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Kuwait, Philippines reach deal on domestic helpers

Workers to retain passports • Kuwait calls to lift labor ban, Manila in no hurry

KUWAIT: Kuwait and the Philippines signed a draft deal to regulate the work of domestic helpers, a Kuwaiti diplomat said yesterday. Foreign Ministry Undersecretary for Consulate Affairs Sami Al-Hamad told KUNA that the deal, which was signed on Friday night, came as a result of a meeting between a visiting Kuwaiti ministerial delegation and Filipino authorities in Manila. The deal will ensure the rights of both employers and employees, said Hamad.

The deal may end a two-month crisis sparked by reports that abuse by employers in Kuwait had driven several Filipinos to suicide. The Philippines stopped sending workers to Kuwait in January after a Filipina maid was found dead in a freezer, the latest incident in what Manila called a pattern of abuse in the state.

Hamad said the two sides agreed that domestic workers from the Philippines will have the right to retain their passports as well as the right to refuse being transferred to other employers. A Filipino request to obtain any criminal records that employers might have was denied, because Kuwaiti authori-

ties will not allow anyone with a record to recruit workers, said the foreign ministry official. Hamad affirmed that the Kuwaiti side requested that the doors for labor recruitment should be reopened for Kuwaiti agencies, especially the government-backed Al-Durra company. He assured that those interested in employing domestic workers will be able to do so by paying reasonable fees. But the ban on sending Filipinos to work in Kuwait will remain in place, Philippines Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III said after the sides engaged in two days of talks resolved their last remaining issues over dinner.

President Rodrigo Duterte has said the ban won't be lifted unless Filipinos get better protection in Kuwait and justice is served for the Filipina woman found in the freezer, Joana Demafelis, whose death sparked outrage in the Philippines. Bello said earlier that even if a pact was reached, Duterte wanted to see justice served in her case before lifting the ban.

Bello said the pact would be signed at an agreed time and venue in the near future, most likely in

Kuwait. The officials agreed to allow Filipino workers to keep their own passports, or give them to the Philippine Embassy for safekeeping, to prevent employers from withholding the document. The workers will also get to keep their cellphones. Employers will not be allowed to transfer workers from one employer to another without the workers' consent. Both parties also agreed to provide a \$400 (KD 120) monthly salary. The employer will open a bank account where salary will be deposited, as proof the worker is being paid.

Workers in many Gulf states are employed under the kafala (sponsorship) system, which gives employers the right to keep their passports and full control over their stay in the country. Rights groups say this system leaves millions of workers in the Gulf region open to exploitation. There are more than 250,000 Filipinos in Kuwait, the Philippine foreign ministry estimates, with most working as domestic helpers. There are also large numbers in the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. — Agencies



Sami Al-Hamad

Thousands of Syrians flee as two battles rage

ARBIN, Syria: Thousands of terrified Syrian civilians fled for their lives yesterday, as they sought to escape two raging offensives in a rebel bastion outside Damascus and a northwestern Kurdish enclave. Syria's civil war this week entered its eighth year with world powers unable to stem a complex conflict that has killed more than 350,000 people and displaced at least half the country's population. Tens of thousands have taken to the roads, as Russia-backed regime fighters advance against rebels in Eastern Ghouta outside the capital and Turkey-led forces press an assault in the Kurdish enclave of Afrin.

Air strikes killed 36 civilians in Eastern Ghouta yesterday, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported, most of them in the town of Zamalka as they prepared to flee. An AFP reporter in the nearby town of Arbin heard intense bombardment. The fresh violence came as around 20,000 people streamed out of the last

rebel bastion on the capital's doorstep yesterday, the Britain-based monitor said.

Regime forces have retaken 70 percent of Eastern Ghouta since Feb 18, carving it up into three shrinking pockets held by different rebels. The regime assault has killed more than 1,400 civilians in the enclave, according to the Observatory, which relies on a network of sources on the ground. Around 50,000 civilians have poured out of Eastern Ghouta since Thursday, fleeing air strikes and advancing troops, the Observatory said. The Russian defense ministry said more than 44,000 have left the enclave in total.

