terrible flaws of the Iran nuclear deal" or he would refuse to extend US sanctions relief on Iran that it calls for. US sanctions will resume unless Trump issues fresh "waivers" to suspend them on May 12. The crux of the July 2015 pact between Iran and six major powers - Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States - was that Iran would restrict its nuclear program in return for relief from sanctions that have crippled its economy.

Trump sees three defects in the deal: its failure to address Iran's ballistic missile program; the terms under which international inspectors can visit suspect Iranian nuclear sites; and "sunset" clauses under which limits on

the Iranian nuclear program start to expire after 10 years. He wants all three strengthened if the United States is to stay in the deal. In a Jan 13 cable, the State Department sketched out a path under which the three European allies would simply commit to try to improve the deal over time in return for Trump keeping the pact alive by renewing sanctions relief in May.

### Trump 'is what matters here'

Other European officials and former US officials said Pompeo's rise, if he is confirmed as secretary of state by the Senate, might have a more ambiguous effect on the negotiations and that, in any case, Trump's views are paramount. "All our work is going into delivering a credible package that is sellable to Trump," said a European diplomat on condition of anonymity. "He is what matters here." While Pompeo was a fierce critic of the deal, called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), as a congressman, he tempered his

## Ex-officials warn against jumping to conclusions

views when testifying before Congress in January 2017 to seek confirmation as CIA director.

"Pompeo was a hawk on Iran. However, my understanding is he doesn't want the deal to disappear," said a former senior US official. "People should not jump to conclusions." Many of Trump's top national security aides, like Tillerson, have argued that the United States is better off with the Iran nuclear deal than without it. That stance was echoed on Tuesday by the US general who heads the US military command responsible for the Middle East and Central Asia.

Former US officials suggested that, as the administration nears a planned summit meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un about Pyongyang's nuclear program, it could rethink its stance on the Iran deal. European diplomats saw some chance Pompeo may have more influence over Trump than Tillerson, who antagonized the US president by reportedly calling him a "moron" and who differed with Trump on Iran and other issues. "If Pompeo is that hawkish, then in reality all it is the affirmation of Trump's policies. It's Trump's line," said another European diplomat. "Hopefully he'll have the mandate that Tillerson didn't have." — Reuters



WASHINGTON: In this file photo, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Mike Pompeo waits to speak at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, DC. US President Donald Trump announced the departure of his top diplomat Rex Tillerson, to be succeeded by the current CIA chief Mike Pompeo. —AFP

## Israel avoids snap polls; Netanyahu faces indictment

JERUSALEM: Israel's governing coalition has reached a deal to avoid early elections after days of tense negotiations, but politicians are now bracing for a bombshell that may lie ahead: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's possible indictment. The deal announced on Tuesday night put to rest for now talk of a high-stakes gamble for Netanyahu, who could be indicted for bribery in the months ahead.

Some members of his coalition had accused him of wanting early elections to shore up his political standing ahead of the attorney general's decision. Polls suggest he would remain prime minister if early elections were held, and some analysts say that would allow him to press his case that he is being hounded by the country's elites and political enemies but supported by the public.

A range of Israeli media reports said Netanyahu decided to back down and search for a deal in part after it became clear he could not garner enough votes to dissolve parliament. As for Netanyahu himself, he maintained throughout that he wants his coalition to last its entire term, which ends in November 2019. After Tuesday's deal, he stood before parliament and taunted opposition leaders, claiming they were afraid of early elections even though they had publicly pushed for them. —AFP

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## International

# Celebrated abroad, French leader 'struggling to find love' at home

## Many irritated by Macron's combative style

**PONTOISE:** He may have won election on a promise to be "neither of the left, nor the right", but France's mould-breaking young president is finding out that enacting broad welfare and labour reforms without a traditional power base has its price. In a by-election last month, the voters of the tidy market town of Pontoise, west of Paris, made clear their disenchantment with Emmanuel Macron by stripping his party of a parliamentary seat won only eight months earlier.

Chief among their complaints is cuts to pensions - one of the ways the 40-year-old former investment banker has tried to pay for a reduction in taxes on salaries. "For pensioners such as myself, it's a real catastrophe. It's been presented as 'only fair', but it's an injustice, pure and simple," said Yvan Mary, a 71-year-old pensioner standing outside the bakery on the main square. "It's not what people expected, including those who voted for him. There's a sense of betrayal."

Despite economic growth at its highest in six years, falling unemployment, and international newspapers and magazine covers celebrating "Macronmania", Macron's approval rating is now at its lowest since his election, at around 43 percent. And nowhere is the frustration more acute than among France's over-65s - the age group where Macron found the strongest support in the presidential vote last year. In one survey, Macron suffered a nine-point fall in February alone, after most pensioners noticed a decline in their pension payments in January.

### 'I won't apologise'

Sensing an opportunity after several failed attempts to challenge Macron's reforms-

which he says will galvanise a hidebound economy - the French unions have called a day of protests on behalf of pensioners on Thursday. That will provide an indication of what unions hope will become a "spring of discontent", with national strikes called for March 22 against the government's plans to shake up totems of the French "social model",



### Former banker's support among older voters shrinks

such as jobs-for-life in public administration and the railways.

But as yet, Macron is showing no sign of following the path trodden by several French leaders before him by backing off from economic reforms under pressure from the streets. "I know I'm asking for an effort from the oldest, that sometimes some of them grumble," Macron said this month on the sidelines of a visit in the Champagne region, where a pensioner publicly complained to him. "It doesn't make me popular-but I won't apologise for it," he later told reporters, in the combative-some say arrogant-manner that has become his hallmark.

Elysee insiders say they always knew

there would be no honeymoon, since Macron decided to launch a whirlwind of reforms targeting vested interests right from the start of his mandate. Apart from pensioners, his moves to make hiring and firing easier and slash a wealth tax, while putting off increases in welfare spending, have alienated many of the left-leaning voters who switched to him from the mainstream Socialists in 2017, making up almost half his vote.

Just over a third of left-wing sympathisers now support Macron, according to an Ifoop-Fiducial poll this month, compared with 43 percent of right-wing voters. "It's about his policy choices-but also his style," Bruno Cautres, a sociologist at Paris's Sciences-Po university who recently ran a focus group on percep-

tions of Macron. "Some of the words used, even by some who voted for him, are particularly negative: 'He's haughty, contemptuous, he likes to show off in international conferences'," he said.

### Logic of honour

But Cautres said Macron's reformist zeal and his apparent resolve to break down "special privileges" have also run up against a deeper, more entrenched characteristic of the French psyche. It is what French sociologist Philippe d'Iribarne called the "logic of honour" - the pride French feel about the system of rights and duties particular to each



AGRA, Uttar Pradesh: French President Emmanuel Macron and his wife Brigitte Macron pose for photographs as they visit the Taj Mahal complex in the Indian city of Agra.—AFP

working group, inherited from the pre-Revolution era. "In France, the feeling of having your honour besmirched is one of the strongest impediments to reforms," Cautres said, adding that it was especially ingrained among the 5 million public sector workers.

"It's a French cultural trait, forged by history, which is very important. You can't reform the public administration just by using managerial arguments, as Macron is

doing." In the medieval alleys of Pontoise, which has swung back and forth between left and right in recent decades, they put their view of the young centrist, as he would have it, more bluntly. "To him, it's: 'I do what I say-live with it. Whether you agree or disagree-you voted for me, so that's how it is,'" said 61-year-old Anita Deliers, a retired administrator. "He's too much of a neoliberal for my liking." —Reuters

### News in brief

#### 25 killed in Nigeria

**LAGOS:** Herders are believed to have killed 25 villagers in central Nigeria's Plateau state, police said yesterday, in the latest violence linked to land, water and grazing rights. The killings happened on Monday in the Bassa area of Plateau state, just a few days after at least five people were killed in the area. "The people were returning to Zirechi (village) from Dundun when they were attacked by gunmen believed to be Fulani herders," state police commissioner Undie Adie said. "I can confirm that 25 villagers were killed while two were injured. A number of houses were also burnt down by the attackers," he said.—AFP

#### NZ diplomat rapped

**WELLINGTON:** A top New Zealand diplomat in Washington was reportedly censured yesterday over social media posts expressing fears "we will all die" if US President Donald Trump is re-elected. Caroline Beresford, Wellington's second-ranked diplomat in the US, tweeted "get your shit together" discussing Bernie Sanders-Elizabeth Warren Democratic ticket against Trump in the 2020 election. "Please get your shit together or we will all die," she wrote in tweets, since deleted, later adding: "They've learned nothing." Sanders and Warren are a liberal dream team but pundits would expect them to struggle against Trump's right-wing populism in the next presidential race.—AFP

#### Dog dies in overhead bin

**WASHINGTON:** A dog has died during a United Airlines flight after a flight attendant insisted it be placed in a pet carrier during the flight Monday from Houston to New York. United said it took responsibility for the death, saying pets should not be placed in the overhead storage compartments. "This was a tragic accident that should never have occurred," the airline said in a statement, adding that it expressed its "deepest condolences to the family." Passenger Maggie Gremminger, 30, who was seated behind the pet owner, said the owner was told to put her dog in the compartment after boarding with two kids including an infant, according to The New York Times.—AFP

#### 25 killed in Central Mali

**BAMAKO:** At least 25 people have died in intercommunal violence in central Mali over the past week, a local community leader said Tuesday, as ethnic groups clashed over land in a zone where the state is near-absent and jihadists roam freely. Nomadic Fulani people and farmers from the Dogon ethnic group have engaged in tit-for-tat violence sparked by Fulanis grazing their cattle on Dogon land. Dogons also accuse Fulanis in the area of colluding with cleric Amadou Koufa, whose Islamist group recently joined the Group to Support Islam and Muslims, a jihadist alliance with links to Al-Qaeda.—AFP

#### Myung-bak questioned

**SEOUL:** Former South Korean president Lee Myung-bak was questioned over corruption yesterday, the last of the country's living ex-leaders to be embroiled in a criminal inquiry. Allegations of graft involving the conservative 76-year-old's relatives and aides during his term have mounted in recent weeks as prosecutors investigate multiple cases of bribery amounting to millions of dollars. The probe means that all four living former South Korean presidents have been convicted, charged, or investigated for criminal offences. "I stand here with a heavy heart," Lee said as he arrived at the prosecutors' office in Seoul, after a car journey from his home in the capital covered live on television.—AFP

## One 'Dreamer' to Trump: Think of me as your daughter

**ANNANDALE:** Nicolle Uria was 15 when her parents told her a shocking secret: she was an undocumented immigrant in the only country she has even known. The teen, who was born in Bolivia, recalls that as her parents braced her two years ago for that gut-wrenching conversation, she expected something else to come out of their mouths. "I immediately thought, 'I'm adopted', even though I look just like my sisters and my mom," Uria said.

"The last thing on my mind was finding out that I was undocumented," said Uria, who is in her last year of high school in Annandale, Virginia outside Washington, and says she wants to study journalism in college. She gets good grades, is on the school volleyball team and works on the school newspaper. But she is now worried that her dreams will go unrealized. Last September, her life was turned upside down when President Donald Trump ordered an end to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), the Obama-era program that protected from deportation some 700,000 immigrants brought to the US illegally as children, as she was.

Trump gave Congress six months to work out something for these so-called "Dreamers," most of them Latinos. The program was supposed to end on March 5 but remains in force because of rulings from two federal judges suspending Trump's decision. While the program works its way through court and lawmakers have failed to agree on the fate of the "Dreamers," Nicolle is terribly afraid of being separated from her parents, siblings and other family members. "I would be going back to a country I don't even know," she said as she cried. "I have no memories of Bolivia."

### 'A better future'

Nicolle's parents brought her to America when she was



VIRGINIA: 'Dreamer' Nicolle Uria (2nd left) confers with school friends in Annandale, Virginia. Nicolle Uria was 15 when her parents told her a shocking secret: she was an undocumented immigrant in the only country she has even known.—AFP

a year old. Ivan Uria, a former civil servant, and Giovanna Portugal, who studied to be an architect, worked in whatever they could find: cleaning homes or offices, at a gas station, looking after small children. Their overriding goal was to get a good education for their three daughters. They always led Nicolle to believe she had been born in the United States. "I did not want to break her heart telling her the truth," said Portugal.

One time, Portugal asked her daughter's Girl Scout leader to leave her out of a trip to the White House by telling her there was no room-she could not bear to tell Nicolle she did not have the papers needed to get into the presidential mansion. Portugal and her husband recently obtained residency papers after their elder daughters-

Ariana, 31, and, Lizzet, 29, both university graduates-married US citizens.

But legalizing Nicolle's status is tricky, and they are acutely afraid of her being deported. "I just don't want to go back because I'd feel that I wasted my parents' time. My parents have worked so much," Nicolle said. She thought of her parents when she attended Trump's State of the Union speech at the invitation of a Democratic lawmaker, and once again heard the president speak of immigrants as if they were criminals. "I would like him and the members of Congress to think of us as their kids. I know that they want the best for their kids. And we are here to give a better future to America," said Nicolle.—AFP

## Europe's 'Queen' Merkel clings onto power

**BERLIN:** Long dubbed the "Queen of Europe" by the media, Germany's veteran Chancellor Angela Merkel has emerged as the bruised survivor of her deepest crisis to govern for what many expect will be her final term. After 12 years at the helm of Europe's top economy, the pastor's daughter, widely regarded as the world's most powerful woman, goes on to live another day after post-war Germany's longest stretch of coalition haggling.

If she indeed serves out her fourth four-year term, the 63-year-old could match or surpass the marathon tenure of her late mentor, Germany's "reunification chancellor" Helmut Kohl. Some observers doubt she will stay in power that long. Many voters have grown wary of "Mutti" ("Mummy", as she is known) and there is widespread talk that she is entering the "twilight" of her reign. Merkel's deep woes are the price she paid for an uncharacteristically bold move-opening Germany's borders to a mass influx of refugees that has brought more than one million asylum seekers to Germany since 2015.

The humanitarian act made her a liberal hero to many but also sparked a xenophobic backlash that propelled the rise of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, whose battle cry is "Merkel must go". When the AfD entered Germany's par-

liament last September, it shattered a taboo against extremists sitting in the Bundestag, while the serial election winner Merkel slunk away with her party's worst result since 1949. Although no-one within her Christian Democrats has dared openly to challenge her for the top job, political analyst Oskar Niedermayer said it is clear that "Angela Merkel is past her zenith".

### 'Leader of free world'

Raised behind the Iron Curtain, Merkel has weathered multiple crises during her long time in power. Protesters dubbed her Europe's "austerity queen" for her tough stance on debt-hit eurozone economies. Some demonstrators branded her a Nazi in their fury. In the turbulent times of US President Donald Trump, Brexit and multiple global crises, she came to be hailed abroad as a defender of liberal democracy. Germans have long seen her as the bedrock of stability and enviable growth and jobs rates. They have thanked her by keeping her in government ever since she became their youngest and first female chancellor in 2005, a contemporary of Tony Blair and George W Bush.

Merkel, with her pragmatic and modest style, seemed to have perfected the art of staying in power in a wealthy, ageing nation that tends to favour continuity over change. Seemingly devoid of vanity and indifferent to the trappings of power, she lives in a Berlin flat with her media-shy scientist husband Joachim Sauer, shops in a local supermarket and spends holidays hiking in the Alps. Though frequently criticised for sitting out tough challenges, Merkel has punctuated her reign with



BERLIN: Combo photo shows German Chancellor Angela Merkel being sworn in as new Chancellor for her first term (top left); for the second term (top right); for her third term (bottom left), and yesterday for her fourth term.—AFP

some bold decisions, including scrapping nuclear power after Japan's 2011 Fukushima disaster.

### 'Merkelvelian'

Merkel was born Angela Dorothea Kasner on July 17, 1954 in the port city of Hamburg. Soon after, her father, a Lutheran clergyman, moved the family to a small-town parish in the communist East at a time when most people were headed the other way. Biographers say life in a police state taught Merkel to hide her true thoughts behind a poker face. A top student, she

excelled in Russian, which would later help her keep up the often tough dialogue with President Vladimir Putin. He was a KGB officer in Dresden when the Berlin Wall fell in 1989. During that momentous upheaval, Merkel joined a group that soon merged with the Christian Democrats of Kohl, who fondly if patronisingly dubbed Merkel his "girl". Merkel's mentor was not the last politician to underestimate her and pay the price. When Kohl became embroiled in a campaign finance scandal in 1999, Merkel openly urged her party to drop the self-declared "old warhorse". —AFP



## International

# Duterte to withdraw the Philippines from ICC after 'outrageous attacks'

## President sees ICC's move as harassment, political

**MANILA:** The Philippines said yesterday it is withdrawing from the International Criminal Court (ICC) due to what President Rodrigo Duterte called "outrageous" attacks by UN officials and violations of due process by the ICC. The decision marks a stunning about-face by Duterte, who has repeatedly dared the ICC to indict him and said he was willing to "rot in jail" or go on trial to defend a war on drugs that has killed thousands of his own people. The mercurial former mayor had initially welcomed last month's announcement by the ICC of its preliminary examination into a complaint filed by a Philippine lawyer accusing Duterte and top officials of crimes against humanity.

But in a 15-page statement, dated March 13, Duterte said he was withdrawing from the ICC's founding treaty, the Rome Statute, because of "baseless, unprecedented and outrageous attacks" by UN officials, and ICC actions that he said failed to follow due process and presumption of innocence. "There appears to be a concerted effort on the part of the UN special rapporteurs to paint me as a ruthless and heartless violator of human rights who allegedly caused thousands of extrajudicial killings," Duterte said. The ICC's examination was premature, he added, and "effectively created the impression that I am to be charged ... for serious crimes falling under its jurisdiction."

He made no mention of the withdrawal in a speech yesterday. Duterte's chief critics said the move was a U-turn that showed the tough-talking leader was now in panic mode. The London-based rights group Amnesty International called the withdrawal "misguided" and "cowardly". An ICC spokesman referred most questions to the

court's prosecutors, who could not immediately be reached. According to ICC rules, a withdrawal is effective one year after receipt of notification. The Philippines comes under the its jurisdiction because it is a member, and pulling out cannot impact jurisdiction retroactively.

### International alarm

Duterte's bloody campaign has caused international alarm and fierce criticism from some UN representatives, including High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein, who on Friday said Duterte should submit himself for a psychiatric examination. Duterte's defiance is among the traits that make him wildly popular in the Philippines, where his crackdown has broad support. He has refused to accept some police may be systematically

### ICC looking at complaint about war on drugs

executing suspected dealers, as activists say.

Police deny allegations of murder and cover-ups and say they killed about 4,100 drug dealers in shootouts, but have nothing to do with an estimated 2,300 largely unsolved drug-related homicides. Last month, he indicated he would cooperate with the ICC examination and even said he would prefer a firing squad to prison. But he soon changed his tune, telling security forces not to cooperate in any international investigation, and that "not in a million years" would the ICC have jurisdiction.

Jude Sabio, the lawyer who filed the ICC complaint last year, said Duterte's move was predictable, futile and designed to appeal to his base. "Looks like they are really afraid. Why? They feel that this will proceed to an investigation," Sabio told Reuters, adding the with-



**DAVAO:** President Rodrigo Duterte fires a few rounds with a sniper rifle during the opening ceremony of the National Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) Challenge in Davao City, southern Philippine island of Mindanao. Duterte said yesterday he was pulling the Philippines out of the treaty underpinning the International Criminal Court, which is examining his deadly drug war. —AFP

drawal "will have no binding legal effect". The ICC can only intervene when a member state is unable or unwilling to carry out investigations and prosecute suspected perpetrators. The Philippines says that is far from the case. The ICC's examination seeks to establish whether crimes have taken place, and such a process typically takes years.

Duterte's spokesman, Harry Roque, said the ICC was "siding with the enemies of the president", while Duterte's legal counsel Salvador Panelo said the acces-

sion to the Rome Statute in 2011 was never announced in the Philippines official gazette, thus did not apply. Panelo insisted Duterte was not afraid, but objected to the ICC becoming "a political tool to harass a particular country, like ours". Duterte's critics argued otherwise. Senator Risa Hontiveros said Duterte was desperate and "may have unwittingly displayed his fear of being proven guilty". Senator Antonio Trillanes said Duterte was withdrawing "because he knows that there is no way out for him in the ICC". —Reuters

## Thirty years on, gas attack still poisons Iraq's Halabja

**HALABJA:** As a teenager Kamal Jalal saw two of his sisters killed when Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's forces launched a gas attack on the Kurdish town of Halabja. Now three decades later at the age of 47 this Iraqi Kurd remains reliant on a machine to help him breathe—and is still waiting for compensation over a massacre that became a byword for brutality. "The doctors told me that I lost 75 percent of my lungs," he told AFP as he sat in his small home just metres (yards) from a memorial overlooking the town. The monument with a Kurdish flag on top commemorates some 5,000 Iraqi Kurds, mostly women and children, killed on March 16, 1988 when deadly gas was released on Halabja in the mountains of northeastern Iraq.

The attack from the skies came after ethnic Kurdish fighters who sided with Iran in the eight-year Iraq-Iran war withdrew from the rural farming town. Like many of the thousands of people gassed in Halabja, Jalal was hospitalised in Iran, which lies just a dozen kilometres (seven miles) away. For him—and others who got treatment in Europe paid for by Kurdish authorities—the recent fight against Islamic State jihadists that wracked the region meant they struggled to travel to get the care they need.

### Struggle for compensation

The attack on Halabja marked the culmination of a ruthless campaign of retribution by Saddam against those seen as siding with Tehran as the devastating conflict between



**HALABJA:** A handout picture shows Kurdish adults and children killed by an Iraqi chemical attack on the Kurdish city of Halabja in northeastern Iraq, on March 17, 1988. —AFP

the two neighbours drew to a close. The gruesome aftermath of the slaughter was captured by international journalists—but it would take decades for there to be some sort of reckoning. After his ouster in the wake of the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, Saddam eventually faced trial for the killings of an estimated 180,000 in the Anfal campaign against the Kurds. But he was hanged in 2006 on another conviction before a court could officially find him guilty of carrying out a "genocide" against the Kurds.

Four years later Saddam's cousin General Ali Hassan al-

Majid, known as "Chemical Ali", was executed for ordering poisonous gas attacks, including against Halabja. Back in Halabja Arass Abed is spearheading the fight by survivors for compensation. The 48-year-old is the only member of his family to have survived the attack and founded an association representing victims and their loved ones. "The Iraqi supreme court ruled that the chemical attack on Halabja was a war crime and genocide," he said. "The government in Baghdad needs to compensate the victims and the town as a whole." —AFP

## 'Uncle Hawking' draws nearly half-billion clicks from mourning Chinese

**SHANGHAI:** Stephen Hawking's death yesterday generated nearly half a billion clicks in China, where fans mourned a "giant star" who was admired for rising above physical disability and for heartfelt messages to his Chinese social media followers. Already well-known in China, the British cosmologist two years ago further endeared himself by opening an account on the Twitter-like Weibo platform, posting in both Chinese and English. The account drew one million fans in its first few hours and now has nearly five million followers.

The infrequent posts by Hawking, who Chinese affectionately called "Hawking Dada", or "Uncle Hawking", typically generated tens of thousands of admiring comments apiece. News of his death at age 76 quickly became the top-trending Weibo topic, with the hashtag #Hawking passed# generating more than 450 million reads and nearly 250,000 comments in the hours after his death was announced. Many called his passing "the falling of a giant star". "The deterioration of his body did not trap him. Today this superhuman brain has left this world, and his next journey, death, remains a mystery," one user said.

"I hope he has the strength to send us information from the next world." Another user wrote: "Even though I can't understand Hawking Dada's books... he is the one who knows the secret of this world." At a daily press briefing in Beijing, Chinese

foreign ministry spokesman Lu Kang called him a "fighter for science who arduously battled illness for a long time". Lu noted that Hawking also "strongly insisted" on visiting the Great Wall on a previous visit to China despite his physical condition. "Mr Hawking and his contributions will be remembered forever." Most of Hawking's life was spent in a wheelchair, crippled by amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), a form of motor neuron disease. He died at his home in England yesterday, his family said.

Hawking posted on Weibo about black holes and other phenomena, and wrote in one message that being on China's leading social media platform was "a source of great inspiration". One of his more popular postings was a June 2016 message of encouragement to tens of millions of Chinese students preparing for annual national college-entrance exams, a stressful, make-or-break ordeal that can determine one's future. "Whether you aim to be a doctor, teacher, scientist, musician, engineer, or a writer, be fearless in the pursuit of your aspirations. You are the next generation of big thinkers and thought leaders that will shape the future for generations to come," he wrote.

### Flag flies at half mast

The flag over the late Stephen Hawking's Cambridge University college flew at half-mast yesterday, as students and academics came to pay tribute after the physicist's death. Gonville and Caius College, where Hawking was a fellow for over 50 years, also opened a book of condolences in the chapel and placed a black-and-white picture of him on a notice board. Hu Xiaohua, a teacher in China and a visiting scholar at the English faculty in Cambridge, cried as she looked at the image. "I read his books and was inspired. He said never give up and he never gave up," the 49-year-old said, dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief. She said Hawking, who was confined to a



**CAMBRIDGE:** People queue to sign a condolence book at Gonville and Caius College, where British physicist, Stephen Hawking was a fellow for over 50 years, at Cambridge University in Cambridge, following the announcement of his death, aged 76. —AFP

wheelchair for five decades by motor neuron disease, was one of the reasons why she moved to Cambridge and had inspired her interest in quantum physics. "I wished I could meet him. He was the greatest scientist of the 21st century. He really meant a lot to me. I prayed for him every day. I wished he could stand up," she said.

### 'Great sense of humour'

Hawking, who died yesterday aged 76, had a study at the college which he shared with other fellows and his name is painted on the stone arch entrance and above the room's wooden door. "He was an amazing person," said Edo Dzafic, 26, a molecular biology doctoral student from Slovenia who came to sign the book of condolences. Dzafic said he "got people to think outside the box about what's out there. It's what

we all wonder about". Justin Hayward, who was Hawking's doctoral student from 1991 to 1995, said the world-famous physicist had come to his wedding in 2006.

"He was a fun person to work with and had a great sense of humour. For his students at the blackboard, sometimes a little scary," said Hayward, who came with his wife. In the book of condolences, Ben Stevenson wrote: "Rest in peace. An inspiration. Looking at the stars, not the floor. Thank you." Other mourners also expressed their hope of an afterlife for Hawking, who did not believe in it himself. Kerem Bayraktaroglu shared a personal memory about playing the violin in front of Hawking and wrote: "I hope you will now know the true secrets of the universe". Diana Hayward wrote: "May you rest in peace and rise in glory." —Agencies

## Fearing diplomatic sidelines, Japan eyes Abe-Kim summit

**TOKYO:** Japan is reportedly considering seeking a summit between Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, as Tokyo struggles to stay relevant in fast-moving diplomacy with Pyongyang. Officials in Tokyo would not confirm yesterday the reports of a potential shift in Japan's policy, but government spokesman Yoshihide Suga also declined to explicitly deny a summit was being explored.

"What is important is that the three countries, Japan, the US and South Korea, continue to closely coordinate policies," he said at a regular briefing. "We wish to make progress on our efforts to reach a comprehensive resolution of the nuclear, missile, and abduction (of Japanese citizens)... and as part of that, we will review our way forward from the perspective of the most effective approach." There has been no public suggestion from any side of an Abe-Kim summit.

But Japan's Kyodo and Jiji Press agencies both reported the possibility was being studied after Tokyo found itself on the back foot with the surprise announcement last week that US President Donald Trump would meet with Kim later this year. Japan has long maintained a hardline position on negotiations with Pyongyang, warning against "talks for the sake of talks", and in the early days of Trump's administration there appeared to be little daylight between Tokyo and Washington on the issue. But the prospect of a Trump-Kim summit, as well as talks between North and South Korea, appears to have pushed Tokyo to reassess its position, analysts said.

Japan fears the current diplomatic track could leave unaddressed the North's short-range missile capabilities, as well as the emotive issue of Japanese citizens kidnapped by Pyongyang during the Cold War. "Japan has to hold a summit as soon as possible after the North-South summit and the US-North summit... to avoid being left out both in terms of security concerns and on the abduction issue," Masao Okonogi, a North Korea specialist affiliated with Tokyo's Keio University, told AFP. Speaking before the latest reports, Korea expert Kan Kimura, a professor at Kobe University, told AFP that Japan had been "left behind" by the recent diplomatic activity. "Things are moving forward without Japan," he said.

### Fear of isolation

The Japanese are "showing clear signs that they are deeply unsettled by this," added Daniel Sneider, an Asia-Pacific specialist at Stanford University. "The Japanese fear being isolated because they have basically positioned themselves as the most hardline of hardliners, constantly expressing scepticism about the North Korean openings to dialogue," he added. The last Japanese prime minister to meet a North Korean leader was Junichiro Koizumi, who met Kim's father Kim Jong Il in Pyongyang in 2004. But Abe rose to political prominence on his calls for a tough line on North Korea, and attitudes only hardened after two missiles fired by Pyongyang flew over Japan last year.

The hostility goes both ways, with Pyongyang regularly excoriating Japan, including over its colonial rule of the Korean peninsula in the early 20th century. "Korea is not a weak nation as it used to be in the past when it was trampled under the jackboots of the Japanese imperialists," the official Korean Central News Agency said in a commentary Monday. The prospect of an Abe-Kim summit also comes at a time of political turmoil for Japan's premier, who is under fire at home over the discount sale of government land to one of his supporters, a deal that was the apparent subject of a cover-up by the finance ministry. —AFP

## Analysis

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## Japan political longevity likely elusive in a post-Abe world

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has made some lasting changes to bolster the power of the premier's office, but his political longevity is mainly due to strong allies, weak enemies and good luck - a hat-trick successors may find hard to emulate. Abe, 63, is in the midst of what may be the worst political crisis since his return to office in Dec 2012, as doubts swirl over suspected cronyism in a land deal with a school operator linked to his wife, Akie.