Yesterday, Syrian state television showed dozens of civilians - men, women, children and the elderly - trudging along a road leading into regime-held territory. Some dragged suitcases while others carried children on their shoulders, kicking up dust from the road as they marched. Several clutched blankets or wore thick winter coats. Some civilians who have arrived in government-controlled territory have complained of having nowhere to sleep.

"Women and children are on the floor," said Abu Khaled, 35, who used to run a clothing shop in Ghouta. Since 2013, Eastern Ghouta's estimated 400,000 residents had lived under government siege, facing severe

Continued on Page 11



JISREEN, Syria: A Syrian girl uses a walker as she evacuates with other civilians from this town in the southern Eastern Ghouta on the way to areas under government control yesterday. — AFP

Xi gets second term with ally as VP; Amir sends congratulations

BEIJING: China's rubberstamp parliament unanimously handed President Xi Jinping a second term yesterday and elevated his right-hand man to the vice presidency, giving him a strong ally to consolidate power and handle US trade threats. Xi's reappointment by the Communist Party-controlled legislature

was a foregone conclusion, but all eyes had been on whether his former anti-corruption enforcer, Wang Qishan, would become his deputy.

The National People's Congress has widely expanded Xi's already considerable authority during its annual session, adding his name to the constitution and lifting the two five-year term limit for the presidency and vice presidency. Xi received a standing ovation after winning all 2,970 votes for the presidency and Central Military Commission chairman. In 2013, Xi had received 2,952 votes, with one against and three abstentions, a 99.86 percent share. Only one delegate voted against Wang's appointment, with 2,969 in favor.

Continued on Page 11

Trump hails FBI official's firing, critics slam ploy

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump has hailed the firing of a senior FBI agent as a "great day for democracy", a move his attorney said he hoped would bring an end to a probe into alleged collusion between the president's campaign and Russia. But critics slammed the axing as a "dangerous" ploy to discredit the top law enforcement agency as well as the work of

Robert Mueller, the special counsel investigating Russian influence in the 2016 election.

Andrew McCabe, who was the FBI's deputy under former director James Comey, sacked by Trump last year, is potentially a key witness in that probe. Trump's personal attorney, John Dowd, told the Daily Beast yesterday that he hoped Deputy Attorney General Rod

Rosenstein would follow the lead of the FBI Office of Professional Responsibility and "bring an end to alleged Russia Collusion investigation manufactured by McCabe's boss James Comey based upon a fraudulent and corrupt Dossier."

McCabe, who has endured a year of withering attacks from the president, was fired by the Justice Department late Friday, just two days before he was to retire after 21 years with the FBI. The firing threw new fuel on the fire raging over the investigation, with critics saying Trump might be planning to

Continued on Page 11



Andrew McCabe

Afghan baby Donald Trump causes a stir

KABUL: Donald Trump flops over his pink and white baby walker and rolls it around his family's modest home in Kabul, blissfully unaware of the turmoil his "infidel" name is causing in the deeply conservative Muslim country. The rosy-cheeked toddler's parents named him after the billionaire US President in the hope of replicating his success. But now he is at the center of a social media firestorm in Afghanistan after a photo of his ID papers was posted on Facebook.

A self-confessed fan of the American tycoon turned leader of the free world, Sayed Assadullah Pooya said he and his wife have been inundated with "vulgar and insulting" comments attacking their choice of name for their third child. Some Facebook users have gone as far as threatening to kill Sayed for giving his son an "infidel

Continued on Page 11



KABUL: Afghan Sayed Assadullah Pooya looks on alongside his son Donald Trump during an interview on Friday. — AFP



BEIJING: Wang Qishan (left) shakes hands with China's President Xi Jinping after Wang was elected as China's Vice President during the 13th National People's Congress at the Great Hall of the People yesterday. — AFP

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: This picture taken on March 16, 2018, shows the sky over Kuwait City during a heavy sand storm. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



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Egyptians living in Kuwait show their passports as they arrive to cast their vote in the Egyptian presidential elections at the Egyptian embassy in Kuwait City, on March 16, 2018. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Egyptians in Kuwait line up at embassy for voting

KUWAIT: Egyptians expats in Kuwait flocked to their country's embassy on Friday to cast their ballots in the presidential elections. The voting for Egyptians living abroad, which ran for three days, included 139 polling stations in 124 countries all over the world. Egyptian Ambassador in Kuwait Tareq Al-Qouni was the first to cast his ballot in the process, while many Egyptians went to the embassy a few hours ahead of the vote amid intensive security presence.