He has denied he or his wife intervened in the sale. But the affair could dash Abe's hopes of a third three-year term as governing Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) president from September, leading to a leadership change sooner than expected. Among the reforms Abe made was the launch in 2014 of a cabinet bureau giving him and his close aide, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga, authority to appoint hundreds of senior officials, tightening their grip on the bureaucracy.

That was the latest in a series of moves over the past two decades to centralize power in the "Kantei", as the prime minister's office is known. "Abe is the culmination of changes that began earlier that made clear where the buck stops," said Gerry Curtis, emeritus professor at New York's Columbia University. "After Abe, how the institutions work depends on the individual."

Abe and Suga have made skilful use of their increased clout. Even before the new system was adopted, for example, Abe named an ex-diplomat sympathetic to his drive to loosen the limits of the pacifist constitution on the military to a post in charge of interpreting that charter. Abe has assembled a tight inner circle of aides, many of whom have learned from missteps of his first, troubled term in 2006-2007. That tenure ended when he quit abruptly in the face of scandals in his cabinet, a hung parliament and bad health. "It's an insider group of trusted friends that run a very, very stable ship," said Jesper Koll, head of equities fund WisdomTree Japan. "In a very un-Japanese fashion, he is not afraid to exercise power and use the institutional framework."

## Carrots and sticks

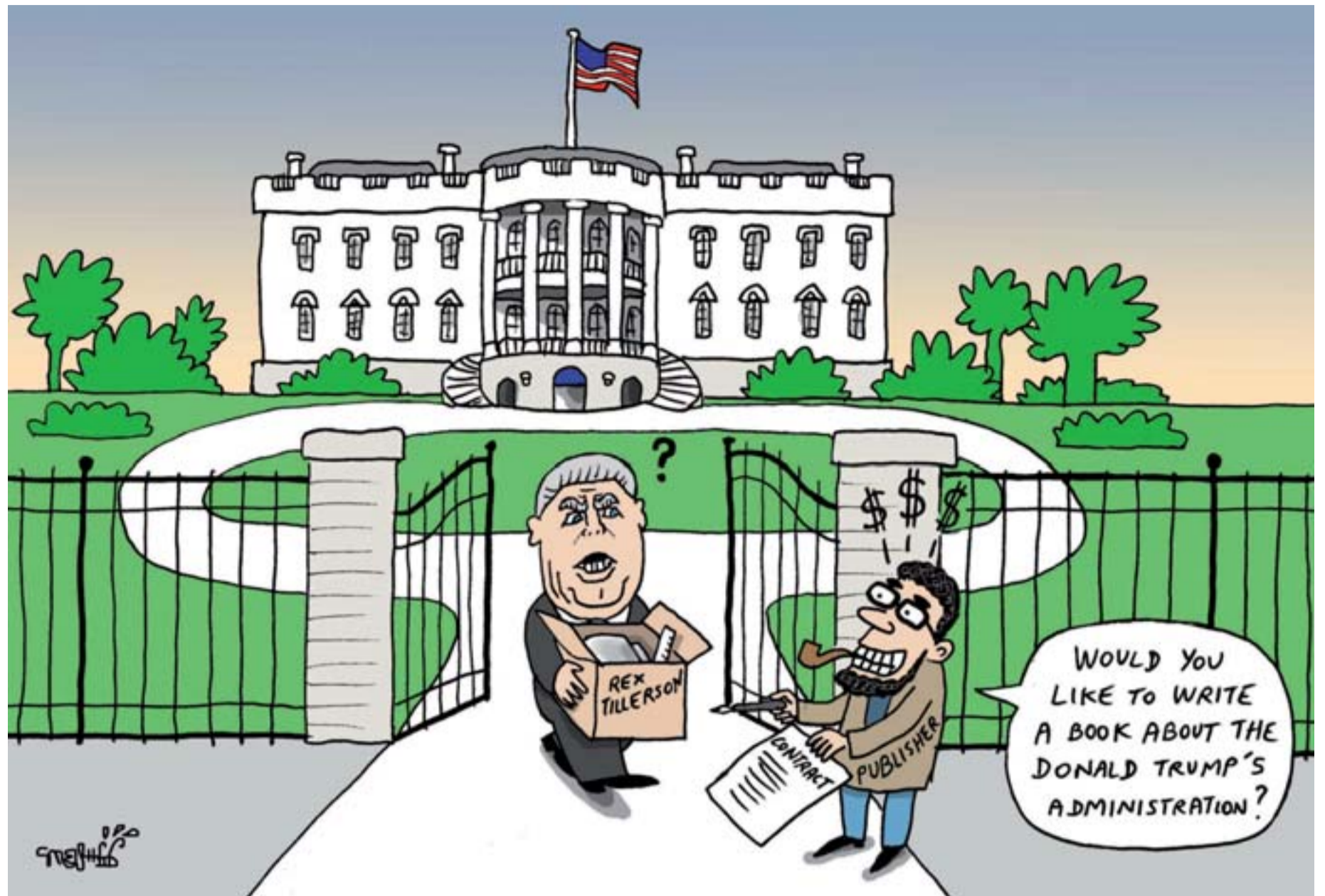
Abe has also benefited from a fragmented opposition and voters' memories of the rocky reign of rival Democratic Party of Japan - which has since shattered into three smaller parties. He has led his ruling bloc to three huge wins in lower house elections, helped by a splintering of opposition votes and low turnout. His "Abenomics" recipe for growth, including hyper-easy monetary policy and fiscal spending, has given Japan its longest period of expansion since the 1980s, a fact not lost on voters, although consumption could lose steam and wage growth is weak.

Abe's willingness to risk snap elections - two in the past four years - has helped keep LDP lawmakers in line by forcing them to focus on re-election rather than challenging him, while he has rewarded their constituents with public works spending. "Prime Minister Abe has been very good ... at both carrots and sticks," said University of Tokyo professor Yu Uchiyama. Some of his strategies, however, such as trying to dampen media criticism by limiting access to information as well as putting bureaucrats in their place, may already be backfiring.

Rivals inside the LDP are also getting feisty, with some speaking out about the suspected cronyism scandal. "Abe declared war on the media and the media is now getting its revenge," said Jeffrey Kingston, director of Asian studies at Temple University's Japan campus. The conservative Abe's perceived nemesis, the liberal Asahi newspaper, was first to report that the finance ministry had altered documents about the land deal. "Abe declared war on the autonomy of the bureaucrats, but I'm not betting against the bureaucracy," Kingston added.

## Finance minister

Likely successors, such as former foreign minister Fumio Kishida and former defense minister, Shigeru Ishiba may not have the right stuff to pull the levers of Kantei power with the same skill as Abe's team, analysts said. That has some experts worrying that Japan could again see the revolving door premiers of the past. Japan had five prime ministers in the five years before Abe returned for a second term, and nine between 1989 and 2001, before Junichiro Koizumi managed a five-year term. "If Abe has to go now, I'd predict that the next prime minister would last less than two years," said Koll of WisdomTree Japan. "Abe is an active prime minister. Whoever comes next will be a passive one." —Reuters



## Trump tired of hearing 'no' for an answer

Almost 14 months into Donald Trump's turbulent White House tenure, loyalists are in, dissenters are out and the president himself is acting on his own instincts more swiftly than ever to make decisions on policies from trade to North Korea. People close to Trump said his firing on Tuesday of Secretary of State Rex Tillerson was the latest sign of the Republican president's growing impatience with his initial set of hand-picked advisers who he viewed as slow-walking his favored policies. Trump will still encourage disagreement within his inner circle, these people said, but once he makes a decision, he wants it carried out swiftly.

"To this day, I think that a healthy ideological diversity prevails in the White House, but what has changed is that he is no longer willing to allow people to slow roll or stonewall his agenda," said Andrew Surabian, a former White House strategist under Trump. "He wants people executing and getting things done." Trump expects to have "a vigorous internal debate and then have everyone be on the same page" with the final decision, said a former Trump campaign official with knowledge of the White House's thinking, speaking on condition of anonymity. As Trump himself said last week, "I like conflict."

After fending off entreaties to hold back, Trump last week formally announced global tariffs on imports of steel and aluminum to the dismay of allies. His top economic adviser Gary Cohn, who disagreed with him on trade and other issues, resigned. Later in the week, during a meeting with South Korea's national security adviser, Trump agreed to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, despite months earlier having

threatened to "totally destroy" his country if necessary.

Tillerson, who has advocated a more moderate and diplomatic approach to US foreign policy, was out days later, replaced by CIA Director Mike Pompeo, a Trump loyalist. Trump announced the change on Twitter. "He is looking for people who are in broad agreement with what he wants to do and who are willing to accept that he's the team leader," said Republican former Speaker

Trump told reporters at the White House shortly after announcing his new choice for top diplomat. "With Mike, we've had a very good chemistry from the very beginning." Longtime associates of the president said Trump's moves were consistent with his businessman past and would send a message to aides who have not accepted his style and convictions.

"People who thought they could change him are finding out what we found out on the campaign a long time ago: You can't. You can make him better but 180-degree changes in opinion are unlikely," said Barry Bennett, a former Trump campaign strategist. "If you think it's your mission to just talk him out of it, it's mission impossible."

Trump's critics accused him of running his White House the same way he ran his former reality television show, "The Apprentice". "Firing a secretary of state by Twitter may make for great drama and instant TV ratings, but this, and countless other instances like this, produce undiluted instability that damages the nation and the office of the presidency at just about every level," Democratic Senator Patrick Leahy said in a statement.

More changes are coming. Trump has yet to announce a successor to Cohn. Gingrich said he expected the president to hire someone "more compatible" than the former Goldman Sachs executive. Trump signaled on Tuesday that conservative commentator Larry Kudlow is the front-runner for the post. The changes, and Trump's comments about staff shakeups, also raise the possibility of more senior staff departures, such as Chief of Staff John Kelly or national security adviser HR McMaster, both of whom have had run-ins with the boss. —Reuters



## President accused of running White House like 'The Apprentice' show

of the House of Representatives Newt Gingrich, an informal Trump adviser. Trump hinted on Tuesday that he was moving toward having the team he desired after a year of frustration with people like Tillerson and an up-and-down relationship with Cohn.

## The cabinet he wants

"I'm really at a point where we're getting very close to having the cabinet and other things that I want,"

## China eye-roll goes viral, censors put a lid on it

It was the eye-roll that launched a thousand gifs. China's censors are scrambling to put a lid on a social media frenzy unleashed by a journalist's reaction to a softball question during the mostly scripted annual parliament session. Impeccably coiffed and sporting a bright blue suit jacket, Yicai financial news service reporter Liang Xiangyi sighed and raised a sceptical eyebrow at another journalist's query to a delegate at a National People's Congress press event Tuesday.

As the question about China's Belt and Road infrastructure project dragged on for 45 seconds, Liang grimaced, glanced sideways to give the woman dressed in red a disbelieving once-over, and concluded with a majestic, head-turning eye-roll. Caught on camera by state broadcaster CCTV, the moment at the usually staid Great Hall of the People went viral and turned Liang into an instant online celebrity.

Social media platforms were flooded with gifs, cartoons and parody reenactments, with people dressed in red and blue. Some began superimposing footage of her eye-roll on clips of celebrities spouting nonsense. Liang's image was plastered onto T-shirts and cellphone cases sold on Taobao, China's ever-reactive eBay equivalent. But China maintains tight control of its internet and is extremely wary of viral stories about politically sensitive subjects like the NPC.

By evening, Liang's name had become the most-censored term on China's Twitter-like Weibo platform. And yesterday, authorities released an "urgent notice" prohibiting all discussion of her in all mainland media outlets. "Anything already posted must be deleted. Without excep-

tion, websites must not hype the episode," according to the US-based China Digital Times, which posted the leaked directive.

## 'In the hearts of the nation'

This year's NPC gathering has been historic. A vote Sunday abolished rules limiting heads of state to 10 years in power, setting President Xi Jinping on a course to potentially rule the country for life. On Tuesday, the congress also unveiled plans for the biggest shakeup of government structures in at least a decade, including the merger of its banking and insurance regulators to better handle financial risks.

But Liang's epic eye-roll has now grabbed the limelight. "With this outfit and your meaningful expression, you've left a deep impression in the hearts of the whole nation's people," wrote one of thousands of commenters on her Weibo account, which had soared to over 200,000 followers.

Zhang Huijun, the reporter who posed the long-winded question, works for American Multimedia Television (AMTV), a Los Angeles-based company whose website describes itself as a CCTV partner. Reporters from media outlets based abroad but with ties back to China's state media apparatus are often called on at government events so that Beijing can appear to cede the floor to "foreign" journalists - who will nonetheless toe the party line.

## Unknown fate

A leaked screenshot of an Yicai group chat showed Liang explaining herself. "Her question was even longer than the answer," she said, using a colorful obscenity to describe Zhang and calling her "stupid". Yicai Media declined to comment and the NPC press office said they did not know anything about rumours that Liang's press credentials were revoked.

AFP journalists did not see Liang or Zhang during a session yesterday of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the top political advisory board that holds its annual session at the same time as the NPC. Online commenters were sympathetic to Liang. "Sister, if you've lost your job," one fan told her, "you can always work in social media." —AFP

## Russians see sabotage theory as credible

As the finger of blame points at Russia over the poisoning in Britain of former double agent Sergei Skripal, alternative theories are being promoted in Russian media outlets, ranging from a plot to sabotage the country's upcoming presidential election to an attempt to ruin its hosting of this summer's football World Cup. Despite British Prime Minister Theresa May saying the Russian government's involvement was "highly likely" due to the use of the Novichok nerve agent, many Russian people back alternative hypotheses.

"Russia is always blamed for everything," complained Lyubov Tarassenko, a 69-year-old pensioner in Moscow. Her reaction, for the most part, reflects the mood of Russians following the spy scandal, who see their country as a victim rather than a guilty party. "The British secret services are behind the poisoning, given the ideal way it was carried out using a substance presumed to have come from Russia," said Vladislav Dyatlov, a 46-year-old lawyer. They want "to influence the result of the Russian presidential election," he said, adding: "Well, we want to elect our president ourselves."

The vote takes place on Sunday and President Vladimir Putin is the overwhelming favorite to win another mandate. "Russia has nothing to do with it," insisted Andrei Shishkanov, a 49-year-old doctor, who believe the affair is aimed at harming the election or the World Cup Russia is hosting. Skripal and his daughter Yulia were found unconscious on a park bench in the southern city of Salisbury last week and both remain in critical condition in hospital.

The UK has demanded Russia provide answers on the March 4 poisoning. After the identities of the victims were revealed,

Kirill Kleimenov, a presenter on TV channel Pierviy Kanal commented sarcastically that "being a traitor is one of the most dangerous professions in the world". Kleimenov went on to note that grave misfortune had befallen several Russians living in Britain in recent years, saying: "alcohol, drugs, stress, depression are inevitable ills linked to the profession of traitor which can provoke heart attacks, brain haemorrhage, traffic accidents or even suicide." He concluded: "Don't ever choose England as a country of residence if you are a professional traitor to your country."

## Too neat

One much-reported case of a Russian meeting a suspicious death in Britain in recent years was that of former FSB secret service operative Alexander Litvinenko, poisoned after his tea was laced with highly radioactive polonium-210. Russian state TV on Sunday stated that Skripal "was no longer of interest to anyone" while a presenter pondered "is the British climate damaging to turncoats?" The broadcaster also suggested Britain's secret service may have had a role in the case, given that the poisoning occurred "very close to the British military center of Porton Down, which was carrying out research into" the nerve agent used.

"This poisoning is too neat, coming a few days before the Russian presidential election," said another broadcaster, NTV, in its evening bulletin. While spies carry out their business across the globe "it is only in Great Britain that they are poisoned," the NTV presenter mused.

The influential speaker of Russia's lower parliamentary chamber, Vyacheslav Volodin, went further in denouncing what he termed "a premeditated action which constitutes a form of interference in the (electoral) campaign". "Great Britain and its authorities are responsible," he added. Dmitry Kiselyov, star commentator with the state broadcaster and regarded as close to the Kremlin, suggested the goal was to spoil the World Cup. "Why not poison Skripal and then afterwards use that to organize a boycott of the World Cup?" Kiselyov asked on Sunday. —AFP

News

# Merkel elected to fourth term; Amir...

Continued from Page 1

he sent to the German chancellor, the Amir wished Merkel every success as she begins another term in office. HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar messages.

Merkel, wearing a necklace in the national colors black-red-gold, nevertheless beamed as applause filled the Bundestag chamber, where her scientist husband Joachim Sauer and her 89-year-old mother Herlind Kasner were among the well-wishers. For the veteran leader, the ceremony marked the end of a painful stretch of post-election paralysis, the deepest crisis of her 12-year career. A rightwing populist rise in September elections weakened all mainstream parties and deprived Merkel of a majority, forcing her into another unhappy alliance with the center-left SPD.

The grand coalition, mockingly dubbed a "GroKo" in German, didn't start as a "love marriage", her designated vice chancellor and finance minister, the SPD's Olaf Scholz, drily observed this week. All coalition partners have nonetheless vowed to stay together for a full term until 2021. Merkel later met her new cabinet, in which the SPD has wrested the trophy posts of both finance and foreign affairs to the dismay of critics within her Christian Democratic Union (CDU).

To quieten the dissent, Merkel has named an outspoken critic, Jens Spahn, 37, as her new health minister and tapped a potential successor with new CDU general secretary Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer. "The chancellor was, from time to time, written off in the past six months," said analyst Marianne Kneuer of Hildesheim University, adding that with the fresh appointments "Merkel has strengthened her position again".

On Friday Merkel will head to Paris to discuss EU reform plans with French President Emmanuel Macron ahead of a March 22-23 summit, after a lengthy stretch in which Berlin was hamstrung on the European and

world stage. Macron warned in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung daily that, without Germany on board, "part of my project would be doomed to failure". Merkel's incoming coalition has broadly welcomed Macron's bold reform plans, meant to reinvigorate the bloc and counter populists who have made major gains in Western democracies.

She has argued that the EU must increasingly look after its own interests in the era of US President Donald Trump, who has questioned long-standing transatlantic defence ties and threatened a trade war. Berlin advocates closer EU cooperation on defense, immigration and plans for a European Monetary Fund. But it is lukewarm on the idea of a joint eurozone finance minister and rejects any pooling of debt.

The rise of populist fringe parties is also the central domestic threat for Merkel's new coalition, which faces the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) as the biggest opposition party. The AfD scored almost 13 percent in the election, capitalizing on public fears over a mass influx of more than one million migrants since 2015 and angrily demanding that "Merkel must go" - a slogan that appeared again yesterday, on a protest banner briefly unfurled in the chamber.

The shock rise of the AfD has come at the expense of the mainstream parties - while Merkel's last GroKo had a crushing 80 percent parliamentary majority, the margin has shrunk to 56 percent. Merkel, speaking on German TV, pledged that "we aim to solve the problems of those who cast protest votes for this party". To answer the new right-wing threat, designated interior minister Horst Seehofer has pledged a "zero tolerance" law-and-order drive and faster deportations of failed asylum-seekers.

His new interior super-ministry also covers "Heimat" or homeland affairs, a term much derided for evoking Alpine vistas, beer and bratwurst but intended to recapture claims to patriotism from the AfD. Scholz has meanwhile promised to tackle another fear exploited by populists, of vanishing jobs in the age of globalization and rapid technological change. "When we look at the Trump election, Brexit and the success of rightwing populist parties in many European countries," Scholz said, "we see there is a clear need to find new answers to the challenges of the 21st century." — AFP

# Assembly committee says taxes not...

Continued from Page 1

The new amendment bans any contact or dealings

with companies having any trade links to Israel, besides banning any online contacts with Israeli companies.

The amendments also bar Kuwaitis from visiting Israel or occupied Palestinian territories without prior consultation with the government and bans holders of Israeli passports from entering the country. The amendments stipulate jail terms of between three and 15 years and a fine not exceeding KD 10,000 for violators.

# Britain expels 23 Russian diplomats...

Continued from Page 1

behind the attack, which left Skripal and his daughter in a critical condition in hospital, while a policeman was also hospitalized. She had given Moscow until midnight Tuesday to explain whether it was directly responsible or "lost control" of the nerve agent, but said it has responded with "sarcasm, contempt and defiance".

President Vladimir Putin's spokesman said again Wednesday that it had "nothing to do with the accident in Britain", but warned it would not accept the "language of ultimatums". Lavrov has said the Kremlin is ready to cooperate with Britain but complained that its request for samples of the nerve agent had been rejected. Moscow has also warned that it will take retaliatory measures, and on Tuesday threatened to expel British media from Russia if the license of its state broadcaster RT was threatened in Britain.

May yesterday blamed Putin for a deterioration of relations between Moscow and London, saying it was "tragic that President Putin has chosen to act in this way". But the Russian embassy said the British government was responsible. Britain is wary of acting alone and May has spoken to US President Donald Trump,

French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel in recent days. In a phone call late Tuesday, Trump and May "agreed on the need for consequences for those who use these heinous weapons in flagrant violation of international norms", the White House said.

In a joint statement by its 29 member states, the US-led NATO alliance said the attack was a "clear breach of international norms and agreements" and called on Russia to fully disclose details of the Novichok program. British experts say Skripal, 66, and his 33-year-old daughter, who was visiting from Russia, were poisoned with a nerve agent from a broad category known as Novichok, which developed by the Soviet Union during the late stages of the Cold War.

The Russian chemist who first revealed the existence of Novichok, Vil Mirzayanov, said "only the Russians" developed the Novichok agents. "They kept it and are still keeping it in secrecy," he said from his home in the US, where he moved in 1995 after 30 years of working for the State Scientific Research Institute of Organic Chemistry and Technology. The Salisbury case has drawn parallels with the 2006 death by radiation poisoning of former Russian agent and Kremlin critic Alexander Litvinenko, which Britain blamed on Moscow. In a further twist, former senior Russian executive Nikolai Glushkov, linked to late Kremlin opponent Boris Berezovsky, was found dead in London on Tuesday in unexplained circumstances, British and Russian media reported. — AFP

# Saudi Arabia turns to nuclear power...

Continued from Page 1

The kingdom draws on oil and natural gas to both generate power and desalinate its water so turning to other sources of power, including solar, would free up crude for exportation.

By 2040, 55 percent of the country's power supply will come from solar, wind, geothermal and nuclear energy combined, according to KACARE. The projects will cost the kingdom around \$67 billion over the next five years, according to energy minister Faleh. But the Middle East Economic Digest last week estimated Riyadh had already spent over \$82 billion on electricity projects in the past decade.

Riyadh has signed cooperation agreements and memoranda of understanding with over a dozen countries in recent years to boost nuclear cooperation, including France, China, Russia, Hungary and South Korea. Its plans have sparked some controversy in Washington, where tensions are high over the atomic program of Saudi Arabia's archrival Iran, which denies seeking nuclear arms. An American legislator, Democratic Senator Ed Markey of Massachusetts, has expressed concern over the efforts of US President Donald Trump administration to sign a cooperation accord with Saudi Arabia.

Trump has threatened to tear up a 2015 global pact under which Riyadh's arch-rival Tehran - facing suspicions it was working towards a nuclear bomb - agreed to curb its atomic program in exchange for a lifting of sanctions. Analysts have also warned that capacity to produce nuclear energy could potentially open the door to military options across the Middle East.

"Concern about a nuclear arms race is fuelled by uncertainty over the future of Iran's 2015 nuclear agreement, a seeming US willingness to weaken its strict export safeguards in pursuit of economic advantage, and a willingness by suppliers such as Russia and China to ignore risks involved in weaker controls," said James Dorsey, a Middle East expert at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore.

Separately, Qatar launched a five-year development

plan yesterday that focuses on making the tiny country more self-reliant in the face of a boycott by other Arab states. The National Development Strategy for 2018-2022 pledges to "rationalize energy consumption and encourage development of renewable energy while raising self-sufficiency levels for farming and fishing production".

The 333-page plan, released by Prime Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser Al-Thani, aims for Qatar to satisfy 30 percent of its demand for farm animals and 65 percent of its demand for fish domestically by 2022, partly through fish farms. The document does not give figures for Qatar's current level of self-sufficiency in these areas, but the desert country of 2.7 million is heavily dependent on food imports. Only 6 percent of its land is arable, the document says.

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt cut diplomatic and transport ties with Qatar on June 5, accusing it of backing terrorism, a charge which Doha denies. The boycott disrupted Qatar's imports, many of which used to come across its border with Saudi Arabia, and triggered the withdrawal of billions of dollars from Qatari banks by depositors from the four states.

Qatar's economy and financial markets were hurt as imports plunged about 40 percent from a year earlier in the first weeks of the boycott. But the world's top exporter of liquefied natural gas developed new trade routes and deployed tens of billions of dollars from its sovereign wealth fund, estimated to have about \$320 billion of assets, to protect its banks. Gross domestic product data for the third quarter of 2017 showed the economy had largely recovered from the boycott and was again growing robustly.

Efforts to make Qatar more self-sufficient began within weeks of the boycott starting, as a privately owned local company with government support, Baladna, flew in 3,400 cows on state airline Qatar Airways. It plans to build a herd of 14,000, housing them in sheds cooled by fans and jets of mist. There have been few signs of any resolution to the diplomatic dispute, and a senior UAE official has said Qatar's isolation could last years. In January, Qatar filed a complaint to the United Nations about an alleged violation of its airspace by a UAE military aircraft; the UAE denied any violation. Other parts of the five-year development plan deal with social conditions, such as encouraging Qatari citizens to play sport and improving the health of young people. — Agencies

# World mourns scientist, cultural...

Continued from Page 1

Professor Didier Queloz, an astrophysicist and colleague of Hawking's, told AFP that he was "an extraordinary person to meet". Hawking defied predictions that he would only live for a few years after developing a form of motor neurone disease in his early 20s. The illness gradually robbed him of mobility, leaving him confined to a wheelchair, almost completely paralyzed and unable to speak except through his trademark voice synthesizer. "His courage and persistence with his brilliance and humor inspired people across the world," his family said. "He once said, 'It would not be much of a universe if it wasn't home to the people you love'. We will miss him forever."

Born on January 8, 1942 - 300 years to the day after the death of the father of modern science, Galileo Galilei - Stephen William Hawking became one of the world's most well-regarded scientists and entered the pantheon of science titans. His death was announced on the 139th anniversary of the birth of Albert Einstein. Hawking had an enduring fascination with the mysteries of black holes. His work focused on bringing together relativity - the nature of space and time - and quantum theory - how the smallest particles behave - to explain the creation of the Universe and how it is governed.

"My goal is simple," he once said. "It is complete understanding of the universe, why it is as it is and why it exists at all." But he was also a beloved figure in popular culture, with cameos in "Star Trek: The Next Generation" and "The Simpsons". His voice appeared in Pink Floyd

songs. "Have fun out there among the stars," former US president Barack Obama wrote on Twitter alongside a photo of him with Hawking.

NASA issued its own Twitter eulogy, publishing a video of the scientist grinning as he soared into weightlessness on a zero gravity flight at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, escaping his wheelchair for a brief period. His international reach was demonstrated in China, where news of his death generated nearly half a billion clicks as fans bade farewell on social media platform Weibo to a "giant star".

Hawking's first marriage to Jane Wilde in 1965 gave him three children and was immortalized in the 2014 film "The Theory of Everything". Eddie Redmayne, who won an Oscar for his lead role in the film, said Hawking was "the funniest man I have ever had the pleasure to meet." The couple split after 25 years and Hawking married his former nurse, Elaine Mason, but the union broke down amid allegations that he was being abused. He refused to comment.

Hawking became one of the youngest fellows of Britain's most prestigious scientific body, the Royal Society, at the age of 32. In 1979 he was appointed Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge University - a post previously held by Newton. Hawking was an outspoken commentator on life back on earth, voicing his disapproval in recent years of both the election of Donald Trump in the United States, and Britain's vote to leave the European Union.

He also commented on the future of technology, warning that "the development of full artificial intelligence could spell the end of the human race". Despite being a prominent atheist, Hawking met with four popes, and the Vatican issued a statement saying it was "deeply saddened" by the news of his death. Hawking, it said, had always "wanted to advance the relationship between faith and scientific reason". — AFP

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## Sports

# Goggia beats Vonn to women's downhill skiing WCup title

## Feuz clinches men's World Cup title

**ARE:** Italy's Sofia Goggia lost the race but won the World Cup women's downhill title yesterday as she finished second to Lindsey Vonn in the finals in Are, Sweden. Switzerland's Beat Feuz took the men's downhill title when he finished third in his race.

Goggia, who won the downhill gold at the Pyeongchang Olympics in February, needed to finish second to ensure she added a first World Cup globe. The Italian started the final race with a 23-point edge over Vonn, who took bronze in South Korea, and a 71-point cushion over the only other potential champion, Tina Weirather of Liechtenstein.

Goggia skied ninth and posted the fastest time to that point, finishing in 55.71sec and eliminating Weirather who had already completed her run. Vonn started 13th of the 26 entrants and eclipsed Goggia by 0.06sec. That gave the American an 82nd World Cup victory, only four fewer than the all-time record of Ingemar Stenmark, but she needed help to claim her 17th small globe for winning a World Cup discipline.

If Goggia remained in second, Vonn would gain only

20 points in the standings and the Italian would take the title by just three points. Vonn's compatriot Alice McKennis, the 23rd skier to race, came closest to overtaking Goggia, but the American, whose only previous World Cup podium came in 2013, finished 0.22 behind the Italian to take third.