The ambassador expected a high turnout at the embassy during the three days of the process. He said the embassy has already taken all required arrangements and preparations for smooth voting in the presidential race. The ambassador appreciated Kuwaiti security authorities

for their efforts to help in organizing the vote at the embassy.

The Egyptian government in general and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in particular have made proper preparations and arrangements for the vote of Egyptian expats, which runs between March 16 and 18. But, Syria, Libya, Yemen and Somalia would not be the scene of presidential elections due to ongoing security circumstances.

The government urged citizens abroad to participate in the third presidential race since the January 25, 2011 Revolution, which forced ex-President Hosni Mubarak out of power. Only two candidates, notably incumbent President Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi and Al-Ghad Party leader Mousa Mustafa, are contesting the electoral process. In 2017, the government estimated the number of Egyptians living abroad at a total of 9.4 million.

Sixty million eligible voters will cast their ballots in the election in Egypt on March 26-28, while expatriates will vote on March 16-18 at 139 polling stations abroad. The National Election Authority (NEA) announced on February 24 the final list for Egypt's upcoming presidential election, which consists of President Al-Sisi and Al-Ghad Party leader Mousa Moustafa. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Egyptian men living in Kuwait cast their vote in the Egyptian presidential elections at the Egyptian embassy in Kuwait City, on March 16, 2018.

Local

Ministry seeks 900 teachers through 'internal hiring'

Maximum electricity consumption projected at 14,400 megawatts

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Education (MoE) plans to recruit through local and foreign contracts bedoons, GCC nationals and expatriate teachers matching MoE conditions to join public schools' teaching staff for the academic year 2018-2019. Well-informed educational sources said MoE's public education sector had notified the ministry's administrative sector of its need for 900 teachers for the coming school year. The sources added that the ministry will start local recruitment this week in various understaffed subjects already suffering shortages in Kuwaiti teachers.

The sources added that the new teachers will include teachers of English, Arabic, French, Maths, chemistry, physics, biology and geology and female physical education teachers. The sources added that Islamic education, social studies, PC and primary stage science will be restricted to Kuwaiti teachers. The sources stressed that once all

local applications are collected, further measures will be followed prior to declaring the total number of teachers approved for employment and thus determine the balance that might be needed from outside Kuwait.

Electricity consumption

The Ministry of Electricity and Water (MEW) expects maximum electricity con-



Allowance suspended to 713 citizens

sumption rates for the summer to reach 14,400 megawatts out of the total electricity production of 16,700 megawatts, said ministry sources, noting that maximum consumption recorded last summer (2017) was 14,300 megawatts.

Road maintenance

The total number of roads maintenance contracts included in the Ministry of Public Works' (MPW) 2017-2020 plan is 37, with an estimated total cost of KD 161 million, Minister of Public Works Hosam Al-Roumi said. The contracts include renovating Riqqa infrastructure as well as the Hadiya and Riqqa sewage grid, which has already been completed, the minister added. Further, Roumi said maintenance operations include asphaltting, pavements and rain drainage lines, which had been delayed due to budget-related problems.

Rent allowance

Minister of Housing and Minister of State for Services Jenan Boshehri said payment of rent allowance to 713 citizens has been suspended because they failed to update their information. Boshehri added that according to article 19 of law number 47/1993 pertaining housing welfare, rent allowance recipients have to notify the Public Authority for Housing



The Ministry of Education's building.

Welfare (PAHW) of any changes in their marital, employment or property ownership information based on which they might not deserve rent allowances after a maximum of one month effective from the change.