## Weirather finished seventh, behind Vonn

Weirather finished seventh, 0.49 behind Vonn. Feuz lifted the men's downhill globe when he finished third and the only man who could have caught him in the standings, the Pyeongchang Olympic champion Aksel Lund Svindal of Norway, was fourth.

The 31-year-old Swiss skier had to settle

for the bronze medal in Pyeongchang but the World Cup globe was a fitting reward for the most consistent downhill performer of the World Cup season. He has won in Lake Louise, Wengen and Garmish-Partenkirchen.

His time of 1min 20.21sec was just 0.04sec behind the Austrian pair Vincent Kriechmayr and Matthias Mayer who tied for first. Lund Svindal had to settle for second in the downhill rankings. — AFP



**ARE:** (L-R) Downhill World Cup 2nd place US' Lindsey Vonn, winner Sofia Goggia of Italy and 3rd place Liechtenstein's Tina Weirather pose on the podium after the FIS Downhill World Cup, in Aare, Sweden, yesterday. — AFP

## Late Sheikh Faisal Al-Duaij Al-Sabah shooting tourney

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** Tournament of Late Sheikh Faisal Al-Duaij Al-Sabah will kick off today and will continue for three days in the skeet, trap and double trap events for men, women and juniors.

Assistant Secretary at Kuwait Shooting Sport Club Eng Mohammad Al-Ghurba said the tournament has special significance for the shooting community, and lauded the role the Late Sheikh's family is playing towards KSSC and shooters.

He said the double trap event will be the first and will have the winner announced later in the day. He said official training on skeet and trap for all groups will also be conducted today as competition will resume tomorrow and finals will be on Saturday.

The closing ceremony will be held Saturday 17/3/2018 at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex at 6 pm.



Mohammad Al-Ghurba

## Ferrari look to Vettel to end decade-long wait

**LONDON:** Sebastian Vettel's task with Ferrari this season is as easy to say as it is hard to achieve: bring the Formula One world championship back to Maranello and deny Mercedes a fifth in a row.

The oldest, most glamorous and successful team on the starting grid came close last year, with their German driver leading through the opening 12 rounds from Melbourne until Monza before the challenge unravelled.

But 2018 marks a decade since the Italians last won a championship, their 16th constructors' crown in 2008, and the pressure-always intense even at the best of times-has been ratcheting up. So too have expectations after Vettel and Finnish team mate Kimi Raikkonen, whose 2007 title remains the 15th and last won by a Ferrari driver, prepared for the March 25 opener in Australia by lapping fastest in testing.

Such winter times can be misleading, and teams packed up for Melbourne—a race won by Vettel last year—with a suspicion that Lewis Hamilton's Mercedes are still in front and that Ferrari might even have fallen behind Red Bull.

But there are also strong signs that the battle will be even closer this year than last, when Vettel won five races to four-times champion Hamilton's nine. "Overall, I feel we have a good package," said Raikkonen, now 38 and likely to be leaving at the end of the campaign, after his last day of testing the SF71H car. "The car gives me a good feeling and, even if there are still a lot of things to improve, it's reasonably easy to drive and it reacts to the various set-up changes," added the Finn.

**LOTS OF LAPS**  
Ferrari completed 929 laps of the Barcelona circuit over the eight days of testing, equal to 4,324km—or more than 14 Australian Grand Prix distances. Mercedes managed 1,040 laps or 4,841km.

But Ferrari's fastest laps were set on the new hypersoft tyres, the quickest type available, which Mercedes did not even take to Barcelona. Ferrari also went quicker than Mercedes on the ultrasoft tyres but slower on mediums, the best for long stints. Add in times set on different days, with a range of track temperatures, and the jury remains out.

The amount of smoke coming from the Ferrari in the pitlane in Spain will also be something to watch, with some suggesting their engine was using more oil than others.

Vettel, a four times champion who won his titles between 2010-13 with Red Bull, played down the testing times. "We are still working on some things for the first race and it's not really possible to make any predictions based on the performance of the other teams, because everyone is running a different programme," he said.

"However, I'm happy for the guys in the team," added the German, whose pre-season media engagements have been kept to an absolute minimum. That has allowed the team to focus on the job in hand behind closed doors, even if some detect something of a siege mentality, and spare Vettel too much focus on his temperament after flare-ups in 2017.

Ferrari chairman Sergio Marchionne, who has also made headlines by suggesting Ferrari could leave the sport if they feel it is going in the wrong direction, is clear about what he wants to see. "The best thing I think that could happen in 2018 is for Ferrari to perform up to its true potential and to take on the competition," he said last month after the company's fourth quarter results. "And especially Mercedes with whom it has a love-hate relationship, which has now gone back about four or five years. It would be great if we could see a proper fight between Mercedes and Ferrari." — Reuters

## Woods and Els named as Presidents Cup captains

**ORLANDO:** Tiger Woods and Ernie Els shifted their decades-long friendly rivalry onto the international stage as they were officially named captains for the 2019 Presidents Cup on Tuesday. Woods, who holds the matchplay competition's record with 24 match wins for the United States, and Els, who has won an International side best 20 matches, will lead their teams to Australia for the 2019 edition on Dec. 12-15 at Royal Melbourne.

The announcement was made in the Latrobe Room at Bay Hill, site of this week's Arnold Palmer Invitational on the PGA Tour. Els and Woods have frequently shared golf's main stage. Four-times major winner Els of South Africa has been runner-up to Woods seven times in his professional playing career, including twice in majors—the US and British Open in 2000. Woods and Els served as captain's assistants in the 2017 Presidents Cup, when the 12-man US team won 19-11 at Liberty National in New Jersey for their 10th Cup victory against one loss and one draw in the biennial event.

Els and Woods also shared an iconic moment at the 2003 Presidents Cup when they faced off in a sudden-death playoff to decide the competition. They battled evenly through three tension-packed playoff holes before failing light forced officials to declare the event in South Africa a draw. "Tiger and I have had some great duels in the past, and I look forward to the challenge of going against my longtime friend yet again in 2019," said Els. — AFP

## In from the cold? Paralympics shines light on N Korea's disabled

**PYEONGCHANG:** Despite sending only two novice athletes, and during a major charm offensive with the outside world, there is hope that North Korea's Winter Paralympics debut might signal progress for the country's often harshly treated disabled.

Wheelchair-bound Kim Jong Hyon and Ma Yu Chol only started sit-skiing three months ago, so it was little surprise when they finished at or near the back of the field in their two races in Pyeongchang.

However, they were cheered enthusiastically by South Koreans, who have witnessed the North's rapid warming of ties with Seoul and Washington during the Winter Olympics and Paralympics in Pyeongchang.

North Korea is notorious for its record on human rights, and accounts from the country suggest a dismal fate for its disabled citizens. But the United Nations special rapporteur on disabled people's rights, who visited North Korea last year, also told AFP that the isolated country was "very proud" of its support for para sports.

"This I believe is a good sign of how North Korea wants to support the participation of persons with disabilities," Catalina Devandas-Aguilar said. "The government is very proud of its support for the participation of people with disabilities in sports."

### 'DWARFISM CAMPS'

North Korea is one of the world's most repressive regimes, and over the years dark tales have emerged about its treatment of people with disabili-

ties. Reports have described disabled people being taken away from the showcase capital Pyongyang, and being placed in camps where they live in poor conditions.

A 2006 UN report said that people suffering from dwarfism were rounded up and interned at special sites, while there have also been claims that medical experiments are performed on the disabled.

While it has difficult to independently verify such allegations, disabled people who have fled North Korea give harrowing accounts of their treatment.

Choi Kwang-hyoun, a defector playing for the South's Paralympics ice hockey team in Pyeongchang, said he faced harsh discrimination after losing his left leg in a train accident in the North.

"Life is really difficult for people with disabilities in North Korea," Choi said. However, Kim and Ma's appearance in Pyeongchang—about 30 miles (50 kilometres) from the heavily fortified Korean border—follows a few more positive developments.

The North ratified a key UN convention aimed at protecting the rights of the disabled in 2016, and Devandas-Aguilar was allowed to visit last year, the first time a top UN rights expert had been granted access to the country.

After previously ignoring the Summer Paralympics, swimmer Rim Ju Song became North Korea's first Paralympian at London in 2012, followed by two more athletes at Rio 2016. However, some believe political motives rather than genuine concern for disabled people are behind the North's debut at the Winter Paralympics.

Robert King, a former US special envoy for North Korean human rights, said the nuclear-armed state was more focused on improving ties with the South and the United States as sanctions over its weapons programme start to bite.

"The North Koreans are interested because of the political benefits that they get out of it in terms of their relationship with the South, and an effort to improve relations with the United States," King



**PYEONGCHANG:** L-R: Sin Eui-hyun of South Korea, Kim Jong Hyon of North Korea, Ma Yu Chol of North Korea, and Lee Do-yeon of South Korea pose for a photo during a training session at the Alpensia Biathlon Centre in Pyeongchang. — AFP

told AFP.

King conceded the North had made progress in improving disabled people's rights, but said it was a risk-free way for the state to improve its rights

record. "This is something that does not have much of a political cost for them," he said, explaining that it did not compromise the North's ability to tightly control the country. — AFP

Sports

# Westbrook reaches triple ton, Raptors recover

## Thunder star joins exclusive club of triple-double centurions

LOS ANGELES: Russell Westbrook snared the 100th triple-double of his career on Tuesday as the Oklahoma City Thunder closed in on a playoff berth with a 119-107 defeat of the Atlanta Hawks.

Westbrook finished with 32 points, 12 rebounds and 12 assists to become only the fourth player in NBA history to record a century of triples. The 29-year-old Thunder star joins Oscar Robertson (181), Magic Johnson (138) and Jason Kidd (107) as the latest member of the exclusive club of triple-double centurions.

Reigning NBA MVP Westbrook had already claimed Robertson's single-season triple-double record last year, with 42. "It's a blessing man. I give all thanks to the man above for the ability to play basketball," Westbrook said afterward when asked about his milestone.

"I'm just thankful to be able to do it here in Oklahoma City with my team-mates, happy to be able to accomplish something like that," he added. Westbrook led the scoring on Tuesday, with Carmelo Anthony adding 21 points and Jerami Grant contributing 20 off the bench as the Thunder improved to 41-29.

Oklahoma City are fourth in the Western Conference standings, two wins ahead of the fifth-placed New Orleans Pelicans. Although not mathematically certain of a place in the postseason, only a major collapse is likely to deny the Thunder a playoff berth.

### SPURS BOUNCE BACK

Elsewhere on Tuesday, the San Antonio Spurs

bounced back from Monday's mauling at the hands of Houston with a 108-72 blowout over the Orlando Magic. LaMarcus Aldridge returned to the starting line-up for San Antonio and duly delivered with 24 points. Aldridge was one of six Spurs to make double figures, helping the franchise improve to 38-30 for the season.

San Antonio, who are awaiting the return of Kawhi Leonard from injury, are battling to avoid failing to reach the playoffs for the first time since 1996-1997. Two of the Spurs veterans, Tony Parker and Pau Gasol, both rallied to the cause on Tuesday with 10 and 11 points off the bench.

Spurs coach Gregg Popovich saluted his side's hard-nosed defensive display as integral to the win. "The defense really set the tone," Popovich told reporters. "People guarded their men and took pride in it and the rest of the team followed through. It kind of fuelled the offense a little bit."

Popovich believes the Spurs defense could ultimately define the remainder of their season. "We're not going to score on some nights so the defense has to sustain us," he said. In the Eastern Conference, meanwhile, leaders Toronto were forced to dig themselves out of a hole before recovering to seal a ninth straight win in their 116-102 defeat of the Brooklyn Nets.

Jonas Valanciunas led the Raptors' rearguard action with 26 points and 14 rebounds, helping Toronto recover from a 74-59 deficit early in the second half to claim a win which saw them seal their 50th win of the season.

DeMar DeRozan and Fred VanVleet scored 15 points each while Kyle Lowry had a relatively quiet night with



ATLANTA: Russell Westbrook #0 of the Oklahoma City Thunder handles the ball against the Atlanta Hawks on Tuesday at Philips Arena in Atlanta, Georgia. — AFP

11 points and 11 assists. D'Angelo Russell led the scoring for the Nets with 32 points with Rondae Hollis-Jefferson adding 19 from the bench.

In Phoenix, LeBron James scored his 14th triple-double of the season—a career high—as the Cleveland Cavaliers demolished the Suns 129-107. The Cavs

improved to 39-28 to remain in fourth spot in the East, behind Toronto, Boston and Indiana.

James meanwhile lit up the victory with 28 points, 13 rebounds and 11 assists on a night when seven Cleveland players posted double-digit scores, including Jordan Clarkson, with 23 off the bench. — AFP

## Al-Qadisiya basketball team defeat Kuwait

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Al-Qadisiya basketball team defeated Kuwait team by the score of 82-75 in their match that was held Tuesday at Kuwait Club hall, to conclude the first half of the basketball league.

Al-Jahra defeated Al-Nasser 84-65. This makes Al-Qadisiya on top with 10 points while Kuwait has 9 points followed by Jahra 8, Kazima 7, Araby 6 and Nasser 5.

The Qadisiya and Kuwait match was very strong since it started, as Kuwait was in control and reached the score of 14-6 as players were highly focused and their attacks were highly organized, and Qadisiya players were hasty and squandered several opportunities, though the difference was reduced as the first quarter ended with the score of 16-13.

Then in the second quarter Al-Qadisiya turned the tide through its player Nasser Al-Hajras and was scoring from under the basket, while Saleh Al-Yousuf was scoring from outside, and the quarter ended with 32-29.

The third quarter saw Al-Qadisiya succeed in raising the difference to 7 points rebounding from under the basket by Ahmad Darweesh, Saleh Yousuf and Abdelrahman Al-Sahou, then Kuwait tied the score 39-39 through the moves of its players Hussein Al-Khabbaz and Abdallah Al-Shimmari, yet Al-Qadisiya was able to end the third quarter by the score of 53-46.

Excitement characterized the fourth quarter as Kuwait took the initiative and exchanged leads until Al-Qadisiya made the score 66-63 with 16 seconds remaining, only to have Kuwait tie the score by a three pointer by Fahad Al-Dhafiri. The teams resorted to overtime, and this was controlled by Qadisiya and ended the match with the score of 82-75.



Winners Al-Qadisiya basketball team

## Folau undecided on Wallabies future ahead of World Cup

MELBOURNE: Wallabies fullback Israel Folau is undecided on whether he will commit to Michael Cheika's team next year, despite the lure of a second World Cup appearance in Japan. The dual code international is out of contract at the end of the 2018 season and said he would not rush into a decision on his playing future.

"Look, (the World Cup) is something I enjoyed last time around. But, in saying that, there's plenty of options on the line and, when that time comes, I'll make a decision when I'm ready," Folau told local media yesterday.

"There's no rush. I want to make sure everything is set in position and I feel comfortable and I'll come out and make that announcement." The loss of the explosive 28-year-old, who made his name in rugby league, would be a blow for Australia's hopes of winning a third World Cup, four years after reaching the final in England.

It would also be a huge setback for governing body Rugby Australia, which has worked hard to retain its highest profile player in the 15-man code since 2013. Folau started his stellar sporting career in Australia's National Rugby League as a 17-year-old for Melbourne Storm and became the country's youngest international in the 13-man game at 18 when he debuted for the Kangaroos in the same year.

His comments are likely to fan speculation that he is set for a return to NRL but the Wallabies back would also generate huge interest from cashed-up rugby union clubs in Europe and Japan.

The 62-test back told local media last year that he missed playing in the NRL's annual 'State of Origin' series between Queensland and New South Wales and that a return to league was a case of 'never say never'.

Folau scored 12 tries for the Wallabies last year despite being rested for the season-ending tour of the northern hemisphere and was awarded an unprecedented third John Eales medal as the country's top rugby union player.

The New South Wales Waratahs said he was looking to improve on his stellar 2017. "I feel really good. Physically, my body's in good shape and I feel good and I feel mentally good as well," he said ahead of the Waratahs' Super Rugby clash against the Melbourne Rebels on Sunday.

"I just feel like I'm happy with parts of my game but certainly I'm never satisfied fully. I'm always wanting to get better." — Reuters

## Kuwaiti women take on sea with 'far out' wakeboard skills

KUWAIT: Wakeboarding is one of the most demanding marine sports that requires some "gnarly" skills to overcome the unpredictable nature of the sea. With their "far out" attitude and unwavering determination, Kuwaiti women wakeboarders had taken on the challenge to show people that their country has the asset to compete against the world's top athletes.

In an interview with Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), member of (Q8 Balance) wakeboard team Shaikha Al-Nouri attributed her passion to her late father who always encouraged her to take up sports when she was young.

In 2009, the Kuwaiti athlete got interested in wakeboarding and by 2010, Al-Nouri began to compete and win local tournaments.

Al-Nouri said that she was currently the only senior female team member in Q8 Balance; however, she was undeterred from continuing on her path to glory. She affirmed that her teammates had always encouraged her to continue pursuing her passion.

Most recently, Kuwaiti women had been showing increasing interest in wakeboarding and in fact, more cadets are joining the team so far, said Al-Nouri.

On their part, wakeboarders Janna Al-Nsef and Mariam Al-Sabah—who joined the team in 2014 and 2016



Queen of Wake Abu Dhabi National Championship (2017). Gold medal winner.

respectively—were inspired to take up wakeboarding after the reputation of the team grew exponentially.

Despite a number of difficulties, both athletes expressed their desires to compete and win in upcoming wakeboard

tournaments, stressing that nothing was impossible with hard training and a gung-ho attitude. The all-Kuwaiti wakeboard team was established in 2008 while the Q8 Balance squad was founded in 2011. — KUNA

## Sports

# Wozniacki loses in Indian Wells as Halep advances

## Del Potro dumps Ferrer, Cilic crashes out

**INDIANA WELLS:** Caroline Wozniacki blew any chance she had to overtake Simona Halep as world number one after losing 6-4 7-5 to Darya Kasatkina in the fourth round of the BNP Paribas Open at Indian Wells on Tuesday. While Halep overcame a sluggish start to beat Wang Qiang 7-5 6-1. Australian Open champion Wozniacki fell to the same player who knocked her out of last month's St. Petersburg Ladies Open. "I'm just going on court and actually now enjoying every minute during I'm playing." 20th seed Kasatkina told reporters.

"And, yeah, I'm playing (my) best matches against the best players. But as I say, if you want to be on the top, you have to beat the top players. So quite simple rule." Facing Kasatkina in the quarters will be No. 10 seed Angelique Kerber, who easily defeated Caroline Garcia 6-1 6-1. In the men's Juan Martin Del Potro continued his dominance over David Ferrer to book a spot in the Indian Wells fourth round as second seed Marin Cilic suffered a shock loss. World No. 8 Del Potro extended his win streak over the Spaniard to five straight matches, winning 6-4, 7-6 (7/3) at the ATP Tour hardcourt tournament here Tuesday.

The 29-year-old Del Potro improved to 7-6 overall against Ferrer and his five consecutive victories date back to the 2013 Wimbledon quarter-finals. "We always play tough matches. I got lucky," said Del Potro. "I played really well in the tiebreak and served well in the important moments."

Del Potro will next face fellow Argentinian Leonardo Mayer, who defeated Japanese qualifier Taro Daniel 6-

4, 6-1. Del Potro is playing some of his best tennis in years as he improved to 13-3 on the season. In January he returned the top 10 for the first time since 2014.

He is fresh off winning his 21st career title earlier this month in Acapulco when he steamrolled his way into the final by beating three top 10 players in a row. He capped off his Acapulco run by beating South Africa's Kevin Anderson 6-4, 6-4 in the championship game.

Earlier on Tuesday, Halep booked a quarter-final place against Petra Martic after getting the better of China's Wang. The turning point came after a string of unforced errors left Halep trailing 5-4 in the first set, prompting coach Darren Cahill to tell the defensive specialist to work longer points and reduce the error count. Halep went on to lose only one more game. The 26-year-old Romanian showed no sign of the foot injury that forced her to withdraw from the Qatar Total Open in Doha last month and is well positioned to make a run at reclaiming the Indian Wells title she won in 2015. First she will have to get past unseeded Croatian Martic, who advanced to the last eight with a 6-3 7-6(4) win against Marketa Vondrousova.

"She is a very tough opponent because she is serving pretty strong and also the forehand has a lot of top spin ... So I will have to work hard," Halep told the Tennis Channel. A day after beating her sister Serena, Venus Williams moved past Anastasiya Sevastova 7-6(6) 6-4 and will next face Carla Suarez Navarro, who defeated Danielle Collins 6-2 6-4.

Former world number one Karolina Pliskova used her



### Pliskova defeats 16-year-old Anisimova

powerful serve to overwhelm 16-year-old Amanda Anisimova and reach the quarter-finals for the third year in a row. Pliskova's 6-1 7-6(2) win ended the run of the young American, a wild card who beat ninth seed Petra



INDIAN WELLS: Simona Halep of Romania hits a shot during her match against Qiang Wang of China during Day 9 of BNP Paribas Open on Tuesday. —AFP

Kvitova in the third round for the biggest win of her fledgling career. Pliskova will face 20-year-old Naomi Osaka of Japan, who defeated Maria Sakkari 6-1 5-7 6-1 to reach her first Indian Wells quarter-final. —Agencies

## Winning India rights will give Sony 'monopoly'

**MUMBAI:** Adding the rights to broadcast cricket in England and Australia across the subcontinent gave Sony Pictures Networks a dominant position in the sport but winning the rights to India would give it a monopoly, a senior company executive has told Reuters. India's huge market is a major draw for sponsors and advertisers, who often plan product launches around major cricket events and book advertising slots in advance, which in turn leads to a race between broadcasters to secure content.

Star India paid \$757.6 million for the rights to broadcast India's home matches for the period July 2012 to March 2018. Those rights will be up for grabs on March 27 and could see another round of frenzied bidding from the two major players in the Indian market. SPN, owned by Sony Corp, lost out to Star India for the Indian Premier League rights last year but have since won the license to broadcast Australian and English cricket in the subcontinent, taking their tally to seven test playing nations.

"The whole idea was to strengthen our overall leadership position," Rajesh Kaul, the president of SPN's Sports and Distribution Business, told Reuters in an interview. "ECB was a very important and integral part of the strategy. While Australian cricket happens during the winter here, cricket in England is during the summer."

"There is a very encouraging trend of other sports also getting traction in this part of the world but cricket is still the largest. And to have that dominant leadership position in cricket was very, very critical for us." Last year Star India bid a staggering 163.48 billion Indian rupees (\$2.52 billion) to bag the worldwide television and digital rights of the IPL for five years. SPN, who had owned the rights for a decade, was the only other bidder for the television rights with 110.5 billion rupees but lost out to Star's multi-platform offer.

### ON A DIFFERENT LEVEL

SPN already had five boards under their umbrella after they paid \$385 million in 2016 to acquire TEN Sports, which owns the broadcast rights of cricket boards in South Africa, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, West Indies and Zimbabwe.

By wrapping up deals for the Australia and England boards, the network, which also holds rights for this year's soccer World Cup in Russia, will have over 1,000 days of live international cricket over the next five years.

While the health and drawing power of test cricket has come under scrutiny time and again, Kaul said matches between the top sides in the world was always a big draw.

He cited the example of the three-test series between South Africa and India in January, which drew double the TV ratings of India's home series against Sri Lanka last year. "We are now a one-stop destination when it comes to all the bilateral international cricket series," Kaul said.

He added that while the India rights were not a "must-have", acquiring them would take their position to a "completely different level". "As far as our cricket strategy is concerned by and large we are very much there," he said. "We are already the leaders when it comes to cricket and if we get the BCCI it will just give us the monopoly." —Reuters

## Taqi and Ahmad Dashti in semi-finals of Kuwait Tennis Open

**KUWAIT:** The results of Kuwait Ninth Tennis Open 2018 which is being held 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 at the Tennis Center of KTA, in Yarmouk Sports Club.

### Tuesday's results were as follows:

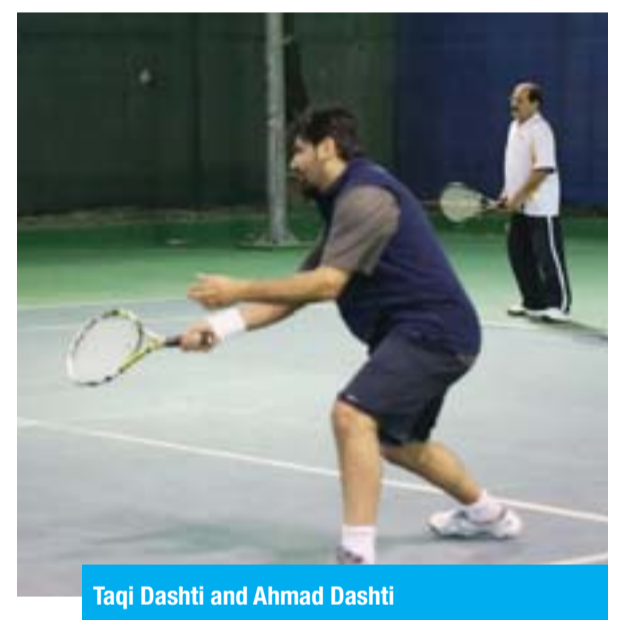
**Under 11 Category:**  
Yousuf Al-Linraqi def. Mahdi Abbas 2-0  
Omar Hisham def. Yousuf Foubyan 2-0  
Khalid Ba-Faqir def. Mohammad Qilli 2-0  
Mohammad Al-Awadhi def. Ibrahim Al-Tarkait 2-0

**Under 17 Category:**  
Talal Antar def. Suleiman Shaker 2-0

**Girls Under 18:**  
Ritaj Hussein reached the finals by defeating Muneera Al-Duajj 2-0

**Men's Individuals:**  
Abdelhameed Jumaa def. Hussein Hani 2-0  
Essa Qabazard def. Dawood Salman 2-0  
Ali Ismail def. Yaqoub Al-Foudary 2-0  
Abdelrahman Al-Awadhi def. Abdallah Al-Qallaf 2-0

**Men's doubles:**  
Abdelhameed Jumaa and Abdelrahman Al-Awadhi reached the quarter finals by defeating Ali and Ahmad Murad 2-0, while Enaam and Ifukhar def. Ali Shams and Hadi Jamal 2-0. Meanwhile in the doubles pioneers category the father son team of Taqi Dashti and Ahmad Dashti reached the semi finals by defeating Sergio and Ibrahim by 2-0, and Winde and George defeated Abdelsalam Mohammad and Hassan Al-Yousufi 2-0.



Taqi Dashti and Ahmad Dashti

## Sharma, Sundar take India into tri-series final

**COLOMBO:** Skipper Rohit Sharma and off-spinner Washington Sundar helped India enter the Twenty20 tri-series final with a 17-run win over Bangladesh in Colombo yesterday. Sharma's dominant 89 guided India to 176-3 and then Sundar claimed three wickets to restrict Bangladesh to 159-6 at the R. Premadasa Stadium. Mushfiqur Rahim's unbeaten 55-ball 72, his second successive half-century, went in vain as India secured their third win in four matches. They now await the winner of the last league contest, which is a virtual semi-final between Bangladesh and hosts Sri Lanka on Friday. Sundar got three top Bangladesh batsmen including dangerous left-handed opener Tamim Iqbal for 27 to derail the opposition chase at 40-3. Mushfiqur then put on 65 runs for the fifth wicket with Sabbir Rahman, who made 27, to give India a scare but the increasing run-rate finally got to the Bangladesh chase.

Sundar returned impressive figures of 3-22 while leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal and pacemen Mohammed Siraj and Shardul Thakur claimed a wicket each. Earlier Sharma, who hit form after scores of 0, 17 and 11, smashed five fours and as many sixes in his 61-ball knock after India were put into bat first.

Following a watchful start against a disciplined Bangladesh bowling, India cut loose with Sharma and Suresh Raina, who smashed 47, putting together 102 runs for the second wicket.

Sharma, who registered his 13th T20 half-century, also put on 70 runs with fellow opener Shikhar Dhawan, who made 35, to lay a solid platform. Paceman Rubel Hossain claimed two wickets and also ran Sharma out off his own bowling on the final ball of the innings. Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have both lost two of their three matches. The final is slated for Sunday. —AFP

### SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at close of play of match 5 between Bangladesh and India yesterday at Colombo, Sri Lanka.

#### India win by 17 runs

India		Bangladesh		
R Sharma	Run Out R Hossain	89	T Iqbal b Sundar	27
S Dhawan	b R Hossain	35	L Das st Karthik b Sundar	7
S Raina	c S Sarkar b R Hossain	47	S Sarkar b Sundar	1
D Karthik	Not Out	2	M Rahim Not Out	72
Extras	0b 1lb 0nb Open 2w	3	Mahmudullah c L Rahul b Chahal	11
Total	(20.0 overs)	176-3	S Rahman b S Thakur	27
Fall of Wickets:	1-70 Dhawan, 2-172 Raina, 3-176 Sharma.		M Hasan c Raina b M Siraj	7
Did Not Bat:	Rahul, Pandey, Sundar, Shankar, Siraj, Thakur, Chahal		Extras	0b 1lb Inb Open 5w
Bowling:	Abu Hider 4-0-43-0-10.75 (1w); Nazmul Islam 4-0-27-0-6.75; Rubel Hossain 4-0-27-2-6.75; Mustafizur Rahman 4-0-38-0-9.50; Mehedi Hasan 3-0-31-0-10.33 (1w); Mahmudullah 1-0-9-0-9.00.		Total	(20.0 overs)
				159-6
			Fall of Wickets:	1-12 Das, 2-35 Sarkar, 3-40 Iqbal, 4-61 Mahmudullah, 5-126 Rahman, 6-150 Miraz.
			Did Not Bat:	Rony, Hossain, Rahman, Islam.
			Bowling:	Mohammed Siraj 4-0-50-1-12.50 (2w,Inb); Washington Sundar 4-0-22-3-5.50 (1w); Shardul Thakur 4-0-37-1-9.25; Yuzvendra Chahal 4-0-21-1-5.25 (2w); Vijay Shankar 4-0-28-0-7.00.