Boshehri added that once the changes

are reported and checked by the housing authority within a month, the suspended rent allowance will be paid retroactively. She added that the housing authority systems have been linked to 11 relevant government bodies to probe any changes in beneficiary citizens' data.

local spotlight

Ladies, ring the bell

By Muna Al-Fuzai

Muna@kuwaittimes.net



A number of women rang bells during a stand-in front of the National Assembly last week to demand equality with men and expressed their refusal to cancel the initiative "Equality between Men and Women," which called for gender equality in everything, and substitute it with the title of "Women's Empowerment".

At the time when the world was celebrating International Women's Day, the Supreme Planning Council of Kuwait, the United Nations Commission for the Empowerment of Women and Kuwait University's Center for Women's Research and Studies launched an initiative titled "Equality between Men and Women", but replaced it with the theme of "Women's Empowerment" in the economic field. This constituted a shocking surprise for a number of human rights activists, who called for full equality with men and not empowerment.

The change and replacement of the initiative's title came after a threat by a number of MPs to question Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan if the initiative was launched for "equality between men and women". They claimed that there are some areas where full equality cannot be achieved.

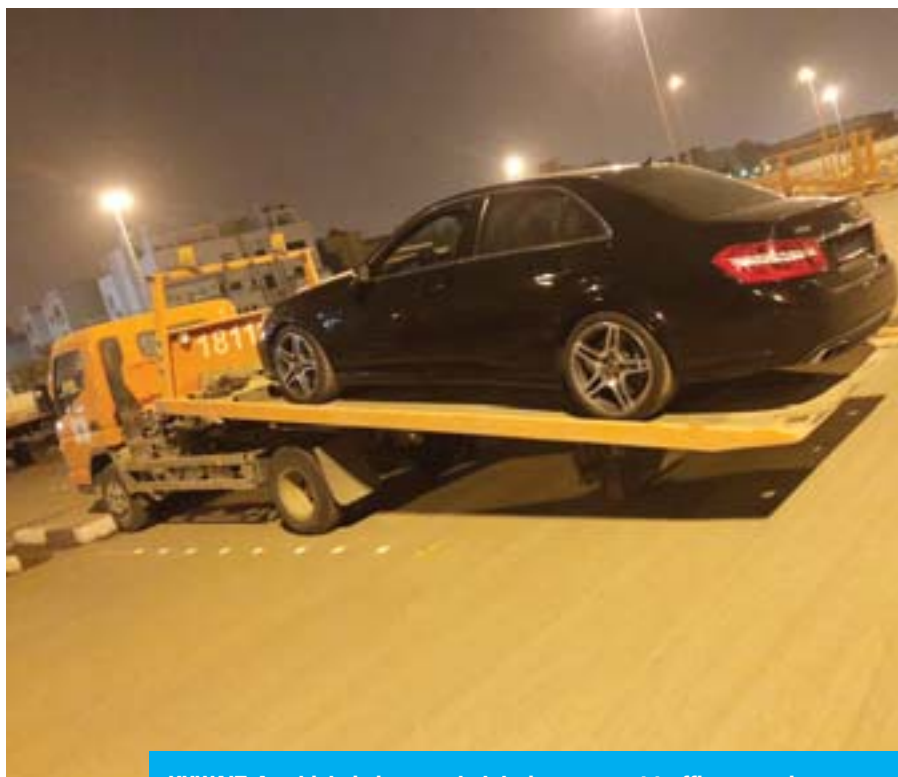
The Kuwaiti government says it seeks equality among all in the country, as stipulated in article 29 of the Kuwaiti constitution, which says that people are equal in human dignity and are equal before the law in public rights and duties, and not be discriminated against due to race, gender, language or religion. However, the reality and real application shows differentiation between men and women, which is a clear violation of article 29.

Dr Abtehal Al-Khatib, a Kuwaiti activist, said in a statement: "Women have the same duties in the country and are supposed to be fully equal in their human rights, their civil rights and even their sense of humanity." I believe there is "discrimination" between men and women in the country and the most prominent is not allowing women to enter the army, as well as the absence of a female judge until today in the country, apart from only two women ministers and only one female MP.

I think it is essential to reconsider the status of women in real terms, as the majority of leadership positions are already reserved for men because they are male and not because they are the most efficient. For example, for many years, a Kuwaiti woman could not apply for a passport without the approval and signature of her husband. This regulation was cancelled only a few years ago. If this is not discrimination and injustice, then I can't give another description.