COLOMBO: Indian cricketer Shikhar Dhawan plays a shot during the fifth Twenty20 (T20) international cricket match between India and Bangladesh of the tri-nation Nidahas Trophy at the R. Premadasa stadium in Colombo yesterday. —AFP

Sports

# Evergrande win again to move closer to last 16

## Al Sadd secure 4-0 win over Nasaf Qarshi

HONG KONG: Guangzhou Evergrande continued their resurgence in the Asian Champions League yesterday with a 2-0 win in South Korea over Jeju United that moved the two-time champions to within touching distance of the knockout phase.

Goals from Nemanja Gudelj and Alan Carvalho gave Fabio Cannavaro's side their second win in a row against the K-League club and moved them on to eight points from four games at the top of Group G.

"We have focused a lot on improving our concentration in away games," said the Italian. "In the last game we conceded too soon due to a loss of focus but this time you could see all of the players have shown their desire to win. "We can't sit back and relax just because we have won so many titles. We need more championships and in this match we were all determined and confident." The Chinese Super League side lead the group by three points from Thailand's Buriram United and Cerezo Osaka, who played out a 2-2 draw in Japan with Kenyu Sugimoto scoring two minutes from time to salvage a point for the J-League club.

Jeju United are bottom of Group G with three points, with two matches remaining. Tianjin Quanjian made it a positive night for Chinese teams as they defeated 2016 champions Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 4-2. Anthony Modeste and Alexandre Pato scored the crucial goals in

the final six minutes. The defeat was Jeonbuk's first of the campaign but Choi Kang-hee's side remain top of Group E. However, their advantage has been whittled down to just two points with Tianjin now in second.

Kitchee sprung the surprise of the round with a last-gasp 1-0 win over Japan's Kashiwa Reysol, with Cheng Chin-lung scoring two minutes into stoppage time to earn the Hong Kong side their first-ever victory in the Asian Champions League.

Spanish World Cup winner Xavi Hernandez, meanwhile, was on target for Al Sadd as the Qatari side secured a 4-0 win over Uzbekistan's Nasaf Qarshi that keeps them top of Group C.

Al Sadd lead on goal-difference from Iran's Persepolis after last year's semi-finalists moved on to nine points with a narrow win over Al Wasl that ensured the club from the United Arab Emirates could not finish in the top two positions. Moamen Zakaria earned Al Ahli a point as their meeting with Al Gharafa from Qatar ended in a 1-1 draw while the other Group A game between Tractorsazi of Iran and Al Jazira of the UAE finished with the same scoreline.

Al Ahli lead the group by three points from Al Jazira, who are level on five points with Al Gharafa as Tractorsazi occupy last place with just two points from four games. — Reuters



TIANJIN: Kim Jin Su (R) of Jeonbuk Hyundai fights for the ball with Zhang Cheng of Tianjin Quanjian during the AFC Champions League group stage football match between China's Tianjin Quanjian and South Korea's Jeonbuk Hyundai in Tianjin yesterday. — AFP

“ We can't sit back and relax ”

## Gun-carrying PAOK boss faces sanctions as FIFA warns Greece

ATHENS: PAOK Salonika president Ivan Savvides yesterday faced disciplinary charges that could lead to a lengthy stadium ban and a points deduction for his team, as world soccer's governing body FIFA warned Greece to act or face potential suspension.

The Georgia-born businessman's pitch invasion with what appeared to be a gun in his belt on Sunday triggered a suspension of football matches in Greece with FIFA urging the country for immediate action.

In a brief statement, the Greek football federation said Savvides had been charged with a series of football code violations, including making threats, which carry a fine and a potential stadium ban of up to five

years. The top division Superleague's disciplinary body will now be responsible for any further action, a league official said. Savvides' team could also be punished with a points deduction which could put them out of the running for the title which they were competing for before Sunday's match.

The charges were announced minutes before Herbert Huebel, who heads a monitoring committee set up by FIFA last year for Greek football, warned Greece to act or risk a potential soccer 'Grexit'.

"What happened in Greek football to be very polite is unacceptable," Huebel said after meeting Deputy Culture and Sport minister Georgios Vassiliadis and federation officials, adding his report to FIFA and UEFA would not be positive.

"The word Grexit is no more impossible. Greek football is going to an edge," he told reporters.

Greece narrowly avoided a FIFA ban back in 2016 over the government's decision to scrap the Greek Cup following crowd violence.

The country has indefinitely suspended matches after Savvides was filmed wearing a holster which appeared to contain a gun as he strode onto the pitch to protest about a PAOK disallowed goal against AEK



Herbert Huebel

Athens at the weekend.

The game was abandoned and later awarded to PAOK 1-0 following the controversial goal which had prompted the initial protests.

Savvides apologised for his actions in a club statement on Tuesday but the European Club Association (ECA) suspended the Greek side as a member with immediate effect. — Reuters

## West Ham vow to ban pitch invaders for life

LONDON: West Ham United say supporters who invaded the pitch and threw missiles towards the directors' box during Saturday's home defeat by Burnley will be banned for life. At least two supporters entered the playing area during the second half in which Burnley scored three times to win 3-0 and leave West Ham in relegation danger from the Premier League.

One of the fans, a 61-year-old businessman, took a corner flag and planted it in the centre circle to protest the club's move from Upton Park Stadium. West Ham co-owners David Gold and David Sullivan were verbally abused and had coins thrown at them in the directors' box as fans congregated below.

The club, which moved into the Olympic 2012 stadium, now known as the London Stadium, at the beginning of last season as lead tenants, have held emergency meetings with stakeholders.

"West Ham United are committed to taking decisive and positive action with the primary focus of ensuring London Stadium is a safe, comfortable and secure environment for supporters attending future matches," a statement said. "Following the incidents which marred the second half of the Premier League fixture with Burnley, the Club is conducting a full and thorough investigation, and has attended a series of emergency meetings with London Stadium stakeholders. "The Club is working in close conjunction with the Metropolitan Police to identify those individuals, who entered the pitch during the second half, and with stadium operator LS185, using London Stadium's high-quality CCTV footage, to identify those who threw missiles, both of which are specific offences under the Football (Offences) Act 1991."

"Any individual found guilty will be banned from attending any West Ham United fixture, home and away, for life and the Club will request the courts serve a banning order to prevent these individuals attending any football matches in future." —Reuters

## Bruins storm past Hurricanes 6-4

RALEIGH: David Pastrnak scored three goals in the third period to complete a huge Boston comeback as the Bruins took down the Carolina Hurricanes 6-4 on Tuesday night in Raleigh, N.C. Pastrnak notched a power-play goal with 3:30 remaining to give the Bruins their first lead since it was 1-0. Brad Marchand, Matt Grzelcyk and Danton Heinen also scored for Boston. Riley Nash and Marchand each provided two assists while Pastrnak and Grzelcyk had one apiece. Carolina's goals were scored by Sebastian Aho, Teuvo Teravainen, Justin Williams and Brock McGinn. Elias Lindholm and Justin Faulk both had two assists.

### PREDATORS 3, JETS 1

Goalie Pekka Rinne stopped 32 of 33 shots, and Nashville pulled away for a win over visiting Winnipeg. The Predators earned their 11th win in 12 games to increase their lead atop the Western Conference's Central Division. The Predators reached 100 points, which is tied with the Tampa Bay Lightning for most in the NHL. Kevin Fiala, Austin Watson and Viktor Arvidsson scored for Nashville. Kyle Connor scored in a losing effort for Winnipeg, which lost its third game in a row.

### AVALANCHE 5, WILD 1

J.T. Compher scored two goals while Semyon Varlamov stopped 33 shots as Colorado started a brief, critical late-season road trip with a win over Minnesota. Nikita Zadorov, Nathan MacKinnon and Tyson Jost also lit the lamp for Colorado, which tied Dallas for the two Western Conference wild-card positions at 82 points apiece. Mikko Koivu scored the only goal for Minnesota.

### CANADIENS 4, STARS 2

Artturi Lehkonen had a pair of goals and Alex Galchenyuk and Jonathan Drouin recorded two assists each as Montreal defeated visiting Dallas to snap a five-match losing streak. Canadiens goalie Antti Niemi made 36 saves. The Stars have lost two straight matches, are 1-3-1 in their past five games and 4-6-2 in their last 12. Radek Faksa and Jamie Benn scored for Dallas.

### SENATORS 7, LIGHTNING 4

Ryan Dzingel and Mike Hoffman both hit the 20-goal mark, and goalie Mike Condon stopped 42 shots as visiting Ottawa handed Tampa Bay its first regulation loss in 11 games. Hoffman, who scored twice, has compiled 20 or more goals in all four of his full NHL seasons. Dzingel, Marian Gaborik, Erik Karlsson and Tom Pyatt



CALGARY: Sean Monahan #23 of the Calgary Flames looks for a rebound after Micheal Ferland #79 takes a shot on Cam Talbot #33 of the Edmonton Oilers during an NHL game at Scotiabank Saddledome on Tuesday in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. — AFP

each had a goal and an assist for the Senators. J.T. Miller responded with three goals for the Lightning, his first career hat trick. Ryan McDonagh added a goal for Tampa Bay.

### FLAMES 1, OILERS 0

Johnny Gaudreau scored the lone goal early in the second period and goalie Mike Smith pitched a 28-save shutout as Calgary blanked visiting Edmonton. Gaudreau tallied at the 5:18 mark of the middle frame. Calgary's Micheal Ferland won a board battle with Adam Larsson, then gave the puck to Sean Monahan, who faked a shot before feeding a wide-open Gaudreau at the doorstep. Gaudreau roofed a back-hander over the shoulder of Oilers goalie Cam Talbot (31 saves). Gaudreau's goal was his 80th point of the season, a career high.

### COYOTES 4, KINGS 3 (SO)

Alex Goligoski's goal in the fifth round of a shootout gave Arizona a win over visiting Los Angeles. Arizona led 3-0 midway through the second period before Los Angeles rallied to force overtime. Rookie Coyotes goaltender Adin Hill stopped 34 shots for his first career NHL win. Nick Cousins led the Coyotes with a goal and an assist. Clayton Keller and Christian Dvorak also scored for Arizona in regulation. Jeff Carter led the

Kings with two goals, while Tanner Pearson supplied Los Angeles' other goal. Los Angeles goaltender Jack Campbell recorded 26 saves. — Reuters

Live		Matches on TV	
		(Local Timings)	
<b>UEFA EUROPA LEAGUE</b>			
Lokomotiv Moscow v Atletico de Madrid	19:00		
beIN SPORTS HD 2			
Dynamo Kyiv v Lazio	21:00		
beIN SPORTS HD 2			
Zenit St. Petersburg v Leipzig	21:00		
beIN SPORTS HD 5			
Athletic de Bilbao v Olympique Marseille	21:00		
beIN SPORTS HD 2			
Viktoria Plzen v Sporting	21:00		
beIN SPORTS HD 4			
Olympique Lyonnais v CSKA Moscow	23:05		
beIN SPORTS HD 7			
Red Bull Salzburg v Borussia Dortmund	23:05		
beIN SPORTS HD 6			
Arsenal v Milan	23:05		
beIN SPORTS HD 2			

## Pakistan's international ban lifted

ZURICH: Pakistan's ban from international soccer has been lifted by FIFA following the end of "undue third-party interference" in the country's football federation (PFF), the world governing body said yesterday.

The ban, in force since October, had barred Pakistan's teams, including the senior national side, from playing in international competition while the PFF was denied access to FIFA development and training programmes.

FIFA said it lifted the ban after an administrator appointed by the Lahore High Court was directed to hand control back to the PFF. FIFA said the PFF had "successfully taken back control of the PFF offices along with the PFF accounts on March 1" and added that it was still closely following the situation at the federation.

According to FIFA records, Pakistan, 203rd of 211 teams in the world rankings, have not played a full international since a 0-0 draw with Yemen in a World Cup qualifier in March 2015.

Pakistan have never qualified for the World Cup. FIFA's statutes rule that all member federations must be free of any government and judicial interference in their respective countries. — Reuters

**12** Goggia beats Vonn to women's downhill skiing WCup title



**13** Kuwaiti women take on sea with 'far out' wakeboard skills



**15** Evergrande win again to move closer to last 16



## Barca thrash Chelsea to make last eight

Majestic Messi hits 100 Champions League goals



BARCELONA: Barcelona's Spanish midfielder Andres Iniesta (L) vies with Chelsea's Nigerian midfielder Victor Moses during the UEFA Champions League round of sixteen second leg football match between FC Barcelona and Chelsea FC at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona yesterday. — AFP

BARCELONA: Barcelona hailed Lionel Messi as 'The King' and he handed Chelsea the royal punishment by scoring twice to reach 100 Champions League goals and end their quarter-final hopes.

After unfurling a banner showing the words 'God Save The King' before kick-off, Barca's fans were celebrating after just 129 seconds at the Camp Nou as Messi found the net before Chelsea had even made a pass. He then teed up Ousmane Dembele to double Barca's lead in the second leg of the last-16 clash before registering a century of Champions League goals on his 123rd appearance to complete a 3-0 victory, 4-1 on aggregate.

Messi becomes only the second player to reach the milestone in Europe's premier tournament, following Real Madrid's Cristiano Ronaldo, who has 117 goals in 152 games. By the end, the Argentinian's scintillating breakthrough in the build-up to Dembele's first Barcelona goal had become little more than a footnote to what

was another Messi masterclass.

It caps a remarkable five days for the 30-year-old, who sat out Saturday's La Liga win over Malaga to attend to the birth of his third child. Chelsea, in touch after the 1-1 draw at Stamford Bridge, were therefore unfortunate enough to encounter the striker fresh, free and at his frighteningly brilliant best.

At the finish, Chelsea coach Antonio Conte left the field with his arm around the forward, perhaps with nothing to add but congratulations. Conte's team had chances, particularly in the first half, but the sense was once Barcelona were in front they were content to sit back and counter.

With Manchester United dumped out by Sevilla and Tottenham outmanoeuvred by Juventus, Chelsea's exit means for all the talk of a Premier League resurgence, Liverpool and Manchester City are its only two representatives in the quarter-finals. Spain have three, after Real saw off the challenge of Paris Saint-Germain.

### FASTEST MESSI GOAL

Andres Iniesta shook off a hamstring strain to start while Dembele was a surprise inclusion, preferred to Paulinho and rewarded for his excellent display against Malaga.

Conte, meanwhile, plumped for Olivier Giroud up front ahead of both Alvaro Morata, who was on the bench, and Eden Hazard, who was granted his wish to play deeper in attacking midfield.

Within three minutes, however, Chelsea's plan to frustrate was spoiled. Messi started the move and finished it, with Dembele, Luis Suarez and a deflection off Marcos Alonso, helping him find the space to fire through the legs of Thibaut Courtois for the fastest goal of his career.

Chelsea responded well, with Willian and Victor Moses both posing a threat down the right, only for Barcelona to strike again in the 20th minute.

Cesc Fabregas failed to secure possession in mid-

field and Messi was away, skipping past a desperate lunge from Andreas Christensen, before taking the whole stadium by surprise by squaring to the back post. The excellent Dembele took one touch and slammed the ball into the top corner.

Alonso and N'Golo Kante both went close before half-time, the latter arguably robbing Fabregas of an easier finish with the Spaniard's right foot. Alonso then clipped the edge of the post with a bending free-kick just before half-time.

After an hour, however, any hopes Chelsea had of a comeback were extinguished. Suarez raced through the midfield but looked to have hit a wall on the edge of Chelsea's box.

Messi took over, tearing past the rooted Moses and banging the ball, again through the legs of Courtois, into the net. Antonio Rudiger headed against the bar late on but Chelsea could not even find the scantest of consolations. Messi's work was done. — AFP

## Bayern sweep aside Besiktas to reach quarter-finals

ISTANBUL: A Thiago Alcantara strike and Sandro Wagner's first Champions League goal capped Bayern Munich's 3-1 win at Besiktas yesterday as the German giants cruised into the quarter-finals for the seventh year in a row.

Bayern completed a comprehensive 8-1 aggregate victory in Istanbul, having effectively clinched the last-16 tie following a 5-0 rout last month in the first leg in Munich. For Bayern coach Jupp Heynckes, who replaced Carlo Ancelotti in October, this was his 11th straight win in the Champions League which set a new competition record.

After Thiago fired home early on, an own goal by Besiktas right-back Gokhan Gonul put Bayern 2-0 up right at the start of the second half. With their team 7-0 down overall, Besiktas finally came to life, grabbing a consolation goal by Vagner Love.

But Bayern notched their third of the evening when back-up striker Sandro Wagner came off the bench to mark his Champions League debut with his first goal at this level. Having resisted the urge to name a weakened team after their first-leg romp, Bayern wasted little time taking the lead against the Turkish champions.

Top scorer Robert Lewandowski surprisingly start-

ed up front, leaving Wagner waiting for his elite European debut until the last 20 minutes. It was a surprise move by Heynckes with tough Bundesliga games against RB Leipzig and Borussia Dortmund to come this month.

Nevertheless, Lewandowski played until the 67th minute, but failed to add to his 32 goals this season in all competitions. Thiago, back after injury, celebrated his first Champions League goal since netting in the 3-0 win at home to Anderlecht last September.

With 18 minutes gone, Bayern captain Thomas Mueller swung in a cross and the Spain international thumped the ball home from close range. After claiming Bayern's 100th goal this season, Thiago was forced off on 35 minutes-attacking midfielder James Rodriguez replaced him as the Colombian made his return from a calf injury.

Mats Hummels, who along Jerome Boateng was booked in the first half, was replaced by Niklas Sule at the break before Bayern extended their lead thanks to a Besiktas own goal. Right-back Rafinha whipped in a cross, but with the Besiktas defence focused on preventing the ball reaching the lurking Lewandowski, Gonul turned the ball into his own net.

Besiktas pulled a goal back on 59 minutes when David Alaba lost possession deep in his own half, allowing Gonul to supply Love who did just enough to roll the ball over the line. Alaba atoned with a crucial block to deny Besiktas forward Mustafa Pektemek soon after, and the Austrian set up Wagner on 84 minutes as his deflected cross was chested over the line by the substitute. — AFP



ISTANBUL: Besiktas midfielder Necip Uysal (C) and Bayern Munich's French midfielder Franck Ribery (L) watch the ball during the second leg of the last 16 UEFA Champions League football match between Besiktas and Bayern Munich at Besiktas Park in Istanbul yesterday. — AFP



## Business

THURSDAY, MARCH 15, 2018

**18** Broadcom ends bid for Qualcomm after Trump nixes \$117bn deal**19** US retail sales falter again; producer prices rise solidly**21** NBK Capital awarded 'Best 3-Year Performance for GCC Equity fund'

STRASBOURG: European Commissioner for Trade Cecilia Malmström delivers a speech during a debate on US tariffs on steel and aluminum during a plenary session at the European Parliament yesterday in Strasbourg, eastern France. — AFP

# EU urges Trump to avert trade war

## Trump eyes tariffs up to \$60 billion on Chinese goods

**HELSINKI/STRASBOURG:** The European Union urged the United States yesterday to revive trade talks rather than escalate a dispute over tariffs on metals and cars. President Donald Trump last week signed an order to impose duties on incoming steel and aluminum and threatened to levy a tax on EU cars if the European Union does not remove "horrific" tariffs and trade barriers on a range of goods.

European Council President Donald Tusk responded yesterday by urging Trump to "make trade not war". "When the president complains of too many tariffs between the EU and the US, I can understand him. We are not happy either," Tusk, who chairs summits of EU leaders, told a news conference in Helsinki. "That is the reason why a few years ago we started trade negotiations with the US. We should go back to these talks now. Make trade not war, Mr President," he said.

Tusk was referring to planned Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) talks which were frozen after Trump's election victory in 2016. The European Commission - which has drawn up a list of US products worth 2.8 billion euros (\$3.5 billion) on which it could impose tariffs if EU steel and aluminum is hit - also sought to be conciliatory. "This is not a dispute between Europe and the United States as such," Commission Vice President Jyrki Katainen told the European Parliament. "That's why the Commission will concentrate on problem-solving, instead of provoking further problems."

Katainen said US business and both parties in Congress shared the EU's belief in trade guided by international rules. "What we want to do is clear up this mess.

I think there are good reasons why both sides will accept, at the end of the day, that we don't need, we don't want, a trade war. Instead we should concentrate on improving our trading conditions."

President Trump is seeking to impose tariffs on up to \$60 billion of Chinese imports and will target the technology and telecommunications sectors, two people who had discussed the issue with the Trump administration said on Tuesday.

A third source who had direct knowledge of the administration's thinking said the tariffs, associated with a "Section 301" intellectual property investigation, under the 1974 US Trade Act begun in August last year, could come "in the very near future."

While the tariffs would be chiefly targeted at information technology, consumer electronics and telecoms, they could be much broader and the list could eventually run to 100 products, this person said. The White House declined to comment on the size or timing of any move.

In Beijing, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Lu Kang said Sino-US trade relations should not be a zero-sum game, and that the two countries should use "constructive" means to manage tension.



### Chinese tech, telecoms, apparel targeted

"We have said many times that China resolutely opposes any kind of unilateral protectionist trade measures," Lu told reporters.

"If the United States takes actions that harm China's interests, China will have to take measures to firmly protect our legitimate rights."

Trump is targeting Chinese high technology companies to punish China for its investment policies that effectively force US companies to give up their technology secrets in exchange for being allowed to operate in the country, as well as for other IP practices Washington considers unfair.

The Trump administration is also considering imposing investment restrictions on Chinese companies over and above the heightened national security restrictions, but details on these were not immediately known. A US Treasury spokeswoman did not immediately respond to requests for comment. But lobbyists in Washington expressed concern that Trump's ambitious tariff plan would also include other labor-intensive consumer goods sectors such as apparel, footwear and toys.

Higher tariffs on these products would "hurt American families," said Hun Quach, a trade lobbyist for the Retail

Industry Leaders Association.

"We're not talking about fancy cashmere sweaters, we're talking about cotton T-shirts and jeans and shoes that kids wear for back-to-school," she added. "Alarm bells are ringing."

China runs a \$375 billion trade surplus with the United States and when President Xi Jinping's top economic adviser visited Washington recently, the administration pressed him to come up with a way of reducing that number. Trump came to office on a promise to shield American workers from imports and his first action as president was to pull the United States out of the 12-country Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal.

His administration is in the midst of negotiations to revamp the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and last week announced the imposition of tariffs on steel and aluminum imports.

While the tariffs on steel and aluminum, announced last week by Trump, are viewed as relatively insignificant in terms of imports and exports, moves to target China directly risk a direct and harsh response from Beijing. "If this is serious, the Chinese will retaliate. The key question is, does the US retaliate against that retaliation," said Derek Scissors, a China trade expert at the American Enterprise Institute, a pro-business think tank.

That would spook stock markets, but Scissors said that the more serious the conflict became, the worse China's position would become, due to the importance of its US trade surplus.

"Their incentive to negotiate is to head us off from a major trade conflict." — Agencies

## Sweet start: Bubble tea shares triple in HK market debut

**HONG KONG:** Hong Kong's bubble tea fever has leaped from long queues outside street stalls to the stock market with a maker of the drink tripling on its trading debut yesterday. Priced at HK\$1 (\$0.13), shares of B & S International Holdings Ltd., which operates Taiwanese bubble tea franchise TenRen, started trading at HK\$2.75 and once reached HK\$3.25, before closing at HK\$3.98.

The initial public offering was the second most oversubscribed in Hong Kong ever at 2,601 times, according to Bloomberg News. The tea-based beverage, loaded with milk, sugar and tapioca pearls,

has gained a global following and the popular TenRen chain has outlets across the world from North America to Singapore and Australia, according to a statement by B & S.

Hong Kong's IPO market has had a strong start after a lackluster performance in 2017. Hong Kong led a rally after Asian stocks mostly opened the year with gains in January, with the city's stocks setting a record closing high for three days straight later that month. Chinese smartphone giant Xiaomi and Jack Ma's Alibaba are among the companies mulling listings in Hong Kong this year, according to reports. Hong Kong's stock exchange has proposed rule changes and is set to allow dual-class shares and attract more firms to list in the city.

But it is unclear how long the market hype over the drink would last beyond yesterday. Ronald Wan of Hong Kong-based Partners Capital International told Bloomberg News the market debut was an "irrational rally driven by speculators chasing a relatively small stock". — AFP

## OPEC says US oil production to rise again in 2018

**VIENNA:** US oil production is set to rise further this year, OPEC said yesterday, but the crude market will continue to rebalance as cartel members and Russia trim their output in a bid to support prices.

The US supply increase is expected to come as the Organization for Petroleum Exporting Countries, dominated by oil giant Saudi Arabia, works with Russia to slash output after prices for crude plummeted to around \$30 per barrel in 2016 from over \$100 two years earlier.

Shale oil - which accounts for the majority of US supply - is expensive to produce, and is therefore unprofitable when prices are low. Now that crude prices are safely back up at well over \$60 per barrel, American companies are taking advantage. Other shale producers such as Britain, Canada, Brazil and

China are also expected to boost output, OPEC said in its monthly report.

Non-OPEC members are set to produce 59.53 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2018, the cartel said, revising its previous estimate upwards by 0.28 million bpd.

US production growth is still expected at 2.7 percent in 2018, up from 2.3 percent in 2017. OPEC countries will meanwhile continue to honor their 2016 agreement to keep supply low, they said.

Cartel members' production went down 77,000 bpd from January to February, the report said, citing secondary sources. The United Arab Emirates, Iraq and crisis-hit Venezuela pumped less oil in February than the month before, while Angola and cash-strapped Nigeria produced more.

On the demand side, OPEC revised higher its expectations. With global economic growth strong at 3.8 percent, oil demand will be strong this year, OPEC said, particularly in China.

"The current healthy momentum in the global economy, together with the efforts undertaken by the OPEC and non-OPEC oil producing countries ... is supporting the rebalancing of the oil market fundamentals," the report said. — AFP



Business

# US retail sales falter again; producer prices rise solidly

## PPI excluding food, energy, trade rises 0.4%

WASHINGTON: US retail sales fell for a third straight month in February as households cut back on purchases of motor vehicles and other big-ticket items, pointing to a slowdown in economic growth in the first quarter.

Other data yesterday showed underlying producer prices increasing solidly in February amid strong gains in the cost of services such as hotel accommodation, airline fares and hospital inpatient care. Inflation is steadily rising and the Federal Reserve is expected to raise interest rates next week.

The Commerce Department said retail sales slipped 0.1 percent last month. January data was revised to show sales dipping 0.1 percent instead of falling 0.3 percent as previously reported. It was the first time since April 2012 that retail sales have declined for three straight months.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast retail sales rising 0.3 percent in February. Retail sales in February increased 4.0 percent from a year ago.

Excluding automobiles, gasoline, building materials and food services, retail sales edged up 0.1 percent last month after being unchanged in January.

These so-called core retail sales correspond most closely with the consumer spending component of gross domestic product.

Consumer spending, which accounts for more than two-thirds of US economic activity, appears to have slowed at the start of the year after accelerating at a 3.8 percent annualized rate in the fourth quarter.

The dollar slipped against a basket of currencies after the data, while prices for US Treasuries were little moved. US stock index futures slightly extended

gains. Slower consumer spending supports expectations of moderate economic growth in the first quarter. GDP growth estimates for the January-March quarter are around a 2 percent annualized rate.

The economy grew at a 2.5 percent pace in the fourth quarter. But revisions to December data on construction spending, factory orders and wholesale inventories have suggested the fourth-quarter growth estimate could be raised to a 3.0 percent pace. The government will publish its third estimate for fourth-quarter GDP growth later this month.

### Strong labor market

Consumer spending, however, remains underpinned by a strong labor market, which is viewed by Fed officials as being near or a little beyond full employment.

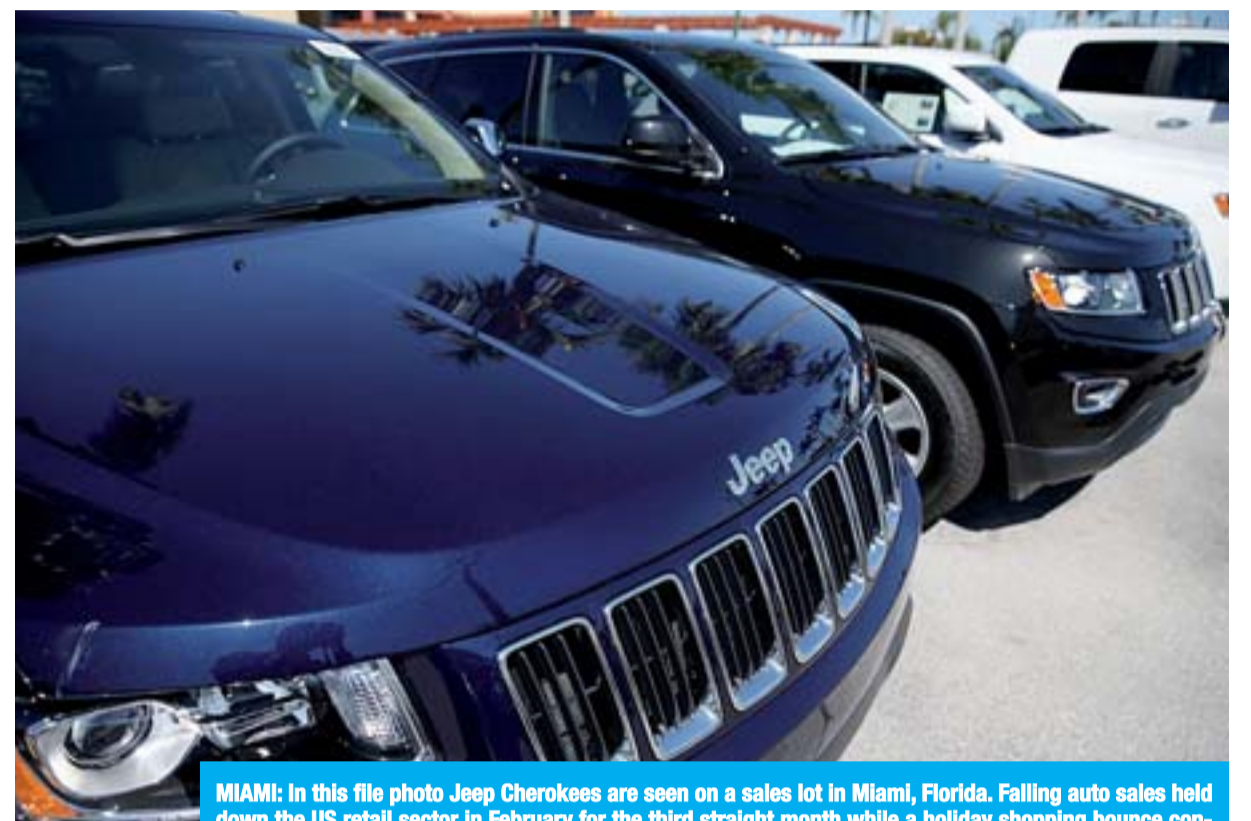
The economy created 313,000 jobs in February.

Consumer spending could also get a lift from a \$1.5 trillion income tax cut package. Auto sales fell 0.9 percent in February after a similar drop in January. Receipts at service stations declined 1.2 percent, reflecting lower gasoline prices.

There were also declines in sales at furniture stores, health and personal care stores and electronics and appliance stores. But there were some pockets of strength. Sales at building material stores increased 1.9 percent last month.

Receipts at clothing stores gained 0.4 percent and sales at online retailers surged 1.0 percent. Consumers also spent more at restaurants and bars and splurged on sporting goods and hobbies.

In a separate report, the Labor Department said a



MIAMI: In this file photo Jeep Cherokees are seen on a sales lot in Miami, Florida. Falling auto sales held down the US retail sector in February for the third straight month while a holiday shopping bounce continued to recede, official data showed yesterday. —AFP

key measure of underlying producer price pressures that excludes food, energy and trade services rose 0.4 percent last month, matching January's gain.

That boosted the year-on-year increase in the so-called core PPI to 2.7 percent, the biggest gain since August 2014, from 2.5 percent in January. The increase in underlying wholesale prices supports views that consumer inflation will pick up this year.

Economists believe that a tightening labor market, weak dollar and fiscal stimulus from the tax cuts and increased government spending will lift inflation toward the Fed's 2 percent target this year.

The US central bank's preferred inflation measure, the personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index excluding food and energy, has undershot its target since May 2012. —Reuters



## Labor market remains bullish

## Infiniti Al-Babtain participates in Amiri Diwan open day

KUWAIT: Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al-Babtain Company (AABC), the sole authorized dealer of Infiniti vehicles in the State of Kuwait, recently participated in the Amiri Diwan Open day for its employees held at SIRBB circuit. The staff and their employees were able to view and explore the exquisite details of some of the popular Infiniti models on display during the memorable day.

The open day that included several activities ranging from interactive children's games, food stalls, also displayed two premium Infiniti vehicles, the QX80 and QX60 coupled with test drives to enjoy on its premium compact models - Q30 and Q60.

Preferred by families is the QX60, which reflects the concept of high-end cars, and is designed to be a masterpiece of all standards. This innovative icon is a role model for the future in Infiniti's pioneering automotive technologies like the family-friendly features like a Rear Entertainment System with dual 8-inch monitors and wireless headphones incorporating a range of advanced technologies that the manufacturer has adopted in its research to create exceptional, high-performance cars.

With a 295-horsepower, 3.5-LITER V6 direct injection engine to keep the driver satisfied, QX60 displays the signature INFINITI design. From the double-arch grille to the LED taillights that accentuate the D-pillar, the confident curves captivate attention not usually given to a 7-passenger SUV.

Exemplifying Infiniti's presence in the luxury SUV



segment, the QX80 meets the needs of today's luxury car buyers, and introduces a more modern interpretation of upscale luxury to the full-size SUV segment. A model that speaks to the affluent, high-achieving entrepreneurs and business leaders, often with families, the QX80 provides space and utility, hand-crafted quality and modern design, and effortless on-road performance.

The QX80 has a refined and spacious cabin that features high-quality materials, a hand-crafted finish

and advanced drive-assist technologies. With a comfort-oriented suspension, and substantial performance from its 5.6-liter V8 engine, the QX80 guarantees drivers a feeling of control and confidence at the wheel.

Infiniti Al-Babtain encourages its customers to discover the diversified range of models that owe to its market leadership in Kuwait and be part of the Infiniti family by visiting the designated showroom located in Al-Rai.

## US energy pipeline developers to seek exemptions to steel tariff

HOUSTON/SEOUL: US energy pipeline developers say they intend to pursue exemptions to the Trump Administration's proposed steel tariffs, as concerns grow for those companies and from key exporters to the United States like South Korea. "We have a number of pipeline projects that would be impacted significantly by this cost increase," said Adam Bedard, chief executive of Arb Midstream, an energy transportation and marketing company. If exemptions become available, "we'd certainly try and qualify for it."

He was referring to the US Commerce Department's effort to devise a procedure for companies to apply to avoid paying a 25 percent tariff on imported steel or 10 percent on imported aluminum.

Commerce has 10 days to come up with the procedure to apply for exemptions from the steel and aluminum tariff declaration issued last week. There is a national security exemption for US companies to buy steel items that domestic manufacturers do not produce in the volumes or quality required. The president also said exemptions would be available to certain countries. Imports account for 77 percent of the steel used in US pipelines, according to a 2017 study conducted for the pipeline industry. Some manufacturers already have customers waiting two years for pipeline to construct lines to carry shale oil and gas from West Texas fields to US Gulf Coast export hubs.

Energy trade associations fought for a way around the tariff. They argued that US manufacturers either do not offer key metal grades or diameters, or have long production times that would impede development of shale oil and gas pipelines. NAmerico Partners LP, which is proposing a multibillion dollar pipeline to move natural gas from west Texas to the US Gulf Coast, estimates the steel tariff would raise the cost to its customers by between 2 percent and 4 percent.

"We will do everything we are capable of to limit the impact to our shippers," said Jeff Welch, the company's managing partner. NAmerico has not yet made the final decision to begin construction of the 468-mile (753 kilometer) pipeline, he said. Even with exemptions, tariffs could still raise costs and slow down projects, said Nicolas Adrian McTyre, an Austin, Texas attorney and former trial attorney for the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

"You are looking at a new regulatory hurdle potentially and there are a lot of unknowns to that process currently."

### S Korea looks elsewhere

One of the primary providers of steel for pipeline companies is South Korea. Manufacturers there have said they are considering sending exports to other parts of the world due to difficulties with shipping to the United States, even before the tariffs go into effect.

John Stody, a spokesman for the US Association of Oil Pipe Lines, said at least one member firm, which he did not name, tried to buy steel from South Korea in recent days, but was rebuffed due to tariff uncertainty. "Foreign pipe sellers are hesitant to sell pipe," he said. —Reuters

## NBK participates in KNPC's Talent Management Program

KUWAIT: The National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) recently took part in the conclusion ceremony of the 2017-2018 Talents Management Program organized by Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) for its employees. Speaking on the occasion, NBK's Human Resources Manager Emad Ahmed Al-Ablani reviewed the program's effects on the employees and the bank's continuous local, regional and international achievements.

"It is talented individuals who make positive differences," he said noting that talent management is an integrated strategy formulated to deal with its employees and utilize all their potential.

Al-Ablani added that major firms always maintain their leadership through preparing new generations of leaders to be ready to take over when the time comes. He added that NBK is always keen on spreading the culture of development and developing its human resources and talents. "Ample, efforts, time and resources are dedicated to provide our employees with vocational workshops and training," he added. Concluding the ceremony, KNPC's CEO Mohammed Ghazi Al-Mutairi presented a trophy to NBK in appreciation of its role in conducting the program.



Wall Street slips as industrials lag

NEW YORK: Wall Street's main indexes gave up opening gains yesterday as industrial companies continued to suffer from concerns over the impact of new tariffs on trade.

"The market is still trying to weigh concerns about tariffs on one hand and understanding how the President acts and how he speaks openly and comes up with a different policy in the end," said Robert Pavlik, chief investment strategist at SlateStone Wealth.

Major US manufacturers have been the heaviest hit since Trump trailered and then announced tariffs on steel and aluminum imports earlier this month.

The issue overshadowed China's report that its factory output grew much faster than

expected at the start of the year, suggesting the world's second largest economy may be picking up speed.

The third straight monthly fall in retail sales did not speak well of US growth but it cooled any nerves that the Federal Reserve could raise interest rates more than the three times in 2018. At 9:59 a.m. ET, the Dow Jones Industrial Average was up 0.08 percent at 25,027.92. The S&P 500 gained 0.1 percent to 2,768.29 and the Nasdaq Composite rose 0.02 percent to 7,512.85.

Shares in Qualcomm fell about 3 percent and those in rival Broadcom declined 1.7 percent after the Singapore-based chipmaker formally withdrew its bid for Qualcomm Inc but said it would pursue other targets. Ford shares were up 4.3 percent after Morgan Stanley double-upgraded the stock to "overweight" and raised its earnings forecast for the first time in two years.

Signet Jewelers fell about 14 percent after

the company reported lower same-store sales in the fourth quarter.

Advancing issues outnumbered decliners on the NYSE by 1,744 to 796. On the Nasdaq, 1,320 issues rose and 1,004 fell.

The Tillerson news, coming days after the exit of Gary Cohn, a strong free trade proponent, had sent the dollar skidding, pushed world stocks lower and bond prices higher. The moves accelerated after news of the planned tariffs, which reportedly target Chinese tech, electronics and telecoms.

The negative momentum faded somewhat in Europe, with a pan-European equity index up 0.3 percent after it fell 1 percent on Tuesday. The index was boosted by a 1 percent jump in resources stocks which benefited from the Chinese data as well as a 3-billion-euro share buyback at German sports-wear firm Adidas.

That left MSCI's all-country equity index down only marginally, its second day in the

red and off one-month highs hit before news broke of Tillerson's sacking. His departure brings to 35 the number of senior Trump administration officials who have left, Citi estimates.

"The market probably correctly viewed this move as weakening internal White House opposition to some of Trump's less market-friendly policies, in particular the President's trade policy," Daiwa strategist Mantas Vanagas said.

The dollar has been another casualty, though it swung 0.15 percent higher after three days of losses. US Treasury yields traded just off one-week lows touched earlier in the session.

German 10-year government bond yields approached one-month lows and stand 20 basis points below this year's peak, at 0.60 percent.

Growth

The trade war fears at least temporarily eclipsed data from China which showed industrial output expanding at a surprisingly faster pace at the start of the year. Fixed asset investment also beat forecasts, while retail sales improved.

That news helped Brent oil futures up almost half a percent after two days of declines while copper futures jumped almost one percent.

Morgan Stanley analysts said the data suggested "that some tariff-related losses within its export business may be absorbed by strength elsewhere." The data highlighted the relatively robust position of China's and also the world's economy. The latter is slated to grow this year by 3.9 percent, according to the International Monetary Fund's forecast in January.

Central banks in Japan and the euro zone, meanwhile, also stuck with their dovish message. The former said most of its policymakers believed it should "persistently" pursue powerful monetary easing. The euro slipped 0.2 percent against the dollar, inching off an overnight one-month high after European Central Bank President Mario Draghi said the ECB needed more evidence that inflation was rising towards target. He warned of risks from "possible spillovers of the new trade measures announced by the US administration." — Reuters

Daily Kuwait Stock Exchange Report. Wednesday, March 14, 2018. Includes Index, Price Index, Weighted Index, KRX 15, Trades, and various security listings with columns for High, Low, Volume, Value (KID), Trades, Last, and Change.

China unloads Blackstone stake amid Trump trade tension

SHANGHAI: China's sovereign wealth fund has sold its stake in Blackstone Group, the US private equity firm has said, ending a decade-long investment at a time of simmering bilateral trade tension.

Blackstone said in an annual report released earlier this month that China Investment Corp (CIC) had recently unloaded the stake that it first began to acquire in 2007 when China sought lucrative ways to invest its massive foreign exchange reserves.

The investment was executed via a legal entity set up by CIC called Beijing Wonderful Investments.

"As of February 22, 2018, Beijing Wonderful Investments no longer

owned any non-voting common units," said the Blackstone report filed two weeks ago. It gave no further information. CIC initially paid \$3 billion for a nine percent stake in Blackstone in 2007 in one of its first major investments.

A year later it upped its stake to 12.5 percent, Blackstone said at the time. The investment was shadowed by wild swings over the years in Blackstone's share price. It was not immediately clear why CIC, which according to its website now has more than \$800 billion in total assets, sold the stake.

No public statement by CIC on the matter has been seen and the fund did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Sino-US commercial ties are perennially touchy due largely to a significant trade imbalance in China's favor and related accusations by Washington that Beijing impedes access to its markets.

Trade relations have come into even sharper focus once again under US President Donald Trump, who frequently calls out China over its trade policies and recently announced US tariffs on steel and aluminium imports that will affect China, among others. — AFP

Australia's NAB says incentives 'root cause' of fraud

SYDNEY: National Australia Bank Ltd's system of bonuses and incentives encouraged bankers to engage in fraudulent lending practices to boost their incomes. NAB told a powerful judicial inquiry into the scandal-ridden sector yesterday. Scrutiny of the bank's various incentive schemes dominated the second day at the Royal Commission in Melbourne, where the country's fourth-biggest bank conceded falsified mortgage documents were used to help people collect bonuses and commissions and beat sales targets.

"So from a very early point, NAB was aware that a driver for these ... fraudulent behaviors was its own remuneration structure," barrister Rowena Orr told the inquiry. Under questioning, senior NAB executive Anthony Waldron said the structures were "certainly one of the root causes".

The year-long inquiry promises to shed light on the inner workings of some of Australia's biggest companies, and has the power to recommend tighter regulation and criminal prosecutions.

Initially opposed by the center-right government, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull eventually bowed to public pressure to hold the inquiry after years of scandals at the big banks including poor financial advice, interest-rate rigging, and accusations of money-laundering.

Poor lending practices are expected to feature prominently, with the "Big Four" banks dominating the country's \$1.7 trillion (\$1.36 trillion) mortgage market and often accused of abusing their power.

The start of the inquiry has focused on NAB's so-called introducer pro-

gramme, where the bank rewards people who are not staff with commissions when they introduce potential home-loan customers. NAB disclosed in documents on Tuesday that some employees had accepted over-the-counter cash bribes to facilitate loans based on fake documents.

"There's been breakdowns right throughout the end-to-end process here for the application of loans," Waldron told the inquiry yesterday. Some of those rewarded commissions of 0.4 percent of the size of the loan included a gymnasium operator and a tailor, the inquiry heard.

Forged loan documents and dishonest use of customers' signatures were used to enable "introducers" to collect commissions, and bank staff to earn bigger bonuses, the inquiry heard.

NAB derived more than \$24 billion (\$18.9 billion) in home loans from the scheme between 2013 and 2016, when the misconduct took place. The inquiry disclosed on Wednesday that \$630,000 was paid to introducers during the four-year period, mostly to one party. NAB said it has since reworked the incentives program and sacked 20 employees in connection with the scheme.

Brokers squeezed

The inquiry turned its focus to NAB's larger rival, Commonwealth Bank of Australia, yesterday afternoon. Mortgage broker Mark Harris said CBA pressured brokers to maintain a minimum level of "volume" with the lender or be cut off.

"The concern is that that would push brokers into using Commonwealth Bank where they should not have done," said Harris, who said his accreditation to recommend CBA loans was cancelled in 2017 because of low volumes. Australia's four biggest banks derived \$51.77 billion from mortgage brokers in the September quarter of 2017, according to the inquiry, or about 55 percent of all residential home loans. CBA attracts more than 40 percent of new home loans from brokers.

CBA declined to comment to Reuters yesterday. Scrutiny of the bank's lending practices will continue today. — AFP

Business

# NBK Capital awarded 'Best 3-Year Performance for GCC Equity fund'

Award by the MENA Fund Manager magazine for 2018

**KUWAIT:** NBK Capital won a prestigious award by the MENA Fund Manager magazine. The renowned magazine focuses in depth analysis of MENA fund management trends. The award was announced during the Annual Mena Fund Manager Performance Awards ceremony that was held in Dubai.

For the second year in a row, the award, "Best 3-Year Performance for GCC Equity fund with assets below \$75 Million" was given to NBK Gulf Equity Fund. The fund seeks in investing primarily in GCC equities and it has an active strategic approach in diversifying its investment, optimizing long-term returns, and



reducing downside risks that exist within the GCC equity markets. It is one of four funds that are managed by NBK Capital, the other three being NBK Qatar Equity Fund, NBK Kuwait Equity Fund, and NBK Gulf Equity Investment Fund.

Dr Husayn Shahrur, NBK Capital's Managing Director of Regional (MENA) Asset Management, said: "this continual suc-

cess by NBK Gulf Equity Fund is a testament of the high efficiency of its team as well as the successful strategy it follows; one that focuses on meticulous studying of equities and their potential long-term returns". He added that NBK Capital is pleased to add this award to its collection of similar accolades of excellence previously received and represents a landmark in NBK Capital's journey of continuous growth as well as evidence of the effectiveness of the approach that is followed by the company towards achieving the highest levels possible of service and performance.



## VIVA organizes launch event at Avenues this Friday for all-new Samsung Galaxy S9

**KUWAIT:** VIVA, Kuwait's fastest-growing and most developed telecom operator, organizes launch event for the all-new Samsung Galaxy S9 and S9+ at Avenues Mall (Dome 3) tomorrow (16 March 2018) from 2 pm until 10 pm. The event will feature special offer on the new smartphones including competitions, valuable prizes and surprises. VIVA's booth will be available as well at Marina Crescent.

The latest addition to Samsung's Galaxy smartphone lineup is built on the best-in-class Galaxy Foundation of design innovation and cutting-edge technology. Made for the way we increasingly communicate and express ourselves more with images, videos and emojis, the Galaxy S9 and S9+ drive innovation with Samsung's most advanced camera ever. Redesigned with a new dual aperture lens that powers an innovative low light camera technology, Super Slow-mo video capabilities and personalized AR Emoji, the Galaxy S9 and S9+ ensure you never miss a moment and make your everyday epic.



VIVA is the fastest-growing telecom operator in Kuwait. Launched in December 2008, VIVA makes things 'More' for its customers by transforming communication, information and entertainment experiences. The company has rapidly established a pioneer position in the market through its customer centric approach. VIVA's quest is to be the mobile brand of choice in Kuwait by being transparent, engaging, energetic and fulfilling. VIVA continues to take a considerable share of the market by offering an innovative range of best value products, services and content propositions: a state of the art, nationwide network and world-class service.

## Burgan Bank announces winner of Al-Thuraya Salary account draw

**KUWAIT:** Burgan Bank, announced yesterday Hozum Qablan Hozum Al-Shammari as the lucky winner of the Al-Thuraya Salary Account monthly draw.

The draw rewards new and existing customers who transfer their salary to Burgan Bank by offering them a chance to win a Nissan Patrol SUV every month. With every KD 10 available in the account, the customer receives one chance to enter the draw.

The Al-Thuraya account holders have the option to hold money in Kuwaiti Dinar and other major currencies

and can access account-related services such as standing orders, loans and credit cards, and benefit from the discounts and offers throughout the year.

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

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

## Gulf Bank announces winners of Al-Danah daily draws

**KUWAIT:** Gulf Bank held its Al-Danah daily draws on 11 March 2018 announcing the names of its winners for the week 04 - 08 March 2018. The Al-Danah daily draws include draws every working day for two prizes of KD 1,000 per winner.

**The winners are:**

- (Sunday 4/03): Manal Khadair Turki Almutary, Abdullah Menkhi Khalaf Alfadhi.
- (Monday 5/03): Noor Abdulrahman Mohammed Alkhalaf, Ahmed Jaber Dhaif Alenizi.
- (Tuesday 06/03): Harbinder Kaur Kuldeep Singh, Faizah Abdullah Abdulateef Alothman.
- (Wednesday 07/03): Aadel Esam Jafar Abdulrahim, Mohammad Abdullah Mohammad Aabdin.
- (Thursday 08/03): Haifa Rashid Abdulla Al Methen, Naser Salim Naser Alrashidi.

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah 2018 draw lineup includes daily draws (2 winners per working day each receive KD 1000). Al-Danah's first quarterly draw for the prize of KD 200,000 will be held on 28 March, the second quarterly draw for the prize of KD 250,000 will be held on 27 June and the 3rd quarterly draw for the prize of KD 500,000 will be held on 26 September. The final Al-Danah draw for KD 1 million will be held on 10 January 2019 whereby the Al-Danah millionaire will be announced.

Gulf Bank encourages you to increase your chances by depositing more into your Al-Danah account, immediately from any local bank, using the new ePay (Self-Pay) service, which is available on Gulf Bank's Online and Mobile Banking.

Five reasons why the Al-Danah account is the best:

1. Kuwait's single biggest yearly cash prize of KD 1 million and the largest international bank prize according to Guinness World Records
2. Kuwait's biggest quarterly cash prizes, up to KD 500,000
3. Two winners of KD 1,000 every working day
4. The most chances to win
5. One bank that transfers your chances to win from the previous year to the current year



## Trade war threat drives demand for high-grade eurozone bonds

**LONDON:** High-rated eurozone government bond yields stayed near recent lows on Tuesday after a high-profile sacking in the United States administration and a fresh batch of tariffs on Chinese goods overshadowed signals of global growth. US President Donald Trump fired Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, seen as a globalist by analysts, and soon afterwards sources told Reuters the United States is seeking to impose tariffs on up to \$60 billion of Chinese imports.

This morning, European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi stated that the possible spillovers of the new trade measures announced by the US administration could hurt inflation.

A market gauge of long-term inflation expectations, the five-year breakeven forward swap, was below 1.70 percent, dipping below that level on Tuesday for the first time this year.

"The bigger picture is we are currently seeing an environment of falling yields, and one of the key reasons is fears of an international trade war," said DZ Bank analyst Sebastian Fellechner. German 10-year government bond yields were close to a one-month low and 20 basis points below this year's peak at 0.60 percent, as the specter of trade wars puts doubts over a global recovery and the removal of ECB stimulus. In addition, demand for a Dutch auction of 10-year bonds hit 18 billion euros at one stage, a strong result for the Netherlands debt agency. The yield on Germany's 30-year bonds also dropped to 1.27 percent ahead of an auction of 30-year bonds expected to raise 1.5 billion euros for the bloc's largest economy.

Other central bankers are also due to speak later on Tuesday, including Vitor Constancio, Peter Praet and Francois Villeroy de Galhau, and investors will be looking for any signs as to which direction the bank will take in this environment. "Given the expectation of an overall dovish tone and the bullish market reaction to the last ECB press conference, we think any surprisingly hawkish line has the potential to wrong-foot the market," Mizuho analysts said in a note.

Bond yields dropped after last week's ECB meeting, as the central bank signalled caution on inflation and protectionism, a message reinforced on Tuesday by Draghi.

Portugal will also sell bonds in auctions, and is set to offer a total of between one billion euros and 1.25 billion euros of 10-year and 27-year bonds, the state debt agency said. Southern European government debt underperformed ahead of that sale, with yields rising 1-2 basis points. — Reuters

## Turkish Airlines closes Airbus and Boeing orders

**KUWAIT:** Turkish Airlines yesterday announced on the PDP that, in order to insure the need for wide body aircraft, the Incorporation has decided to purchase 50 firm and 10 optional aircraft, a total of 60 wide body aircraft, of which 6 to be delivered in 2019, 14 in 2020, 10 in 2021, 12 in 2022, 11 in 2023 and 7 in the year 2024. According to this, a total of 30 B787-9 aircraft, of which 25 firm and 5 optional, will be purchased from Boeing and a total of 30 A350-900 aircraft, of which 25 firm and 5 optional will be purchased from Airbus.

Related MoU with Airbus was signed last January at the ...lysee Palace, Paris, during Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's official visit to France with French President Emmanuel Macron in attendance. Also last September, during President Erdogan's visit to New York to join the United Nations General Assembly, Boeing and Turkish Airlines had announced a commitment to order 787-9 Dreamliners.

Commenting on the closed orders, M. Ilker Ayçi, Chairman of the Board and the Executive Committee, Turkish Airlines said the following: "Today, we're pleased to conclude this process which will bring a landmark benefit not only to Turkish Airlines, but also to Turkey's aviation, by firmly ordering these aircrafts to be added to our ever-expanding fleet. Goodwill agreements turned into firm orders; which we consider to be a very important initiative to meet our need for wide body aircraft at Istanbul's New Airport, which will serve as our new hub once its construction process completed. This great step, which will further strengthen our ever-expanding fleet for 2023, our Republic's 100th year, and bring our passenger's satisfaction to a much higher level will bring a great acceleration to the steady rise of our country's flag carrier, Turkish Airlines, and will also be a considerable added value for Turkish Civil Aviation."

## Cathay Pacific posts HK\$1.26bn loss for 2017

**HONG KONG:** Hong Kong flag carrier Cathay Pacific yesterday announced a HK\$1.26 billion (\$161 million) net loss for 2017, marking the first back-to-back annual loss in its 71-year history.

The company had been hit by intense competition from rival airlines and higher fuel prices, chairman John Slosar said. It was the biggest annual loss the company has seen in nine years and comes as lower-cost Chinese carriers eat into its market share.

Companies such as China Eastern and China Southern Airlines are offering direct services to Europe

and the United States from the mainland, while budget carriers have targeted regional travellers, undermining Cathay's position.

However, Slosar sounded a note of optimism for 2018 as Cathay saw improved premium class demand and a strong cargo business. The firm fared better in the second half of 2017, when it made gains of HK\$792 million compared to a loss of HK\$2.05 billion in the first six months of the year.

Fuel hedging costs fell to HK\$6.38 billion in 2017 from HK\$8.45 billion the previous year. Cathay's loss of HK\$575 million in 2016 was its first time in the red for eight years, and prompted a management shake-up and promises to slash staff costs by 30 percent. It pledged to cut 600 staff including a quarter of its management as part of its biggest overhaul in two decades.

Chief executive Rupert Hogg took over in May 2017, replacing Ivan Chu, who had been in the job for three years. — AFP

## Technology

# Microsoft to deliver the intelligent cloud from new data centers in the Middle East

## Unprecedented opportunity for digital transformation in the region

**DUBAI:** Microsoft revealed plans yesterday to deliver the intelligent, trusted Microsoft Cloud from its first datacenters located in the Middle East, empowering organizations, governments, and businesses to achieve more and recognizing the unprecedented opportunity for digital transformation in the region.

The Microsoft Cloud, comprising Azure, Office 365 and Dynamics 365, will offer enterprise-grade reliability and performance, combined with data residency, from data centers located in Abu Dhabi and Dubai with initial availability expected in 2019. Microsoft's deep expertise in data protection, security and privacy, including the broadest set of compliance certifications in the industry, means customers in the region can accelerate their digital transformation knowing they have a trusted partner. Each new datacenter will adhere to Microsoft's trusted cloud principles and becomes part of one of the largest cloud infrastructures in the world, already serving more than a billion customers and 20 million businesses.

### Logical next step

"Microsoft has been present in the Middle East for more than two decades and is deeply invested in the region in many ways," says Sayed Hashish, Regional General Manager, Microsoft Gulf. "Driven by strong customer demand for cloud computing, local datacenters were the logical next step given the enormous opportunity that the cloud presents. In areas like digital transformation, and the development of new intelligent services, our ambition is for the Microsoft Cloud to form a strategic part of the backbone for regional economic development."

Etisalat Digital, a business unit of Etisalat, is collaborating closely with Microsoft as a Cloud Solutions Provider, offering integrated connectivity with Microsoft Express Route as well as private cloud services using Azure Stack.



Etisalat is also providing consulting, migration and managed services to ensure the smooth transition of business customers to the cloud and sees tremendous potential from Microsoft's intelligent cloud served from state-of-the-art data centers. Salvador Anglada, Chief Business Officer, Etisalat says, "This alliance reinforces the UAE 2021 vision to become one of the top knowledge-based economies in the world. Our collaboration with Microsoft perfectly fits our existing capabilities and positions Etisalat Digital as the leading partner for our customers' digital transformation journey. The strength of Microsoft's cloud combined with Etisalat's own advanced infrastructure and reliable connectivity will be instrumental in accelerating cloud adoption in the UAE and the Middle East."

Microsoft works closely with technology partners throughout the Middle East and Africa, facilitating training and increasing employability

across many sectors. Approximately 4,000 start-ups have been supported through programs like the Microsoft Virtual Academy, and Microsoft's Cloud Society initiative is helping people in the region build marketable skills, readying them for the digital jobs of the future. The integration of the Abu Dhabi and Dubai datacenters with Microsoft's global cloud infrastructure will connect regional businesses with global opportunities, help accelerate new investments and job opportunities and improve access to cloud services for people and organizations across the Middle East. Microsoft's network of 17,800 partners across the region, has recently been bolstered by the new Cloud Solutions Provider program, creating a platform for partners to deliver Microsoft's cloud solutions locally.