Worse, I know many women who are still holding the same jobs since many years because they do not go to diwanias like men, who get promotions because they are males and not due to any scientific preference! I believe that equality is required where men and women are working. Promotions are supposed to be made without discrimination on the basis of sex, but in accordance with functional competence.

Ladies, you rang the bell and some may think your number is small, but you are not alone. The message was delivered.



KUWAIT: A vehicle is impounded during a recent traffic campaign.

106 tickets issued in traffic campaigns

By Hanan Al-Saoudun and Agencies

KUWAIT: The traffic department carried out several campaigns targeting reckless drivers on Arabian Gulf Road, Damascus Street, Maghrib Road, Kabd, Wafra and Jahra Road. Twenty three 23 unmarked vehicles, 15 patrol cars and 95 officers participated in the campaign, where 106 tickets were issued, 46 vehicles were impounded along with three motorcycles and 40 motorists were jailed, a statement by the relations and information security department said.

Municipality inspection

Ahmadi Municipality inspectors inspected stores and buildings under construction resulting in issuing 17 citations for violating signs and 17 warnings to house owners for violating building laws and rules.

Sexual assault

A Filipina domestic helper told Mina

Abdullah police that she was raped by the nephew of her sponsor. Investigations are underway.

Smuggling foiled

Policemen foiled an attempt by a Nepalese man to get rid of 25 bags of heroin and shabu he attempted to throw in a garbage container in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh. He was taken to concerned authorities and charged with pushing drugs. The patrolmen suspected the man near a garbage container, so they approached him and discovered a bag he dropped to ground, in which they found 12 bags of heroin, 13 bags of shabu and money. He was sent to drugs detectives. Separately, Kuwait International Airport customs officers found more than 2 kg of marijuana a passenger attempt to smuggle into the country. He was sent to concerned authorities.

Drug possession

A seatbelt violation led to the discovery of drugs with a Gulf national and his Syrian friend. The two were sent along with the shabu to the Drugs Control General Department. The Gulf national was pulled over for not wearing a seat-belt, and when he got out of the car to sign the ticket, a bag of shabu fell to the ground.

Minister on dissolution: Law above all

KUWAIT: The rule of law will be strictly applied to all individuals and groups without any exceptions, Kuwait's Minister of Social Affairs and Labor Hind Al-Sabeeh said yesterday. Any decision made by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor takes into full account the principles of the rule of law. Sabeeh told the press, noting that this applies to issues dealing with publicity, charities and public welfare. On the dissolution of any charity, Sabeeh placed the onus on administrative and financial irregularities, revealing that three organizations and 17 charities were axed for egregious misconduct.

"All decisions the ministry has taken pertaining the dissolution of charities or civil societies are fully backed by the



Hind Al-Sabeeh

law," Sabeeh pointed out, citing that the ministry has won every lawsuit filed against it. She went on to say that according to the ministry's statistics, measures taken to regulate charity were instrumental in boosting revenue from KD 14 million to KD 40 million in the span of a few years. — KUNA

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All entries are non-returnable, and will be the property of Kuwait Times ©



Yellow vehicles parade on Arabian Gulf Road

KUWAIT: Al-Nuwair Initiative for Positivity organized its fifth annual 'Al-Nouri Carnival' for yellow vehicles at the Arabian Gulf Road yesterday. The event, which coin-

cides with the International Day of Happiness, was organized in cooperation with the education and interior ministries.—Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat




Healthcare key cornerstone of broad development

KUWAIT: Kuwait is eager to improve its medical services given the fact that healthcare is an integral component of sustainable development, the country's health minister said yesterday. Speaking on behalf of Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah during a conference on physical medicine and rehabilitation, the director of the Al-Sabah Medical Area Dr Afrah Al-Sarraf said that the Kuwaiti health ministry plans to infuse some international expertise into the healthcare system through hosting well-known physicians from across the world. She expected the two-day meetings to yield concrete plans that will be instrumental in taking Kuwait's healthcare sys-



tem to new levels, saying that physical medicine has become an increasingly significant part of healthcare.



Dr Afrah Al-Sarraf

Meanwhile, Dr. Salem Al-Kandari, the head of the conference, encouraged participative doctors to share their knowhow with one another in an event that will highlight just how far natural remedies have come. On the physical medicine industry, Kandari pointed out that it has made an impact on the health and wellness scene, as people continue to turn to natural remedies to fight a wide array of physical and psychological ailments.

Kandari also stressed that a solid healthcare system should be backed by sound research, revealing that the conference features 33 lectures and four workshops involving physicians from Kuwait, Canada, France and Turkey, among others. —KUNA

Fun events at NBK's Specialty Hospital, Stem Cell Therapy Unit

KUWAIT: As part of its social responsibility program at the Children's Specialty Hospital and the Stem Cell Therapy Unit, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) carried out fun-creative events to support children while they get their treatment.

The first event titled "Create Your Own Moneyboxes" was organized in collaboration with "The Craftery" team who provided the children with ready shaped money boxes and the kids had the opportunity to choose and color them. Doctors and nurses participated in this event and shared the moments with their young patients.

"Let's Paint" was another initiative that was held for children at the hospital. A talented artist from NBK staff volunteered to conduct a workshop on watercolor basics for the children and teach them how to paint. The two events aimed at inspiring the children and encouraging them to use their imagination and enjoy what they achieve from their own talent.

The two initiatives come as part of a fun



activity program that extends all year long and includes a library, a reading corner, storytelling sessions, activities for the medical staff such as the "nurse of the month", interactive expression day, fun events and a movie night activity that are organized occasionally. The fun activity program is a part of NBK's social responsibility towards children and keenness in supporting them while they get their treatment.

NBK's initiative reflects the bank's high sense of duty and responsibility towards the community and helping those in need. It is a well rooted tradition that has been carried out by NBK each year in its efforts to continuously have an active role in Kuwait's society. It's worth mentioning that NBK's Stem Cell Therapy Unit is the first children's bone marrow transplant center in Kuwait. The new center is the largest corporate social responsibility donation in Kuwait and will expand the hospital's ability to treat children with cancer and blood diseases.



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Local

Education Minister patronizes, inaugurates Kuwait Learning Forum

Organized by NoufEXPO on 7 - 9 May 2018

KUWAIT: NoufEXPO announced yesterday the convening of the “Kuwait Education Forum (Q8EDU) - Learning is a Lifelong Journey” in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Studies, Kuwait University, and the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training. Q8EDU convenes from 7 - 9 May 2018 at Al-Taj Ballroom - Millennium Hotel and Convention Centre. Dr Hamed Mohammed Al-Aazmi, the Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education in the State of Kuwait, will patronize and inaugurate Q8EDU. Education has always been at the top of Kuwait's political leadership agenda. Kuwait has always considered education as the most valuable investment that can be made to ensure



Learning is a Lifelong Journey

Kuwait's future and prosperity. “Kuwait Education Forum” will be held under the motto of “Learning is a Lifelong Journey”. The Forum will discuss all aspects of Kuwait's educational services including achievements and challenges. It will highlight the efforts, carried out by concerned parties, to develop their technologies, services, and human resources in order to cope with change. Curricula and programs will be highlighted too. The accompanying exhibition will be a perfect venue to exhibit the new teaching aids facilitated by today's technologies such as the Internet, visual aids, 3D printing, virtual reality solutions, and artificial intelligence. The Forum will highlight how the

learning process is no longer confined to the boundaries of the family and school, or the college at a later stage. It became a lifelong process driven by modern technologies.

A NoufEXPO spokesperson said that Q8EDU aims at discussing the new trends and the mission of the education process in light of the prevailing technology phenomena. Attendees will be able to benefit from other countries' experiences and how they were able to revolutionize their educational systems. The event will explore how Kuwait can develop their educational system by adopting new learning technologies and methodologies, in addition to exploring the new curricula, e-content programs, and new learning aids available today. Finally, Q8EDU will help students choose their future schools and universities and meet face to face with the management staff of these institutions in the accompanying exhibition area.