### Optimizing operations

Governments, large organizations, Small and



Medium Enterprises (SMEs), as well as start-ups across all industries in the Gulf are making the most out of Microsoft's cloud solutions, engaging customers, empowering employees, optimizing operations, and transforming their products and services.

The Emirates Group, Emaar Properties, Etihad Airways, Majid Al Futtaim, Jumeirah Hotels and Resorts, Landmark Group, Daman Insurance, RAK Ceramics, Imdaad, Gulf Air, Ooredoo, Viva, Kuwait Finance House and Dubai World Trade Center are few of the numerous leading organizations that have chosen the trusted Microsoft Cloud as part of their digital transformation journey, empowering them to evolve their business end-to-end and achieve more.

Microsoft has been rapidly expanding its cloud infrastructure to meet intensifying customer demand. Today the company also announced new cloud regions coming to

Switzerland, the expansion of cloud options for customers in Germany, and the general availability of Azure and Office 365 from new cloud regions in France. Over the last three years, Microsoft has more than doubled the number of Azure regions available. Today, Azure has more regions than any other cloud provider and has announced 50 regions across the globe which includes plans for 12 new regions.

Office 365 and Dynamics 365 also continue to expand the data residency options for customers with 17 geographies announced, and are the only productivity and business application platforms that can offer in-geography data residency across such a broad set of locations. Each geography delivers a consistent experience, backed by robust policies, controls, and systems to keep data safe, and helps provide greater choice to meet customer preferences and local requirements.

## Singapore launches public hearings on 'fake news'

**SINGAPORE:** Singapore yesterday launched public hearings on possible legislation to combat "fake news" which critics said could be used to curtail free speech. A 10-member parliamentary committee was set up in January to tackle false online information which the government says could threaten national security. The wealthy city-state is among the countries looking to introduce legislation to rein in fake news but critics have cautioned this could be used to exert further control over the media.

Some 164 people have written to the committee, including academics, technology and social media companies such as Facebook and Google, and civil activists to give their inputs. The committee will call 79 individuals and organizations to testify over eight days after which it is expected to make recommendations to lawmakers within months.

"Deliberate online falsehoods are a serious global problem... It is a complex problem, affecting us in many different ways," said committee chairman and parliamentary deputy speaker Charles Chong at the opening of the hearing. Several academics were called to testify on the

first day, including cyber-conflict expert Michael Raska, who noted that cyber attacks and false information online could have the same political impact as a military strike.

"How does Singapore deter (these attacks) and respond militarily? These attacks can happen far away where a conventional response is not viable," he said. Singapore already has tough laws in place to prevent the incitement of racial and religious discord, as well as legislation covering libel, public protests and dissent.

The possibility of more regulation in what is seen as a curb on free speech has some big technology companies worried. But the Singapore government has said curbing what it calls online falsehoods is necessary and denied it was aimed at curtailing free speech.

"In fact, one of the purposes of dealing with deliberate online falsehoods is to protect free speech and enhance free speech," Law and Home Affairs Minister K Shanmugam, who is on the committee, said during Wednesday's hearing. Singapore is ranked 151 out of 180 in the World Press Freedom Index by non-profit group Reporters Without Borders. — AFP

## Google guru Larry Page tests flying taxis in New Zealand

**WELLINGTON:** Pilot-less flying taxis are being tested in New Zealand as part of a project backed by Google co-founder Larry Page that supporters say will revolutionize personal transport. New Zealand regulators late Tuesday approved plans for Zephyr Airworks, a subsidiary of Page's company Kitty Hawk, to develop and test the futuristic air taxi. Known as Cora, the electric aircraft has a dozen small lift rotors on its wings, making it capable of vertical take-off and landing like a helicopter. But developers say it is much quieter, meaning it could transport passengers in urban areas using rooftops and car parks as landing pads.

"We are offering a pollution free, emission free vehicle that flies dependably, we think this is the logical next step in the evolution of transportation," Zephyr chief executive Fred Reid said. The Cora prototype being tested in New Zealand's South Island uses three on-board computers to calculate its flight path and is capable of carrying two passengers.

The computers operate independently as a safety measure and the aircraft can deploy a parachute if anything goes wrong. The aircraft, previously known as Zee, Aero, has a range of 100 kilometers reaching speeds of 150 kmh and an altitude of up to 900 meters. The Cora project envisages they will become so common that "air travel will be woven into our daily lives", Zephyr said using them would be a simple experience for passengers.

"You wouldn't have to know anything about flying a plane. Cora could fly for you," it said in a promotional video. "And it would be all-electric, helping to build a sus-



In this handout picture received yesterday from New Zealand based aviation company Zephyr Airworks shows a "Cora" electric powered air taxi in flight. — AFP

tainable world." Page's company is also developing a prototype personal aircraft called the Kitty Hawk Flyer and unveiled an early model in the United States last year. However, it looked more like a recreational flying car, suitable only for flying above water and seating the pilot in an open top cabin exposed to the elements. Cora appears far more robust and is designed more like a traditional aircraft, featuring an 11-metre wingspan, tail and a closed canopy for passengers.

### 'Like science fiction'

The aircraft will not be offered for sale, instead the public must book trips like they would with an airline or taxi service. Zephyr said it would operate in a similar fashion to a car ride-share-with Uber the best known example-and is reportedly working on an app so customers could hail the air taxis on their mobile phones. It said Cora took eight years to design but then developers needed a suitable environment to safely test the new technology. They settled on New Zealand

because of its uncongested airspace and rigorous regulatory environment, with Reid saying local officials had embraced the idea. "We had no idea what to expect," he said. "They could have laughed us out of the room. We were pitching something that sounded like science fiction."

Cora has been given an experimental airworthiness certificate from the New Zealand Civil Aviation Authority. Trialling the flying taxi service will reportedly take six years, with operations based around the city of Christchurch.

"This aircraft represents the evolution of the transport eco system to one that responds to a global challenge around traffic and congestion, and is kinder to the planet," Christchurch mayor Lianne Dalziel said. Page and Sergey Brin founded Google in 1998, starting out in a Silicon Valley garage and transforming into one of the world's largest companies. He remains chief executive of Google's parent Alphabet but the Kitty Hawk and Cora projects are a personal pursuit, not part of the tech giant's operations. — AFP

## France warns Apple, Google about 'abusive' practices

**PARIS:** The French government said yesterday that it would take legal action against Google and Apple over "abusive business practices", threatening fines that could further strain transatlantic ties as a trade war looms. "I believe in an economy based on justice and I will take Google and Apple before the Paris Commercial Court for abusive business practices" against French start-ups, Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said on RTL radio.

He said in particular that the two US giants imposed financial conditions on French app developers and gathered data on their use, while also saying that "both can unilaterally modify contracts". Technology start-ups are a favorite of French President Emmanuel Macron, who has sought to overhaul the nation's laws and regulations to allow entrepreneurs to flourish. The action is based on an inquiry by France's anti-fraud office from 2015 to 2017 which uncovered "a significant imbalance" in their relations with French companies, a finance ministry source told AFP.

"I consider that Google and Apple, as powerful as they are, shouldn't treat our start-ups and our developers in the way they do today," said Le Maire, calling the situation "unacceptable". The fraud office urged in its report fines of two million euros for each company, the ministry source said, though Le Maire said only that they would be "in the millions of euros". "My responsibility is to ensure economic law and order," he said. "There are rules. There is justice. It should be respected." Both Apple and Google declined to comment immediately on Le Maire's claims.

### Mounting pressure

The action against Apple and Google comes after US President Donald Trump



NANTES, France: n this file photo taken on November 20, 2017 shows logos of US multinational technology company Google displayed on computers' screens. — AFP

fanned fears of a wider trade war, pledging to impose a 25 percent tariff on imported steel and 10 percent tariff on imports of aluminum. It is unclear if European nations will obtain waivers, especially after Trump singled out the EU as treating the US "very badly" in trade ties and threatening to tax cars as well.

But European officials have said they will not be intimidated by Trump's protectionist moves, with the EU's top trade official, Cecilia Malmstrom, saying this week that "we will stand up to the bullies". France was already pursuing Apple, Google and other US technology giants over the legal strategies that let them route their income from across the EU through low-tax nations. That leads companies to declare their earnings in countries like Ireland, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, depriving other member states of revenues even though they may account for a bigger share of the earnings. — AFP

## Tech companies rely on mica despite child labor fears

**NEW DELHI:** Tech companies are increasingly reliant on mica to make products from televisions to mobile phones, yet the electronics industry is largely unaware of the origins of a mineral mined globally by children in dangerous conditions, campaigners said yesterday. The sector is the main global buyer of mica and uses far more of the prized mineral than was previously thought, yet many companies have little knowledge about its sourcing and use in their supply chains, said rights group Terre des Hommes (TdH).

"The possibility of child labour in electronic products and in cars is very high," Aysel Sabahoglu, a senior technical advisor at TdH, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. In August 2016, a Thomson Reuters Foundation investigation found several children in India had died in the depths of illegal mica mines -

but that their deaths were covered up. The discovery that seven children had died in two months alone prompted pledges by multinationals sourcing mica from India to clean up their supply chains, and state authorities vowed to accelerate plans to legalise and regulate the sector. While companies in industries from cosmetics to construction source mica from India, they also import the mineral from nations such as Brazil, China, Pakistan, Peru, Sri Lanka and Sudan where children are believed to work in mines, TdH said.

The electronics industry was the biggest purchaser of mica in 2015, buying a quarter of global supplies, and demand in the sector is set to grow by 3.2 percent per year, the report said. The prized mineral not only puts the sparkle in make-up and car paint, but is highly flexible, elastic and durable - which

makes it vital for several sectors including electronics and increasingly the automobile industry, according to the research.

The Responsible Mica Initiative (RMI) - set up last year and backed by multi-billion dollar companies to end child labour in India's mica supply chain by 2022 - said it was aware of the use of the mineral in the electronics sector, and beyond just India. "If electronics, automotive or plastics industries are not much represented within RMI yet, it's for the only reason that ... they have not committed at this stage to take collective action regarding mica," said the RMI's Fanny Fremont. The electronics sector has made some strides towards supply chain traceability and accountability, said Bobbie Sta. Maria, head of labour at the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre. "But there remains a wide gap between companies taking this seriously and those who appear reckless," she said. "Laggards should look to improve their efforts urgently to avoid more children falling victim to this perilous work." — Reuters

Health

# Hawking, the human whose brain transcended disability

**'I have lived five decades longer than doctors predicted'**

**LONDON:** Living with motor neuron disease for more than 50 years, Stephen Hawking transcended his disability to become one of science's brightest stars, harnessing technology to once again give voice to his ideas. "My expectations were reduced to zero when I was 21. Everything since then has been a bonus," he told the New York Times in 2004.

Hawking was given only a few years to live when he was diagnosed in 1964, but defied the medical profession in typically stubborn fashion. "I have lived five decades longer than doctors predicted. I have tried to make good use of my time," he said in 2013 autobiographical documentary "Hawking". "Because every day could be my last, I have the desire to make the most of each and every minute," he added. But the disease gradually deprived him of mobility and confined him to a wheelchair.

He was eventually left almost completely paralyzed and unable to speak, except through a voice synthesizer operated by facial movements. Despite his handicap, the scientist was one of the first to popularize deep science, utilizing a range of media to educate the general public on the secrets of the universe.

**Household name**

His struggle was portrayed in the 2014 film "The Theory of Everything", which won an Oscar and Golden Globes. But it was through scientific articles and his 1988 international bestseller "A Brief History of Time" that Hawking was able to communicate his genius and share his discoveries about black holes.

Hawking was an undisputed heavyweight in his field, holding the Lucasian Chair of Mathematics professorship at the University of Cambridge between 1978 and 2009, a post once held by Isaac Newton, the father of universal gravity. "My disabilities have not been a significant handicap in my field, which is theoretical physics," he said in Science Digest in 1984. "Indeed, they have helped me in a way by shielding me from lecturing and administrative work that I would otherwise have been involved in."

In recent years, he enthusiastically adopted social media to spread his scientific research, responding to fans with messages signed off "SH". He boasted 4.1 million Facebook followers, nearly 30,000 on Twitter and amassed millions of followers within hours when he signed up to Chinese social media platform Weibo.

**'Keep talking'**

Hawking credited the support of his family and friends with giving him the strength to keep up his remarkable pace. "I have managed, however, only because of the large amount of help I have received from my wife, children, colleagues and students," he said. As news broke of his death, Hawking's philosophical musings became particularly poignant.

"For millions of years, mankind lived just like the animals," he once said. "Then something happened which unleashed the power of our imagination. We learned to talk and we learned to listen. Mankind's greatest achievements have come about by talking, and its greatest failures by not talking. "With the technology at our disposal, the possibilities are unbounded. All we need to do is make sure we keep talking." —AFP



**CAMBRIDGE:** In this file photo taken on September 03, 2007, Professor Stephen Hawking poses for photographs in his office at The Centre for Mathematical Sciences. —AFP

## 'Right to try' seeks traction in the US

**WASHINGTON:** Faced with certain death, what do patients have to lose by trying experimental drugs that have not been approved for the market? It could be a child with a rare form of muscular dystrophy. A young woman ravaged by colon cancer. Or a grandfather trapped in the slow decline of Lou Gehrig's disease. Drugs that are already on the market—if they exist—no longer work for them. They want to take part in a clinical trial but can't, either because they are too sick, too young, too old or too far away.

It is this desperate population that lawmakers—both Democrat and Republican in 38 of the 50 US states—have been trying to help by adopting "right to try" laws for experimental treatments that may be given outside of clinical trials. The cause is so popular that President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence have put all their weight behind it.

The Senate has passed a measure on establishing a

national "right to try" law, but the House of Representatives voted Tuesday not to move forward with its own version. Republican leaders in the lower chamber said they would try again—and see the measure passed. Doctors and groups representing patients with rare diseases, however, say a law would create false hope and would change nothing in reality.

Today, doctors can already ask pharmaceutical companies to give them an experimental drug for compassionate use, as long as it has passed the initial safety steps in clinical trials that show it is not toxic or life-threatening. It's unclear how many drug companies comply, but the US Food and Drug Administration approves such requests in 99 percent of cases, usually in a matter of days. Every year, about a thousand patients take advantage of this "expanded access" program offered by the FDA. "People have been helped, yes, but it is unusual," Arthur Caplan, director of medical ethics at New York University's School of Medicine, told AFP. "Most drugs fail in research," he said.

**Pharma hesitant**

The proposed law would not actually create a "right," since drug companies and research labs would remain the only ones to decide whether or not to share

their treatments. The difference is that the FDA would no longer have authority to approve or deny, but would simply be notified, particularly in case of serious adverse events.

"Pence, Trump talk about the right to try, but we already have the right to try," said Caplan. "What they're creating is a right to beg, but we already have that. People do ask companies all the time." The National Organization for Rare Disorders (NORD) said they are opposed because "the legislation still creates an unnecessary, less-safe alternative pathway that will not increase access to investigational therapies for our patients," said Paul Melmeyer, NORD director of federal policy.

Not to mention the fact that "a drug can make you die more miserably and can certainly make you die quicker," added Caplan. Opponents and backers of the idea do agree on one thing—not enough is being done by companies that are in a position to help. Small laboratories, which drive therapeutic innovation, often don't have the means to manage individual requests for drugs in addition to their work in clinical trials.

When it comes to big pharma, they often fear that the death of a patient, even a very sick one, would lead to bad headlines, or a crackdown on the drug by health authorities. —AFP

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## What's On

# Chinese art show earns warm applause from Kuwaiti audience



— Photos by Joseph Shagra

A Chinese folk art show was staged in Kuwait City on Tuesday, receiving warm applause from the local audience. The art show entitled "Splendid China," which was co-organized by the Chinese Embassy to Kuwait and the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) of Kuwait, was presented by the Sichuan Vocational College of Art of China.

The performance included Chinese traditional dances, magic and Bian Lian, a traditional Chinese dramatic art in which performers keep changing

their colorful masks on the face. Zhu Xi, director of cultural office of the Chinese Embassy to Kuwait, expressed his hope that the show will promote exchanges and mutual understanding between the two countries.

"I hope more Chinese arts groups will come to Kuwait to present traditional Chinese art. We will also make our efforts to invite Kuwaiti arts groups to China in the promotion of mutual cultural exchanges," Zhu said. Aysha Adnan Al Mahmoud, director of the Department of Culture of NCCAL, told Xinhua that Sichuan Vocational College of Art of China is

the only foreign troupe invited to the ongoing 29th Future Generations Festival in Kuwait.

"We want to give a unique opportunity for Kuwaitis to learn about Chinese arts and culture," Mahmoud said. Saway Fatima, a Kuwaiti girl who rushed to take pictures with Chinese performers after the show, expressed her love for the Chinese art. "It is the first time I found the charm of the traditional Chinese folk art. I wish I could go to China to see more of it," she said.

## GUST holds 13th annual Book and Information Fair

Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST) yesterday announced the opening of its 13th Annual Book and Information Fair on its campus. The event, which was organized by the A.M. Al-Refai Library, aims at connecting faculty and students with publishers, and to give them the opportunity to discover the latest additions to library resources. The event was attended by the university's top management, and officially opened by GUST President, Professor Donald Bates, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dr Salah Al Sharhan, and Library Director, Shobhita Kohli. The main sponsor of the event was That Al Salasil, GUST's campus bookstore.

The fair also celebrated the release of 13 different books authored by its faculty and staff, all of who attended the ceremony. The books include: Organisational Adaptations: A Pluralistic Perspective by Dr Antonis C Simintiras; Arab Women Voice New Realities, chapter by D. Shahd Al-Shammari; Le Sang et Les Larmes by Dr Tom Bruyer; Organic Cinema by Dr Thorsten Boltz-Bornstein; Transit States by Dr Omar AlShehabi; LSE Kuwait Programme Paper Series, by Dr Omar AlShehabi; The Gulf and Economic Reform in the Era of the Oil Crisis by Dr Omar Al Shehabi; My Mysterious Correspondent, by Ahmad Lafi; Writing Centers in the Higher Education Landscape of the Arabian Gulf, with chapters by Dr Inan Deniz Erguvan; The Divine power and Evil by Dr Kenneth Pak; Media in the Middle East: Activism, Politics, and Culture by Dr Nele Lenze; Hegel and Empire by Dr Mohammed Habib; and The



Red Heaven by Dr Israa Omran.

GUST President, Professor Donald Bates, said "Our focus at GUST is to constantly provide our students and faculty with opportunities that help create, build, and expand their horizons in the interest of promoting an environment of knowledge and learning. Seeing thirteen books published by GUST family members gives the library a real boost, and proves that it is not only alive, but a vital component of our university".

The Book and Information Fair offers leading publishers a platform to display the latest editions of books and online catalogs, which provide online service providers the opportunity to introduce their latest products and innovations, available in the world of technology, to help faculty and students further develop their knowledge in this field. The fair also gives faculty members an opportunity to review the latest course books and accordingly adopt new titles, if required.

## Kuwait's first Urdu Toastmaster Club

For the first time in the History of Kuwait, Urdu Toastmaster Club was inaugurated On Saturday, Feb 10, 2018 in Style with great enthusiasm. The first Urdu Toastmasters meeting was held in the auditorium of Australian College of Kuwait in Mishref. Pakistani community along with Majority of Urdu speaking community from other countries participated in the meeting.

Khush-Bayan Urdu Toastmaster Club's aim is to promote the beautiful Urdu language, which is famous for its poetry, prose and couplets. Members and guests will have the opportunity to express themselves in this elegant and rich language. The Khush-Bayan Toastmasters was chartered from Toastmasters International in October 2017. A Non-Profit Organization, Toastmasters International aims are to improve Communication and



Leadership Skills, Public Speaking and to boost confidence through their unique Education Program around the world.

Samina Mujtaba, Founder and President, chaired the meeting, welcomed and thanked District-20 Director Dr. Mohammad Makhoul, Division-I Director Fatima Abdullah, Assistant Division-I Director Program Quality and Area-37 Director Alina Tacu for their special presence. She stated that this effort is to promote

the Urdu language and to unite and bring people together from diverse backgrounds for a common interest. While Kaneez Fatima & Faisal Jameel Conducted very well Proceedings of the meeting. Toastmaster's meeting are divided into three segments; prepared speeches, impromptu speeches and evaluations. Khush-Bayan English meetings held twice a month While Urdu meeting once in a month.

## LOYAC Arab Youth Festival

LOYAC's Academy for Performance Arts (LAPA) will launch its Arab Youth Festival concerts at 8 this evening at Al-Shaheed Park where the first show will include performances by the magician Abdul Wahab Al-Faalkawi and LAPA's dance team. The second performance will be held Saturday by Kuwaiti singer, Salman Al-Ammari and Ghazi Al-Mulaifi's musical band. The final concert will be held Monday, March 19 for the Egyptian singer Yasmeeen.

Speaking on the occasion, Al-Shaheed Park manager, Yousif Al-Buaijan said that the three concerts would be open and free of charge provided the audience book their seats in advance through the park's website at: [www.alshaheedparkevents.com](http://www.alshaheedparkevents.com). Notably, Al-Faalkawi had practiced magic in Las Vegas for two years working with Angle and David



Yousif Al-Buaijan

Copperfield. He performed in over 30 events in Kuwait, Dubai and Germany.

Ghazi Al-Mulaifi is a researcher specialized in folkloric music who holds a PHD in music from New York university and teaches music at PAAET. Salman Al-Ammari is a Kuwaiti folk singer and Oud player who has a special passion for traditional music. Yasmeeen is an Egyptian singer who has taken part in various TV drama series and was awarded several singing awards.

## CBK visits Dasman Bilingual School

Within the seventh version of its 'Ya Zeen Turathna' campaign designed to revive Kuwaiti heritage and remind new generations of

old Kuwaiti life and traditions, The Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) recently visited Dasman Bilingual School. Commenting on the visit, CBK's assistant manager for PR and publicity, Amani Al-Wer'a stressed that the campaign would be on till the end of March. She added that the visit included a showing of an educational documentary about old Kuwaiti traditions as well as the terminology people used then in addition to a workshop for craftsman, Jamal Al-Ali.





TV

AM MOVIES ACTION
00:05 Under Siege 2
01:50 The Veil
03:25 Point Break
05:35 Independence

ANIMAL PLANET HD
00:50 Untamed & Uncut
01:45 The Jeff Corwin Experience
02:40 Biggest And Baddest

BBC FIRST
00:45 The Durrells
01:35 Death In Paradise
02:35 Our Girl

crime & investigation network
00:00 Homicide Hunter
01:00 My Haunted House

COMEDY CENTRAL
00:05 Hannibal Buress: Live In Chicago
00:55 Chris Hardwick: Funcomfortable

00:05 Under Siege 2
01:50 The Veil
03:25 Point Break
05:35 Independence

16:00 Idiotsitter
16:30 Friendszone
16:55 Friends
17:20 Friends

Discovery Family
00:30 Destroyed In Seconds
00:55 Destroyed In Seconds
01:20 The Know It All Guide To...

ID
00:50 True Conviction
01:45 Hostage: Deadly Demands
02:40 Kiss Of Death

Disney HD
00:10 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
00:35 Binnie And The Ghost

00:05 Hannibal Buress: Live In Chicago
00:55 Chris Hardwick: Funcomfortable
01:45 Tosh.0

Disney Junior
20:50 Jessie
21:15 Disney Mickey Mouse

00:00 Mission Force One
00:30 PJ Masks
01:00 PJ Masks

itv CHOICE
00:10 Who's Doing The Dishes?
01:00 Emmerdale
01:30 Coronation Street

Discovery Channel HD
00:15 Alaskan Bush People
01:05 Gold Rush

XD
06:00 Marvel's Spider-Man
06:25 Milo Murphy's Law
06:50 Right Now Kapow

NAT GEO people HD
00:15 Chasing The Sun
00:45 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia

EHD
00:10 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
01:00 Keeping Up With The Kardashians

00:10 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
01:00 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
01:50 El News Middle East

H2 HD
00:00 Dogfights
01:00 Cities Of The Underworld
02:00 Brad Meltzer's Lost History

HISTORY
00:20 Swamp People
01:05 Swamp People
01:40 American Pickers

00:15 Chasing The Sun
00:45 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
01:10 Sinful Sweets

08:30 Andy And Ben Eat Australia
09:00 Gok's Chinese Takeaway
09:55 Miguel's Tropical Kitchen

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CHANNEL HD
00:10 Miracle Hospital
01:00 Sea Of Hope: America's Underwater Treasures

NAT GEO WILD HD
00:20 Valley Of The Wolves
01:10 Monster Fish

NICK HD
00:12 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
00:36 Rabbids Invasion
01:00 Rabbids Invasion

00:15 Chasing The Sun
00:45 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
01:10 Sinful Sweets

nick jr
00:16 Kid-E-Cats
00:22 Shimmer And Shine

00:16 Kid-E-Cats
00:22 Shimmer And Shine
00:44 Sunny Day
01:06 Max & Ruby

00:20 Valley Of The Wolves
01:10 Monster Fish
02:00 Super Pride

AM MOVIES HD Disney
01:45 The Princess Diaries
04:00 The Princess Diaries 2: Royal Engagement

AM SERIES HD
00:00 DC's Legends Of Tomorrow
01:00 Criminal Minds: Beyond Borders

AM MOVIES COMEDY
01:25 K-9
03:10 A.C.O.D.

12:05 Fort McCoy
13:50 Newsies: The Broadway Musical

AM MOVIES HD KIDS
01:35 Zodiac: The Race Begins
03:05 Rock Dog

AM MOVIES HD
00:45 Dangerous Minds
02:30 The Golden Child

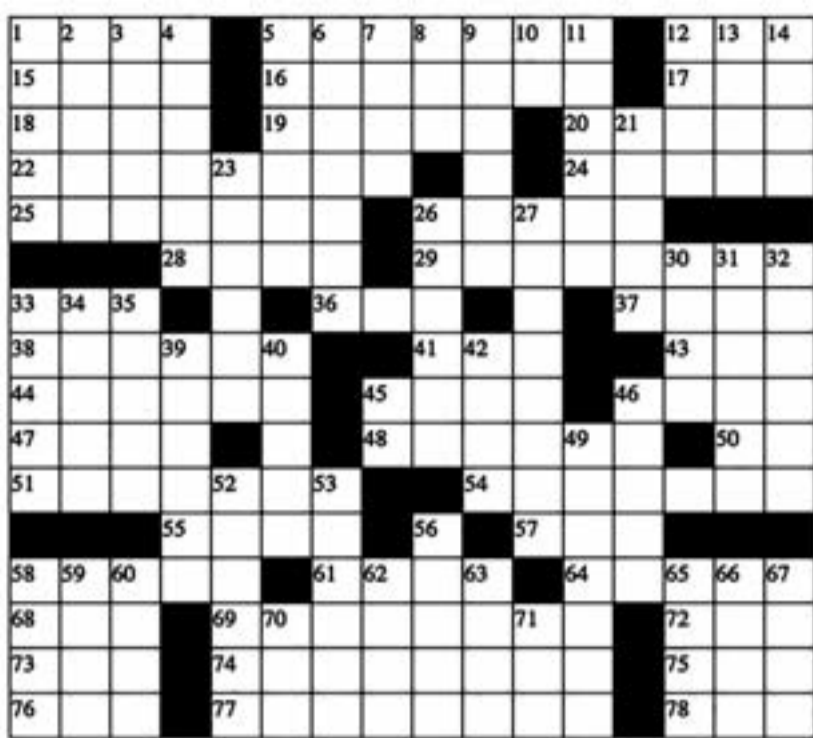
DISCOVERY SCIENCE
00:40 Mythbusters
01:30 How Do They Do It?

STAR GOLD
00:25 A Gentleman: Sundar, Susheel, Risky

STAR MOVIES HD
00:15 Reclaim The Moment
03:00 Committed

STAR WORLD
00:00 Cedar Cove
01:05 My Big Fat Fabulous Life

CROSSWORD 1858



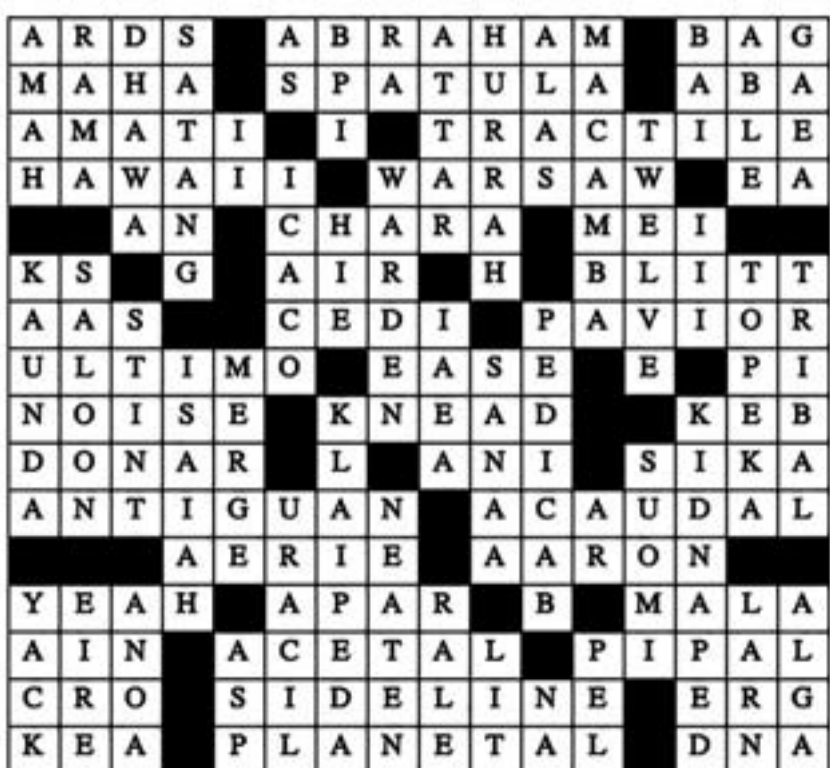
ACROSS

1. Petty quarrel.
5. Pouch used in the shipment of mail.
12. A hormone secreted by the anterior pituitary gland that controls the degree of pigmentation in melanocytes.
15. Very light colored.
16. A state in midwestern United States.
17. Any of various primates with short tails or no tail at all.
18. Report or maintain.
19. A facial expression of contempt or scorn.
20. A British doctorate.
22. The mountain range in Caucasia between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea that forms part of the traditional border between Europe and Asia.
24. An anti-TNF compound (trade name Arava) that is given orally.
25. Of or relating to the enteron.
28. The basic unit of money in Western Samoa.
29. Poisonous herbs.
33. The upper side of the thighs of a seated person.
36. (sports) The chief official (as in boxing or American football) who is expected to ensure fair play.
37. Having or demonstrating ability to recognize or draw fine distinctions.
38. A peninsula in southwestern Europe.
41. The sixth day of the week.
43. Angular distance above the horizon (especially of a celestial object).
44. In a straight unbroken line of descent from parent to child.
47. (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
48. An ancient country is southwestern Asia on the east coast of the Mediterranean.
50. A hard malleable ductile silvery metallic element that is resistant to corrosion.
51. A mountainous island in eastern Indonesia.
54. The supreme commander of a fleet.
55. Not only so, but.
57. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
58. Having a face or facing especially of a specified kind or number.
61. Wading birds of warm regions having long slender down-curved bills.
64. Essential oil or perfume obtained from flowers.
68. American prizefighter who won the world heavyweight championship three times (born in 1942).
69. A room equipped with toilet facilities.
72. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
73. Headress that protects the head from bad weather.
74. A resident of Alabama.
75. 30 to 300 gigahertz.
76. Free from liquid or moisture.
77. A great raja.
78. A broad flat muscle on either side of the back.

DOWN

1. The unlimited 3-dimensional expanse in which everything is located.
2. Music composed for dancing the pavane.
3. A member of the people inhabiting the Aleutian Islands and western Alaska.
4. The cardinal number that is the sum of one and one and one.
5. (Roman Catholic Church) A book containing all the prayers and responses needed to celebrate Mass throughout the year.
6. Shaped like a ring.
7. In the Roman calendar.
8. A statement that deviates from or perverts the truth.
9. Someone who operates a barge.
10. An associate degree in nursing.
11. A member of an agricultural people in southeastern India.
12. A member of the Siouan people formerly living in the Missouri river valley in NE Nebraska.
13. (British) A person without employment who makes money by various dubious schemes.
14. Goddess of the dead and queen of the underworld.
21. Acting like a clown or buffoon.
23. A peninsula between the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf.
26. Coffee trees.
27. The Palestinian uprising (beginning in 1987) against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.
30. A drop of the clear salty saline solution secreted by the lacrimal glands.
31. Capital of the state of Montana.
32. Land received by fee tail v l.
34. Dwell (archaic).
35. Of or relating to punishment.
39. A night flight from which the passengers emerge with eyes red from lack of sleep.
40. Genus of erect herbs of the Middle East having showy flowers.
42. Type genus of the Ranidae.
45. The district occupied entirely by the city of Washington.
46. A member of the Uniat Church.
49. Mottled curly-grained wood of Pterocarpus indicus.
52. A state of extreme confusion and disorder.
53. (Judaism) A period of seven days of mourning after the death of close relative.
56. A stringed instrument of India.
59. (botany) Of or relating to the axil.
60. A large and densely populated urban area.
62. A small cake leavened with yeast.
63. Leafless East Indian vine.
65. A unit of weight used in east Asia approximately equal to 1.3 ounces.
66. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
67. A flat float (usually made of logs or planks) that can be used for transport or as a platform for swimmers.
70. A flat wing-shaped process or wing-like part of an organism.
71. British dominion over India (1757-1947).

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Aries, a perfect day to make decisions and plans for the future has arrived: no problems seem too large to overcome or deal with. Your practical side does battle with the dreamy tendency you experience today. A certain task demands that you focus and push away any distractions. A beloved mentor steps in to give you reliable direction; you already know this information but confirmation from this person is much needed at this time. A project that seemed impossible seems very doable now; you figure out a unique way to bring this to a close. Your imagination is strong and actually very productive as you apply it to solving an odd problem; this could be a big breakthrough. You might just enjoy this evening under the stars with a very good listener, Aries.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Taurus, then new phase you have entered ushers in a time of things going your way, it's almost as though you're able to command fate. Now's the time to work on demanding problems or projects that could require discipline and long-term commitment. Failure isn't an option nor is giving up; this could mean personal or work-related issues. Your manners, fashion and refinement help you land an important account or customer; this is something that's strongly indicated. You may just find that you have been placed under a microscope for examination by a critical person; a boss or in-law could be what this means. Sitting back and observing shows you things you truly never imagined. This evening you unwind with those who behave, think and believe as you do, Taurus.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Gemini, when those around you make their feelings known you're in complete agreement. All around good will and support are prominent at this time. Your surroundings highlight your style and grace; this is especially true when attending a social event. You easily grasp the theoretical and mystic concepts explained by a new friend. A person you're close to could feel threatened by the new way you tend to business; consider that this person chooses to keep their mind closed to anything new or different from what they've known for years. A nice surprise makes your day, especially when you discover who sent it. You receive a sincere compliment on your talents and looks. If you feel pressure and tension from a certain person, consider breaking ties now, Gemini.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Cancer, this is a day that runs without a hitch; peace and quiet are likely. An old, troubled relationship comes to an end; it's a relief when the other person chooses to terminate the relationship as this is what you hoped for. It's easy for you to get along with anyone today and this creates a progressive, productive atmosphere. You're grateful for the quality of your life and those you share it with; more and more negativity is being eliminated. You have strong affection for someone who brings joy to your life; this could indicate a young person or beloved pet. You find yourself in charge of a number of people; you're definitely the best choice for this position. Someone calls with news of a new situation you've just stepped into; this is good news, Cancer.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Leo, you become passionate about your feelings for the mysteries of life, death and paranormal activities. You could choose to be in denial about something that needs your true realization; no one gains from putting their head in the sand! Forgiveness is something you have a problem with; working on this helps tremendously. You are coming to understand that we're all connected on some level. You know instinctively that a new acquaintance is a good choice for employment. Breaking away from the old ways of doing things is interesting but you could try to talk yourself into feeling threatened. You visit an unusual place to shop for organic foods that you have wanted to try for some time. A younger person makes your day when they pay you a surprise visit, Leo.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Virgo, interaction with others reveals your most unique qualities. Something you desire seems out of reach but you could find that attaining it's just waiting for you to act; this is part of your learning about manifesting what you want! You're able to comprehend theories you couldn't before now. It's possible to overcome a phobia you have dealt with all of your life; you can feel yourself growing and strengthening. Opinions and understanding shift regarding how life on the planet actually works and how eternity is involved. You could actually allow yourself a small luxury. Your worth is far more than you let yourself see or understand while others see it very clearly and say so. A personal circumstance seems to be changing in front of your eyes, Virgo.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Libra, when you say what you think it's not appreciated by those who hear it even though they asked for it! Take care that you don't become thoughtless and say things you definitely shouldn't; this could have long-lasting ill effects you may regret. You want to remove yourself from a project you don't feel good about; timing could be everything no matter your choice to push this. Your connections to your coworkers are strong and sincere; this is why productivity and quality are prominent! Being ahead of the game is always best, but even if you're not, you excel. Taking time to revisit how you accomplished something in the past reaches into the present to offer insight. A new perspective on an old situation turns out to be priceless, Libra!



Scorpio (October 23-November 19)

Scorpio, someone seems to think it's alright to show disrespect even in front of others! You're able to get people and places where they need to be; being organized brings success! New ways, new methods these prove their value. Being practical at work comes with ease; this could be difficult at home. New inventions and methods of communicating capture your attention and you could find yourself attending some sort of convention or gathering regarding these. A challenge you receive only makes you more determined to reach a certain goal. You catch something just in time before it causes a huge problem. A visit to a place of culture is strongly indicated for you this evening after a long day at work. You're grateful for the privileges you have in life, Scorpio.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 19)

Sagittarius, you're interested in secrets and mysteries; you enjoy something considered taboo. You have an opportunity to put someone in their place but decline to do so in favor of sitting back and letting them reap what they have sown. Abundance is indicated in the areas of money, love and health; it seems easier to make plans for future prosperity. A comment made in passing provides insight you weren't looking for but are very glad to have at this time. Your regard for things of beauty and value is heightened; value doesn't have to mean monetary worth. A mentor means more to you than they know; perhaps the time to tell them has come. You may choose to attend a social function that may upset someone. Doing something for yourself is golden, Sagittarius.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Capricorn, an energy of creativity soars to the fore; now's the time to write that book or poem, paint that masterpiece or any other creative endeavor. You're surrounded by those who love and respect you; this is a day when everything feels right, one task flows into another without any problem. Setting your goals high works well and you decide to make hay while the sun shines! Intuition serves as a most helpful map if you follow it! Doing well with groups and maybe larger numbers of people is prominent at this time. Reading or taking in a movie stirs creative juices you put to very good use. You come to understand something you refused in the past. Allowing an open mind gets you far and you're learning that going with the flow is easier, Capricorn.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

Aquarius, your head could be in the clouds today, with images of futuristic things dancing in your head. You could trip upon a way to do something that might get in someone else's way; this is difficult as you need to get your project done as soon as possible! The warmth of home on a brisk early spring day causes gratitude in your heart; this is your haven from the world. You receive a visit from someone carrying juicy gossip; this makes you even more determined to do nothing gossip-worthy! You can't believe your good fortune later when you win a raffle or some such prize; absorb it all, intelligent water bearer. You could have a tendency to overspend. Good vibes flow into the evening when a meal shared with friends brings wonderful news, Aquarius.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Pisces, you become interested in volunteering in some way to make a difference in your community; you could actually have a problem choosing as there are so many causes worthy of your time. A strong sense of unity is a hallmark of the new phase you have entered. You could find that you're removed on both the home and work fronts. Decisions regarding both should be put on pause until a better time. You experience simplistic enjoyment, nothing fancy or showy for you! Keeping your thoughts inside feels better than sharing. There's nothing so comforting as a best friend in your time of need, whether sipping warm cocoa with cookies or having a stiff drink; it works every time as long as you're together. Later, reflect on your good fortune, Pisces.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Radiohead Songs

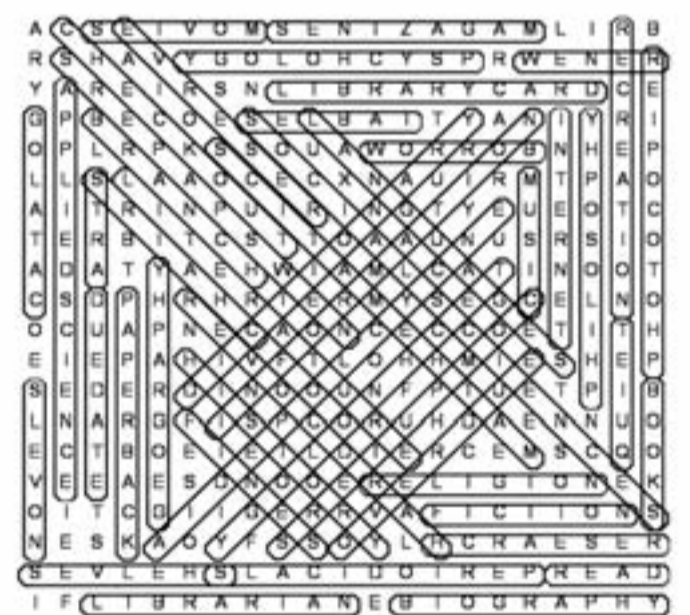
Find and circle all of the Radiohead songs that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell an additional song by Radiohead.



- |                |               |                  |              |
|----------------|---------------|------------------|--------------|
| AIRBAG         | HIGH AND DRY  | MORNING BELL     | PYRAMID SONG |
| ALL I NEED     | HUNTING BEARS | MY IRON LUNG     | RECKONER     |
| BLACK STAR     | IN LIMBO      | NICE DREAM       | RIPCORD      |
| BLOW OUT       | JUST          | NO SURPRISES     | SULK         |
| BODYSNATCHERS  | KARMA POLICE  | NUDE             | THE BENDS    |
| BONES          | KID A         | OPTIMISTIC       | THE TOURIST  |
| CREEP          | KNIVES OUT    | PARANOID ANDROID | TREEFINGERS  |
| ELECTIONEERING | LET DOWN      | PLANET TEXAS     | VEGETABLE    |
| FAUST ARP      | LUCKY         | PROVE YOURSELF   | VIDEOTAPE    |
| FITTER HAPPIER | LURGER        |                  |              |

Yesterday's Solution

Public Library



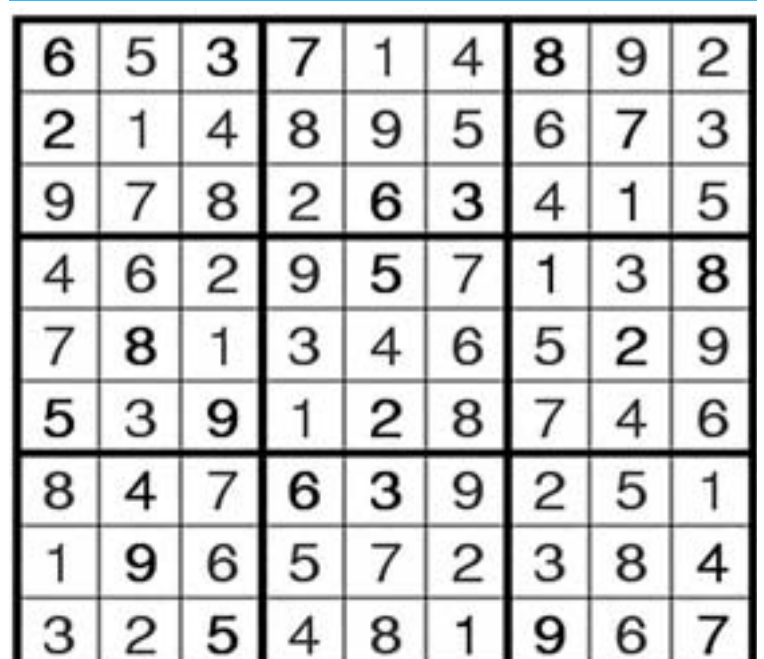
- |                 |              |             |                 |
|-----------------|--------------|-------------|-----------------|
| APPLIED SCIENCE | ENCYCLOPEDIA | MAGAZINES   | QUIET           |
| ARTS            | FICTION      | MATHEMATICS | READ            |
| BIOGRAPHY       | FINE      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

The hidden message is: A LIBRARY IS NOT A LUXURY BUT ONE OF THE NECESSITIES OF LIFE

Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution





## Lifestyle | Gossip



## Dua Lipa cancels shows for emergency dental surgery

**D**ua Lipa has been forced to cancel two concerts in order to have emergency dental surgery. The 'New Rules' hitmaker is currently on tour with Bruno Mars across Australia and New Zealand, but she has had to pull out of two shows in Brisbane after being informed she has to have her wisdom teeth removed. She apologized to her fans in posts on Twitter, revealing: "I'm so sorry to have to cancel some of my support shows with @brunomars. I've been performing with an awful pain due to my wisdom teeth and as advised by my dentist and oral surgeon I have had to have them imminently removed. I have been enjoying this tour so much and I'm so upset that life has gotten in the way but hopefully I'll have a speedy recovery and make it back as soon as possible. Thank you for your

understanding." Her statement came after concert promoter Live Nation made the announcement, explaining that the 22-year-old singer had "been advised by doctors to undergo immediate dental surgery". Dua previously hit the road with the 'Locked Out of Heaven' hitmaker for 10 dates across the US in September, and she took the opportunity to pick up some tips from what she considers to be one of the best performers in the business. Speaking previously, she said: "It's amazing, I love being on tour and when I was on tour with Bruno Mars I got to watch him perform night after night and really learn from his showmanship. He is so well rehearsed so I felt like I was learning from the best. It's been amazing to perform in such big rooms and massive arenas is really rewarding."

## MILEY CYRUS 'SUED FOR \$300M OVER WE CAN'T STOP'

**M**iley Cyrus is reportedly being sued for \$300 million over her chart-topping hit 'We Can't Stop'. The 25-year-old singer - whose single hit the number one spot in the UK when it was released in 2013 - has been accused of stealing the track by a Jamaican musician, who is seeking to stop all further performances and sales. According to TMZ, Michael May - who performs under the name Floungon - has claimed that Miley stole "unique and creative lyrical phraseology in order to establish an overarching and pervasive theme ... in the realm of self-discovery and self-governings". He points to his own 1988 song 'We Run Things', and has argued that the American pop star borrowed from it heavily for her own track. According to Reuters, May has accused the singer of misappropriating his material, pointing to the phrase "We run things. Things no run we," while Miley sings, "We run things. Things don't run we." In the court documents, May

notes he won "formal copyright protection" in November with the US Copyright Office for all musical arrangements in his song. The lawsuit also argues: "[Cyrus' song] owes the basis of its chart-topping popularity to and its highly-lucrative success to plaintiff May's protected, unique, creative and original content." Representatives for both Miley and Sony are yet to respond to their request for comment. It comes after Miley suggested she changed the cultural landscape with her performance at the MTV Video Music Awards (VMAs) in 2013. The singer/songwriter performed a memorably provocative dance routine on stage with Robin Thicke at the annual awards bash, and she believes that her steamy performance marked a major turning point in American culture and in her own life. She explained: "Not only was culture changed, but my life and career were changed forever. It inspired me to use my platform for something much bigger."



# HORACE PANTER GIVES BEANO CHARACTERS PUNK POP-ART MAKEOVER

**H**orace Panter has given iconic 'Beano' characters a punk twist in a series of new pop-art pieces. The Specials bassist has paid tribute to the beloved British comic book - which celebrates its 80th year in 2018 - with a collection of artwork which sees the likes of Dennis the Menace placed into famous pieces. The collection - which does on display for a public exhibition at Beano Studios in London on April 19 - sees Minnie the Minx reimagined as an Andy Warhol starlet, while Dennis and Gnasher are seen making mischief in David Hockney's LA swimming pool. Also part of the collection is a piece which sees Lord Snooty in the style of Roy Lichtenstein's work Minnie the Minx as a Warhol starlet. Lord Snooty - who appeared in the very first issue of the 'Beano' in 1938 - as an iconic character in the style of a Roy Lichtenstein painting. Horace said: "Growing up, there was always Beano around; those characters were an integral part of my childhood. Dennis, Minnie the Minx and, my personal favorites, the



Bash Street Kids - street smart, irreverent anti-heroes for the under 12s: when punk rock came along it seemed like the Beano set to music! "I'd like to think the paintings are funny and irreverent, but paying homage to both my favorite artists and to the comic characters. "Hope you like them as much as I do. For me, it's the ultimate labor of love." Meanwhile Allison Watkins, EVP Global Consumer Products & TV Distribution at Beano Studios, added: "Over the past 80 years, Beano has been the visual soundtrack to British childhood. Whether in the forties, seventies, or noughties, our characters have paved the way for fun and raucous adventures, making this partnership with Horace Panter the perfect fit and a wonderful way to celebrate this big Beano birthday." Horace - who graduated in 1975 with a degree in Fine Art from Lanchester Polytechnic, now Coventry University - is best known as the bassist for 2Tone ska legends The Specials, but has been exhibiting his art in the UK since 2008.

## Kanye West is working on new material

**K**anye West is working on new music in Wyoming. The outspoken rap star - who hasn't released an album since 'The Life of Pablo' in 2016 - has been busy in a recording studio in the mountainous region of the US, where a host of big-name artists have been collaborating with him. The likes of Travis Scott, Kid Cudi and Nas have all recently been photographed in Wyoming, suggesting they could be set to appear on Kanye's long-awaited new album. However, the star-studded list of artists could also be working with Kanye on Travis' new record, which the 40-year-old star is helping to produce, according to hip-hop magazine XXL. Last year, it was reported that Kanye had travelled to Wyoming in order to rediscover his "creative groove". The rap star - who prematurely ended a tour in 2016 after suffering hallucinations and paranoia - decided to distance himself from the glitz and glamour of Los Angeles to focus on music. At the time, an insider shared: "He's far from any noise. He's far from Hollywood and is very isolated right now. He wants to get back into his creative groove." Another source added: "He likes to work in remote places and be in the middle of nowhere as much as he can be. That's his pattern. It's what he always does. He goes away. He's done Hawaii, Mexico, Paris, Malibu ... It's what he's always done. He's not in some 'strug-



gle' to find his creative voice. "Any creative endeavor he's done, there's a start to the process and he wants to figure out what he talks about. It's a creative journey every time and he starts from scratch."

## Roger Daltrey confesses he's 'very deaf'

**R**oger Daltrey has confessed he is "very, very deaf" now. The Who legend urged rock 'n' roll fans to wear earplugs to live shows, as he revealed the extent of the damage done to his hearing through more than 50 years of playing with the iconic British band. Addressing the crowd at a solo concert at the Hard Rock Resort in Las Vegas, Daltrey made reference to his his in-ear monitors, saying: "The trouble with these ear things that I wear is that I am very, very deaf. And I advise you all - all you rock-and-roll fans - take your ear plugs to the gigs. If only we had known when we were young? ... we're lip-reading." Despite the effect performing live and going to shows has had on his hearing, the 74-year-old star told his fans he still wants to keep playing "for a long time". He added: "I am lucky to be doing what I do - so thank you." Daltrey and his bandmate Pete Townshend have both suffered with hearing problems over the years, with the 'Won't Get Fooled Again' singer claiming the band's guitarist "wears two hearing aids" due to the damage caused by a lifetime of rock. Speaking to the Daily Mail newspaper in 2011, Daltrey claimed: "Pete is almost stone deaf. He deafened himself in the recording studio, and when we last performed he had to stand right next to the speakers to hear anything. I don't know what Pete will do. I don't want to do a tour and have him end up completely deaf." Pete, 72, has been open about his hearing struggles and the fact he suffers from tinnitus - a ringing in the ears - and admitted that he has to protect his hearing so he can continue to make music and play live. The songwriter shared: "I don't have perfect hearing, and if I listen to loud music or go to gigs I do tend to get tinnitus."



## DOUGIE POYNTER FORMS NEW BAND INK

**D**ougie Poynter has formed a new band. The bassist has decided to start a new project whilst he waits for McFly to create fresh music and has created the alternative rock group INK with friends Todd Dorigo and Cory Alexander. Dougie, 30, his new bandmates have unveiled their first EP 'Heaven' and describe their influences as acts such as The Rolling Stones, Nick Cave, The National, Nirvana and Leonard Cohen, a big departure from McFly's pop/rock leanings. Although Dougie is branching out on his own he will still very much remain a part of McFly - also comprised of Tom Fletcher, Danny Jones and Harry Judd - but doesn't want to wait any longer for the boys to go on tour. INK's debut EP is comprised of four songs,

'Heaven', 'Fever', 'Symphony Woman' and 'Back To The Noise', and now they have given the world a taste of their music, the trio can't wait to hit the road. Dougie told 1883 Magazine: "We'd like to play live, that's the most part of playing in a band, playing live. The sooner we can do that the better." His McFly bandmates are also keeping busy as they enjoy a year away from the group. Whilst Harry has reinvented himself as a fitness guru, Danny is a coach on 'The Voice Kids' and will keep up with his work as a songwriter and producer. Tom will have his own solo projects to focus on, as he looks to write new novels and produce a musical based on his 'Christmasaurus' children's book.



## Anne-Marie 'scared' to release album

**A**nne-Marie has admitted the thought of releasing her debut album in just over a month "scares the s\*\*t" out of her. The 'Ciao Adios' hitmaker is set to drop her album 'Speak Your Mind' on April 27, and although she insists releasing a record is something she's "always wanted" to do, she can't help but feel "nervous" because of the "expectation" she's put on herself to put it out after working on it for five years. She said: "I've always wanted to release an album. I know it might not be the focus of some people's journeys right now as artists, but I grew up listening to albums on repeat. They're very important for me to hear everything that they're trying to say instead of just what's being played on the radio. I've always wanted to have this album out. So I'm pretty nervous right now, because, since I've started - I guess it's been five years - so I've been writing this album for five years, and that expectation scares the s\*\*t out of me." The 26-year-old singer collaborated with her close pal Ed Sheeran to co-write the track '2002' for her upcoming album, and has recalled that working with the pop megastar was an "inspiring" time. Speaking to Billboard's Pop Shop podcast, she said: "This [song] is about a particular year in my life. It's very different for me. I feel like, when I got in the studio with Ed, he's literally incredible. I knew that he was really good at songwriting, but when I was in the studio, I was like, 'Wow you're so good.' ... He's inspiring, honestly. "I feel like this is a very reminiscent song. And I love those songs - when I hear those songs, I feel like I remember memories that I wouldn't have remembered without that music. In this song, there's a lot of stuff that might make you remember times in your life."

Lifestyle | Gossip

# Kaling loves the contemporary quotes in A Wrinkle in Time



**M**indy Kaling loved how her 'A Wrinkle in Time' character was updated. The 38-year-old actress stars as Mrs. Who in Ava DuVernay's new Disney movie - which is based on the 1962 novel of the same name by Madeleine L'Engle - and in the book the character speaks through quotations including Shakespeare, Dante and the Bible. But in the new movie adaptation, Mrs. Who has been updated to feature more contemporary references including Lin Manuel Miranda and OutKast and Kaling said it was "cool". Speaking on 'Lorraine' yesterday (Kaling said: "It was cool that they updated the quotations from the original book which were more classic and from the Judaism/Christian history. This was updated to feature Lin Manuel Miranda and OutKast." Kaling stars alongside Oprah Winfrey as Mrs. Which and Reese Witherspoon as Mrs. Whatsit and her co-stars had nothing but praise for her as it was a challenging role. Winfrey, 64, told the chat show host: "She [Mindy] won't tell you how hard that is. We think that Mindy

had the hardest role as Mrs. Who. "As our characters you get to ad lib, you can add a sigh, or a 'and' or a 'but', you get a little leeway with the language, but when you're quoting Shakespeare, you can't." The film follows Meg Murry [Storm Reid] who works with her highly intelligent brother and fellow student Calvin O'Keefe [Levi Miller] and three astral travellers Mrs. Which [Winfrey], Mrs. Whatsit [Witherspoon] and Mrs. Who [Kaling] to rescue her father Alex [Chris Pine] who is being held captive on a distant planet. And Winfrey believes the film is a "universal story" and said the message of the movie is that "you are OK just as you are". She said: "It's a universal story. And you know, young girls, 13/14 years old, you try to figure it out. "You try to listen to your own voice and how to trust that instead of everybody around you and all the people who are bullying in one way or another, or trying to influence you in one form or another. "And the messages the 'Mrs' give to Meg is, "You are OK just as you are!"



## MARGOT ROBBIE IN TALKS TO STAR IN ONCE UPON A TIME IN HOLLYWOOD

**M**argot Robbie is in talks to star in the Quentin Tarantino-directed 'Once Upon a Time in Hollywood'. The 27-year-old actress - who has recently emerged as one of Hollywood's most bankable stars - is being lined up to play the role of Sharon Tate in the much-anticipated new movie, which is set in Los Angeles in 1969, at the height of so-called hippy Hollywood. The film will tell the story of the murder of Tate and several others in a killing spree instigated by Charles Manson. Margot could line up alongside Leonardo DiCaprio - who will play a former TV star - and Brad Pitt - his long-time stunt double - in the movie, according to Deadline. Tate was married to director Roman

Polanski and was eight-and-a-half months pregnant with the couple's son at the time of her murder. She was also considered to be one of Hollywood's rising stars when she was killed. Meanwhile, Margot has recently revealed her ambition is to move away from acting in order to spend more time behind the camera as a director. The Australian star is currently one of the most sought-after names in the film business, but Margot has admitted her real ambition is to helm more movies. She recently shared: "I still love acting. But I've spent the last 10 years on a film set, and I realized that if I am pouring my heart and soul into a film, I want to be one of those voices in the conversation making decisions."

## Ruffalo says filming Avengers movies is like a TV show



said: "Oddly enough, I joke with people that this is like doing a TV show where you shoot one episode every three years. "There's a continuity to it and when we talked about it with Marvel and Kevin [Feige] we really do talk about it as the character's progression. "I've been able to have a lot of say in where it goes, and you're also dealing with a new script and a new world but the characters feel like they're making a journey, you know? "And it does feel like one goes to the next and goes to the next. It feels like a long serial which is nice, I think." In 'Thor: Ragnarok', Ruffalo's alter-ego was up in space with the God of Thunder - played by Chris Hemsworth - and since Hulk's last appearance in 'Avengers: Age of Ultron', the character has learnt how to speak small sentences. And now Ruffalo hinted that in the upcoming third 'Avengers' movie, there is a blur between Banner and The Hulk. He said: "The division between Hulk and Banner is starting to blur a little bit, and so you have a Hulk that can actually express himself without being angry. "There are sentences, yes. We're getting into like a five-year-old." Ruffalo also teased that Banner - who has been portrayed as shy and nervous - has gone through a "life-changing experience" after the third 'Thor' film but said he isn't as "in-sync" with Tony Stark aka Iron Man (Robert Downey Jr) as they were. He said: "Well coming out of 'Thor 3', Banner's had a life-changing experience that makes him much more expressive and not so internalized, you know? "So it's not combative but they're not so in-sync as they were. Plus Banner doesn't understand Civil War. He just doesn't get it."

**M**ark Ruffalo said filming the 'Avengers' movies is like "doing a TV show". The 50-year-old actor has portrayed Bruce Banner aka The Hulk in three movies to date - including the two 'Avengers' movies and 'Thor: Ragnarok' - and is set to reprise his role in the highly anticipated 'Avengers: Infinity War', and Ruffalo said he has had "a lot of say" in his character's progression. In an interview with Collider, Ruffalo



## Storm Reid says working with Oprah Winfrey was amazing

**S**torm Reid said working with Oprah Winfrey was "amazing". The 14-year-old actress stars in Ava DuVernay's new Disney movie 'A Wrinkle in Time' alongside the likes of Winfrey, Reese Witherspoon and Mindy Kaling, and said she was uplifted to have someone like Winfrey in her corner. At the European premiere of the new movie at the BFI IMAX in Waterloo, London, on Tuesday Reid said: "To work with Miss Oprah has been amazing and to have her in my corner, for her to inspire me and uplift me was amazing. "But she actually told me, 'Don't waste energy on things you can't change in life, when you can be using that energy on something that is positive in your life'. "So that is like my life motto." The film - which is based on the 1962 novel of the same name by Madeleine L'Engle - follows Meg Murry [Reid] who works with her highly intelligent brother and fellow student Calvin O'Keefe [Levi Miller] and three astral travellers Mrs. Which [Winfrey], Mrs. Whatsit [Witherspoon] and Mrs. Who [Kaling] to rescue her father Alex [Chris Pine] who is being held captive on a distant planet. Reid - who also starred in '12 Years a Slave' - admitted she hopes her new movie will inspire all people. She said: "I just want people to be inspired. Not only young girls but young people, and people in general and I just want them to know that they can do anything they want to do."

## Fantastic Beasts 2 trailer released



**T**he first trailer for the highly anticipated 'Fantastic Beasts: The Crime of Grindelwald' has been released. The second of five adventures - which has been penned by 'Harry Potter' author J.K. Rowling - follows on from the end of the first film, which was released back in 2016, and has been helmed by David Yates. Now the first trailer for the upcoming film has been released and fans finally get to see Jude Law portraying Hogwarts head-teacher Albus Dumbledore in action. The trailer also shows a glimpse of the iconic school for witchcraft and wizardry which first graced the big screen in 'Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone' back in 2001 and was the main setting for the boy wizard during his adventures. However, the sequel - which is set years before 'The Boy Who Lives' is even born - follows the Dark wizard Gellert Grindelwald (Johnny Depp)

escaping from the Magical Congress of the United States of America (MACUSA). Now the wizard is gathering followers to raise pure-blood wizards up to rule over all non-magical beings. In order to stop him and his plans, a young Dumbledore [Law] enlists the help of Magizoologist Newt Scamander [Eddie Redmayne] who agrees to help, unaware of the dangers that lie ahead. Lines are drawn as love and loyalty are tested even among friends and family. The new film sees Redmayne and Depp reprising their respective roles alongside a number of other returning casts Katherine Waterston as Auror Tina Goldstein, Alison Sudol as Queenie and Dan Fogler as Jacob Frowlski. Ezra Miller is back as Credence, Zoe Kravitz will take on the role of Leta Lestrange and Callum Turner will play Newt's brother Theseus Scamander.

## TOM HOLLAND WANTS SPIDER-MAN AND SHURI TO MEET

**T**om Holland has admitted he'd love for Spider-Man to become friends with 'Black Panther' character Shuri in a future Marvel movie. The 21-year-old actor plays the lycra-clad superhero and his alter ego Peter Parker in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), and after striking up a friendship with Shuri actress Letitia Wright, he has said he would love to travel to the fictional world of Wakanda - where 'Black Panther' takes place - in a future movie. He told Entertainment Weekly magazine: "I think Peter would love it. There's some great moments in the comics where Peter ends up there. And Letitia and I have become really good friends over the last year and a bit. It would be brilliant to have our characters meet up, it would be so funny. She's brilliant in the movie, she's actually my favorite part of 'Black Panther'." It's unlikely Tom will get his wish any time soon though, as although Wakanda is set to feature in 'Avengers: Infinity War', Peter and Shuri aren't thought to be getting screen time together. And Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige recently admitted the company already have a plan in place for 'Black Panther 2', so Tom might have to wait even longer to see his dream come true. When asked what he could reveal about 'Black Panther 2', Kevin said: "Nothing specific to reveal, other than to say we absolutely will do that. One of the favourite pastimes at Marvel Studios is sitting around on a Part One and talking and dreaming about what we would do in a Part Two."



## TRAVOLTA'S GOTTI BIOPIC GETS JUNE RELEASE DATE



**J**ohn Travolta's new 'Gotti' biopic will be released in June after it was dropped by Lionsgate just days before its release last year. The new film was set for release under the studio's Premiere banner but the project was sold back to the production company Emmett/Furla/Oasis back in December. No reason was given for the sale, however, according to Deadline, the producers exercised the buy-back clause from the original contract. And it is also reported the film was set for a limited release but the producers wanted to widen the distribution. Now filmmaker Kevin Connolly has taken to Instagram to announce the film has got a new release date. He wrote: "June 15th!!! Save the date... #Gotti (sic)" The biopic follows ill-fated mobster John Gotti (Travolta) who rises to the top of the New York underworld to become the boss of the Gambino crime family. The FBI indicted members of

Gotti's crew for selling narcotics and he took advantage of growing dissent over the leadership of the crime family. Gotti feared he would be killed along with his brother and best friend by crime family boss Paul Castellano for the murder of the mobster in 1985 and took over the family shortly after. As the leader of the most powerful, richest and largest crime syndicate in the world, the Gambino family made hundreds of millions of dollars each year from construction, hijacking, loan sharking, drug trafficking and prostitution and pornography. Gotti was eventually arrested and incarcerated until his death from throat cancer in 2002 when he was 61. Travolta, 63, plays the famous mobster alongside his wife Kelly Preston as Victoria Gotti and Stacy Keach as Aniello Dellacroce. The film is written by 'Haywire' and 'The Limey' scribe Lem Dobbs and 'The Accused' star Leo Rossi. — Bang Showbiz

# Hidden art which only Hong Kongers know



Hidden street art in the alley near Wong Chuk Street, Sham Shui Po, Hong Kong, China.



Hong Kong local artist - KristopherH's mural, 36B Kweilin St, Sham Shui Po, Hong Kong, China.— Reuters photos



A general view of Wong Chuk Hang MTR station, Wong Chuk Hang, Hong Kong, China.



A general view of Wong Chuk Hang MTR station, Wong Chuk Hang, Hong Kong, China.



A mural titled Bruce Lee by Xeva (South Korea) at the junction of Square Street and Tank Lane, Sheung Wan, Hong Kong, China.

## High-end art sales boom in 2017, but it's only a partial market rebound

The works of great artists buoyed the art market last year and none did more than Leonardo da Vinci, whose 'Salvator Mundi' sold to great fanfare for \$450 million in New York in November. Global art sales grew 12 percent to an estimated \$63.7 billion after two years of falling sales, said a report published by UBS and Art Basel on Tuesday. That still fell short of the record of over \$68 billion set in 2014 and below \$66 billion achieved in 2007 before the art market plummeted during the financial crisis. "Industry-wide gains were driven by sales at the top end of the market," said cultural economist Clare McAndrew, who wrote the report.

Over the past decade, auction sales have fallen for works priced under \$1 million, making investment purchases a risky gamble for the lower and middle price segments. But purchases of ultra-expensive artworks soared in value, with the study finding a 148 percent increase in total sales value of works sold for over \$10 million at auction over the last ten years, and a 125 percent increase over just one year.

Indeed, the study found that just 1 percent of artists whose works were offered at auction accounted for nearly two-thirds of the total auction sales.

Art experts remain wary of speculative purchases at a time when the world's wealthy, waylaid by political and economic uncertainty, are eager to place cash. The research indicates that, like wealth-half of which remained in the hands of the top 1 percent in 2017 — the art market has become top heavy.

The Salvator Mundi painting was only recently rediscovered after being sold at auction for 45

pounds, attributed to one of Da Vinci's students, in 1958. Art dealers took a gamble on the damaged and partially covered work, paying \$10,000 in 2005 before restoring and verifying it for an \$80 million resale in 2013. It was flipped to Russian billionaire Dmitry Rybolovlev for \$127 million later that same year.

2017 also set a new record for the late American artist Jean-Michel Basquiat whose



Salvator Mundi is a painting of Christ as Salvator Mundi (Latin for Savior of the World) by Italian artist Leonardo da Vinci.

untitled painting sold to Japanese entrepreneur Yusaku Maezawa for \$110.5 million in May. A work by Roy Liechtenstein fetched \$165 million in a private sale.

### Top heavy

"Away from this premium segment, performance was not all positive, with many businesses coming under pressure," McAndrew said. "This divergence in performance is a continuing concern, particularly as the majority of employment and ancillary spending comes from the very many other businesses in the art trade below the top tier," he said. The largest art markets were also those with the highest numbers of millionaires, with the five largest markets accounting for two-thirds of the world's millionaire population.

Research by UBS, which banks half the world's billionaires, also found a growing engagement amongst the world's very richest with art. In a survey conducted with the bank's U.S.-based clients, the world's largest wealth manager found that over a third of the high net worth individuals - or those with personal assets over \$1 million - were active in the art and collectibles market. While only a third of the collectors placed emphasis on financial return in their collecting, that increased to nearly half for those with wealth over \$5 million. The rapid growth of China's economy and rising wealth over the last two decades helped fuel the art market, the report found, with China overtaking Britain as the second biggest art market following the United States. Further growth in Asian economies could be expected to fuel more collecting over the next five years, it said. — Reuters

## Rockefeller's Picasso could be part of biggest art collection ever sold

A rare Picasso once owned by Gertrude Stein is part of an art trove belonging to the Rockefeller dynasty that could raise half a billion dollars this year, in what auctioneer Christie's says could be the most valuable sale ever of a private collection. Ten works on display at Christie's in Paris, including the Picasso and a Monet, represent a small fraction of the 1,600 lots once owned by billionaire banker David Rockefeller and his wife Peggy that will go under the hammer in May for charity.

David Rockefeller, a former CEO of Chase Manhattan bank and grandson of the oil tycoon John D. Rockefeller, died last year at the age of 101. "We're talking probably north of 500 million dollars which will make it the most valuable collection sale of all time, and the most valuable charity sale of all time," Christie's auctioneer Jonathan Rendell told Reuters TV.

The showpiece of the collection is Picasso's "Young Girl with a Flower Basket", painted in 1905 and acquired by the artist's friend and

collector, the American novelist Stein. Rockefeller and a group of collectors purchased Stein's art in 1968, drawing lots for the works they would keep. The Picasso masterpiece, depicting a statuesque nude with a melancholy expression, hung on the wall of Rockefeller's library for decades and Christie's expects it to fetch between 90 and 120 million dollars.

Also on sale is a small painting of an apple which Picasso gave Stein as a Christmas gift in 1914 after she told him of her disappointment that her brother Leo had held onto a Cezanne still life of apples when they split up their own collection. The proceeds of the sale will go to charities including Harvard University and the Museum of Modern Art. Rendell said he anticipated the works would likely be bought by private collectors, though some could end up in museums. The sale will take place at New York's Rockefeller Center in May. — Reuters

Lifestyle | Music & Movies

# Stephen Hawking, the 'superhuman' pop culture star

Very few people may have read and understood "A Brief History of Time", but the physicist Stephen Hawking carved himself out a place in pop culture equaled only by Albert Einstein. While the brilliant mind behind the theory of relativity was instantly recognizable by Einstein's unruly "mad scientist" hair, Hawking's wheelchair and his synthesized voice made him every bit as iconic. Both knew how to play to the gallery, and that the key to scientific evangelism was not to take yourself too seriously—in public. Einstein famously stuck out his tongue out for a picture in 1951 and Hawking never passed up a chance to show his rapier wit.

Within months of his 1988 bestseller—dubbed "the greatest unread book in history"—entering the Guinness Book of Records, the British cosmologist had become a star of the television chat show circuit and a pop cultural fixture. He appeared as himself in everything from "Star Trek: The Next Generation" playing poker with a hologram of Einstein—to "The Simpsons" where he conceded that Homer's "theory of a donut-shaped universe is intriguing". In fact, he appeared five times in the cartoon series as "the world's smartest man", and became such a running gag that he had his own Simpsons figurine. In his 1999 debut, "They Saved Lisa's Brain", he even started a brawl by punching Principal Skinner. He was usually called on to deliver pearls of gnomish self-deprecating wisdom such as: "Sometimes even the smartest of us can be the most childish. But not me, never..."



This combination of pictures created on March 14, 2018 shows (top left to bottom right) renowned cosmologist Professor Stephen Hawking as he attends a press conference at One World Observatory April 12, 2016 in New York; appearing during the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Paralympic Games at the Olympic Park in east London on August 29, 2012; speaking to an audience by hologram (left) in Hong Kong, beamed live from his office in Cambridge, England; as he (right) is surrounded by media before he addressed a joint press conference between Washington and London where the directors of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists pushed the hands of the "Doomsday Clock" - a barometer of nuclear danger for the past 55 years - by two minutes closer to the midnight hour symbolizing nuclear conflict, in central London, 17 January 2007; as he attends the launch of The Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence (CFI) at the University of Cambridge, in Cambridge, eastern England; as he speaks during an inaugural lecture "The Origin of the Universe" at the Hong University of Science and Technology, 15 June 2006; as he gives a press conference to present his latest book, 'God Created the Integers: The mathematical breakthroughs that changed History' in Paris; is seen on a TV monitor during his conference to open the XXV Prince of Asturias Awards Anniversary event in Oviedo, northern Spain, 12 April 2005. Stephen Hawking won the Prince of Asturias Award for Concord in 1989; as he attends the launch of The Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence (CFI) at the University of Cambridge, in Cambridge, eastern England, on October 19, 2016. — AFP photos



In this file photo taken on December 09, 2014 British actors Felicity Jones (left) and Eddie Redmayne (right) pose with British scientist Stephen Hawking (center) at the UK premiere of the film 'The Theory of Everything' in London.

### 'Imprisoned mind' roaming cosmos

The Simpsons' creator Matt Groening also used Hawking's severed head as a recurring trope in his sci-fi series "Futurama". The scientist was a regular too on another US show, "The Big Bang Theory". Artists even found his TV adverts inspiring. Pink Floyd's David Gilmour sampled his voice from a 1994 British telephone ad for his song, "Keep Talking", after Hawking channeled "E.T." to declare: "Mankind's greatest achievements have come

about by talking and its greatest failures by not talking. It doesn't have to be like this."

Hawking's colleague at Cambridge University, the Astronomer Royal Professor Lord Martin Rees, said the key to his appeal was that his brilliant brain had been imprisoned in a wheelchair and that he had been robbed of his own voice. "The concept of an imprisoned mind roaming the cosmos plainly grabbed people's imagination" and made him a cult figure, Lord Rees said in an appreciation of his friend, released yesterday. "If he had achieved equal distinction in (say) genetics rather than cosmology, his triumph of intellect against adversity probably wouldn't have achieved the same resonance with a worldwide public," he added.

### Postmodern superhero

But for French science writer and YouTube star Bruce Benamran, Hawking was a kind of postmodern superhero.

"He was clearly handicapped by his illness but at the same time he was kind of superhuman. He seemed to live in a kind of energy that was almost superhuman even as he was imprisoned in his wheelchair and obliged to talk through an artificial interface, which made him even more recognizable," he added.

Despite the black hole of a body wracked by amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, Hawking was able to fill the Albert Hall in London and other huge venues across the world and hold audiences spellbound with his ideas. Hawking's personal life also became public property through the success of "The Theory of Everything", which saw actor Eddie Redmayne win an Oscar for portraying the scientist. Based on the book by his first wife, Jane, Lord Rees said the film "conveyed with sensitivity how the need for support (first from a succession of students, but later requiring a team of nurses), strained his marriage to breaking point, especially when augmented by the pres-

sure of his growing celebrity."

Hawking later married one of those nurses, Elaine Mason, whose former husband had designed Hawking's speech synthesizer, although the relationship did not last either. In later life, he wrote a series of much-praised books for children with his daughter, Lucy. While more than 10 million copies of "A Brief History of Time" were sold, Lord Rees said "probably more readers got to the end" of his other books which explained his ideas, such as "Our Universe in a Nutshell" and "The Grand Design". Benamran, however, said his gift for explaining the most complex concepts was the key to his stardom. "He was someone who could explain simply and clearly the most difficult subjects without loading them with scientific baggage," he said. —AFP

## China dragoons viewers to make pro-Xi film a blockbuster

Citizens across China are being corralled into cinemas to watch a propaganda film extolling the Communist Party and Xi Jinping, as an intensifying personality cult around the 64-year-old leader hits the big screen. The mass viewings by staff from companies and government agencies have catapulted the feature-length movie, called "Amazing China" in English and released March 2, into the ranks of the country's biggest box-office earners, with state media saying it was already the country's highest-grossing "documentary" ever.

The feature, produced by state broadcaster CCTV and a government film group, fawns over China's achievements in science,

technology, industry, and poverty reduction since Xi took power in 2012, and the mobilization of movie-goers underlines his increasing dominance of public life. "Most of us are from a state tobacco company. We all came together," said a woman who was among hundreds of viewers at a Shanghai cinema that was, unusually for a weekday, sold out. "It's a very patriotic movie, and contains much of our party's doctrine, so it's our duty to watch it," she said cheerfully.

The timing of the release of the film, distributed by Alibaba Pictures, is no accident. China's annual parliament meeting opened in Beijing on March 5 and on Sunday the Communist-controlled legislature voted to abolish presidential term limits, paving the way for indefinite rule by Xi, who has rapidly become China's most powerful leader since Mao Zedong. The move, which has prompted fears of a budding dictatorship, is part of an accelerating drive by Xi to accumulate power as he pushes his long-term plans to propel China to superpower status, backed up by a relentless domestic propaganda campaign.

The official Xinhua news agency said "Amazing China" was the most talked-about film at parliament, cited by various ministers as proof of the country's progress.

Breathlessly narrated segments praise China's armed forces modernization, infrastructure achievements, space program and economic development in backward regions like Buddhist Tibet and predominantly Muslim Xinjiang. Critics in those regions have complained of repression by Beijing and both have suffered bouts of violent anti-Chinese unrest in recent years. None of this is mentioned in the film. Major problems like chronic air pollution and corruption are also ignored.

### 'Long live the party'

Instead, Tibetans are portrayed as the appreciative recipients of Communist aid that has saved them from poverty. "We are very grateful to the party. Long live the party!" says an elderly Tibetan woman in the documentary. Every few minutes, Xi materializes to offer fresh wisdoms and drive home the message. The viewer rating function on leading Chinese movie platform Douban.com has been disabled for "Amazing China", apparently to stifle criticism.

But many Chinese internet users complained of being pressured to see the movie at their own expense and to write an appraisal of it. Some users of the Twitter-like Weibo platform pleaded with others to share their essays. "It's like schoolchildren being taken to watch a movie and then given homework on it," said one user, complaining that viewers were being treated like "big babies". At the packed Shanghai screening, audience members occasionally reacted with audible excitement at key moments, but some snoring could also be heard.

One man said his trading company's Communist Party cell pushed employees to attend. "It was mandatory. But I'm glad we came. Don't you think it was great?" he asked. Xinhua said "Amazing China" had so far earned 227 million yuan (\$36 billion) — and counting—at the box office. "Star Wars: The Last Jedi", by comparison, made around 267 million yuan in China, according to official sources. China restricts foreign movie imports and increasingly utilizes cinemas to hammer party doctrine. —AFP



This picture shows a poster for the film 'Amazing China' at a cinema hall in Shanghai. — AFP

## Madonna to direct film on Sierra Leone dancer

Pop superstar Madonna on Tuesday announced that she will direct a biopic about Michaela DePrince, a war orphan from Sierra Leone who overcame overwhelming odds to become a successful ballerina. "Taking Flight," taken from the name of DePrince's 2014 autobiography, will be the musical icon's third time as a feature film director after "Filth and Wisdom" in 2008 and "W.E." in 2011.

DePrince, abandoned by her uncle during the West African nation's brutal civil war, was neglected in an orphanage as she suffered from the skin disorder vitiligo. After being adopted by an American family, she rose to become a ballerina in the United States, South Africa and The Netherlands, where the 23-year-old is now a soloist in the Dutch National Ballet. "Michaela's journey resonated with me deeply as both an artist and an activist who understands adversity," Madonna said in a statement.

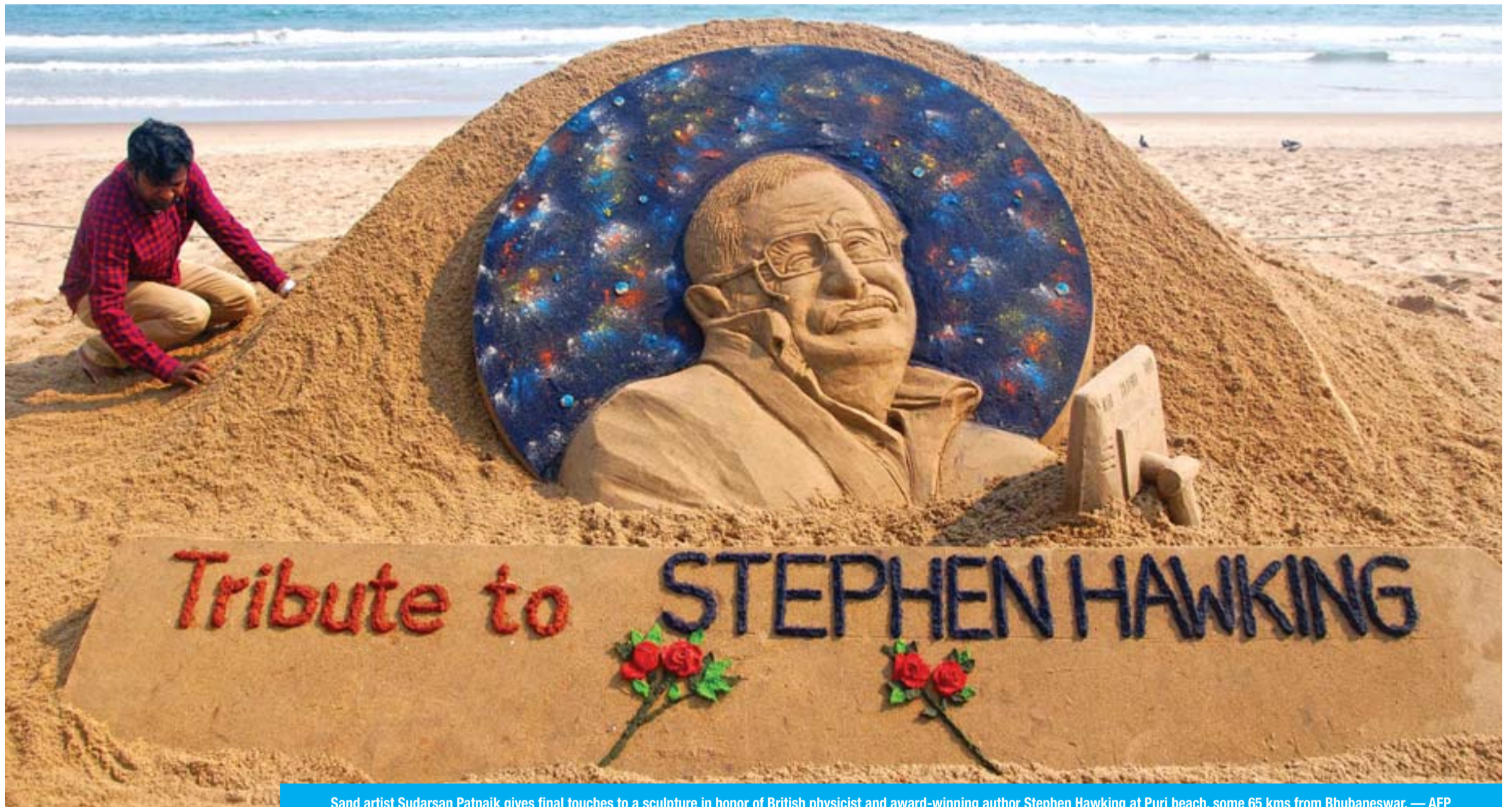
"We have a unique opportunity to shed light on Sierra Leone and let Michaela be the voice for all the orphaned children she grew up beside. I am honored to bring her story to life." DePrince's story earlier was made into a documentary, "First Position." She also appeared in "Lemonade," Beyonce's 2016 intertwined film and album that delves into the experience of African American women. Camilla Blackett, who has written for sitcoms "Fresh Off the Boat" and "New Girl," will adapt a screenplay for the film, which will be released by studio MGM. The plight of orphans is dear to the heart of Madonna who has adopted four children from Malawi. In 2008, she narrated and produced "I Am Because We Are," a documentary about Malawi's orphans who lost their parents to AIDS. — AFP



Madonna

# Lifestyle

THURSDAY, MARCH 15, 2018



Sand artist Sudarsan Patnaik gives final touches to a sculpture in honor of British physicist and award-winning author Stephen Hawking at Puri beach, some 65 kms from Bhubaneswar. — AFP

## Beyond belief: From strict ultra-Orthodox roots to street artist

With her nose piercing, jeans and sweatshirt, rising street artist Sara Erenthal looks nothing like what she was 20 years ago—a member of an extreme ultra-Orthodox Jewish group. New York-based Erenthal, who left religious life behind, is attracting growing attention for her unusual murals and art that give a second life to abandoned objects she finds. Artnet website in December listed her among 10 street artists to watch who are “taking the art form beyond Banksy”, the famed British activist. The 36-year-old’s work has flourished in the streets of Brooklyn and at the New York borough’s FiveMyles exhibition and performance space.

It has been an unlikely rise for someone from the closed world of the ultra-Orthodox, who follow a strict interpretation of Jewish law. “I didn’t have a happy childhood,” Erenthal told AFP during a recent return to Israel for the first time in her professional life. “I stopped believing in God when I was very young, but I never said it. There were also arguments with my family.” While back in Israel for several weeks, Erenthal worked in a studio and on the streets of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

### ‘Subconscious self-portrait

Some of her work was exhibited at the Bait Haadom (Red House) gallery in the hip Shapira neighborhood of southern Tel Aviv. She painted her emblematic woman’s face, with stylized black curves and red lips, on the Jerusalem streets of the ultra-Orthodox district of Geula

near Mea Shearim, the strictly religious area where she was born.

That face and its different guises, almost expressionist in nature, has become her signature. “It is a self-portrait. It represents me in all my variations and also all women and people,” she said. “It is a subconscious self-portrait.” The image at times takes the form of a young girl with braids, how she herself was as a girl.

### ‘Time to leave’

Erenthal comes from a family that belonged to the Neturei Karta branch of ultra-Orthodox Judaism, known for its especially strict religious lifestyle and its opposition to Zionism. For Neturei Karta members, the establishment of a Jewish state is prohibited before the coming of the Messiah, so they avoid dealings with the Israeli state.

When she was only a few years old, her parents left Jerusalem and moved to an ultra-Orthodox neighborhood of Brooklyn, where she spent most of her childhood. “When I was 17 and a half, we moved back to Israel,” Erenthal said. “A few months later, my parents told me they had found someone for me (to marry) without really giving me a choice. I had a gut feeling that that was the time, that if I didn’t leave right away I would never leave.”

### ‘A subtle message’

She ran away from her family and went to the army’s recruitment office to carry out her military service,



Israeli-born New York-based street artist Sara Erenthal sits in front of one of her murals in the Israeli coastal city of Tel Aviv. — AFP photos

mandatory in Israel, though young ultra-Orthodox are often exempt. She spent time in a kibbutz—the collective communities in Israel—and learned Hebrew there after having previously spoken Yiddish, the ancient language that some ultra-Orthodox in Israel still use. Erenthal did nearly two years of military service, working in the administration of an infantry unit. “My military service was my introduction to the secular world,” she said. She later returned to New York, surviving with the help of odd jobs and enduring a “feeling of emptiness”. Seeking to address that void, she spent nearly a year in India. Then in her 30s, she began to draw while there.

“In India, I started to develop as an artist. Until then, I never thought I could be an artist,” she said. “In my family, I was not exposed to contemporary art and to culture in general. We would never go to the museum.” Back in New York, she took her first steps in the art world, beginning by

working in a studio. She quickly turned toward street art, using found objects such as mattresses, televisions and scrap wood in her work, then trying her hand at murals.

She gradually began to include messages in her paintings. Many are spontaneous, inspired by her feelings in the moment or by the objects themselves. Some are more militant, although she says she is not trying to provoke. While in Jerusalem, her graffiti on an abandoned window included the words “Open Your Eyes”. “These words are an invitation to stop for a moment and think,” she said. “It is a subtle message in case someone would need it. I am not trying to tell ultra-Orthodox Jews how they should live their lives. I am not trying to convince anyone. “If someone should see this message, he will.” — AFP



Israeli-born New York-based street artist Sara Erenthal draws one of her emblematic woman’s face in the Israeli coastal city of Tel Aviv.



People walk past drawings by New York-based Israeli-born street artist Sara Erenthal in the Israeli coastal city of Tel Aviv.