Education systems are even under another set of challenges. They have to cope with the fast pace of creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship required to build a capable, efficient, and competitive young gener-

ations. These are mandatory for competitive societies. NoufEXPO is confident that Q8EDU, with the support of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Studies, Kuwait University, and the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training, will boost Kuwait's educational policies and programs to unprecedented frontiers. NoufEXPO urges all specialized organizations, education systems and curricula tech companies, as well as, schools and universities to participate and benefit from this first of its kind event by contacting Q8EDU's Scientific Committee or NoufEXPO on +965 22469921 or send their email messages to info@noufexpo.com.kw at their earliest convenience.



Education Minister
Dr Hamed Al-Aazmi

‘Belt and Road’ initiative creates opportunities for global economic growth

KUWAIT: Since Chinese President Xi Jinping put forward the initiative to jointly build the “Belt and Road” in 2013, practical cooperation between China and Kuwait is progressing to a new level under the initiative. Kuwait highly appreciates and responds positively to this initiative, and was the first country to sign cooperation document on the “Belt and Road” with China. His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has presented Vision 2035 to make Kuwait a financial and commercial center in the world. This vision is in line with China's “Belt and Road” initiative. It will open wide horizons and give a strong momentum to enhance cooperation between the two sides.

In recent years, the two sides have maintained close exchanges and cooperation within the framework of the “Belt and Road,” a number of Chinese task groups have visited Kuwait, the two sides are discussing the Chinese cooperation in planning and building the projects of “Silk City” and “developing the Kuwaiti islands” which is considered as an important project in the Chinese - Kuwaiti collaboration framework in building “Belt and Road.”

Earlier this year, the Kuwaiti Ministers Council has decided to benefit from Chinese expertise to develop the “Silk City and the Islands” project. Therefore, the two sides will enhance coordination to push forward the practical cooperation between China and Kuwait to achieve further concrete achievements in the framework of “Belt and Road.”

The active practical cooperation between China and Kuwait is a thumbnail of the results of the “Belt and Road” initiative in promoting global economic cooperation. The initiative has received a positive response from the international community and strong support from more than 100 countries and international organizations since its launch five years ago. Cooperation agreements between China and more than 80 countries and international organizations have been signed and a number of important cooperative projects have been successfully implemented.

In May 2017, China successfully hosted the Beijing International “Belt and Road” Forum for International Cooperation, which was attended by 29 presidents or prime ministers, in addition to senior representatives from more than 140 countries and presidents of more than 80 international organizations. More than 270 collaborative results were achieved and international consensus was achieved on sharing the construction of “Belt and Road.” This is proof that the construction of the “Belt and Road” has become the network of mutually beneficial cooperation of the continents of the world and the platform of international cooperation for open development.

The central idea of the initiative is to enhance economic cooperation and integrate benefits through interconnectivity and infrastructure, opening up

opportunities for global economic growth and common development for all countries. The initiative focuses on international economic cooperation, does not seek to isolate or target any country, doesn't target the geopolitical competition, it is committed to participating in consultation, building and benefits, instead of being won by a single side, it's not a winner and loser game, in which all sides will lose. The initiative is an international public product provided by China to the world, open to all and its results and benefits shared by the whole world.

The “Belt and Road” initiative is also transparent. Most of the participants in the initiative are developing countries, with a less developed economy, inadequate infrastructure and substantial financing needs for development. The “Belt and Road” initiative comes with the new opportunities and possibilities for these countries, which is an important reason for the initiative to be welcomed warmly by these countries. China adheres to the principle of participating in consultation, building and benefits and adheres to relevant market rules and regulations and working hard to push forward the construction of the “Belt and Road” to provide continuous high quality.

Therefore, we can say that the “Belt and Road” initiative is in line with the trend of the times and is consistent with the rules of growth and serves the interests of peoples of the world, with a wide and bright horizon. China will continue to make joint efforts with countries of the world, including the State of Kuwait, to push forward the construction of the “Belt and Road” with greater depth and provide more opportunities and greater contributions to the development of the world and the growth of the world economy.

‘Kuwait chief contributor to global welfare’

LONDON: Under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Kuwait has solidified its status as a small country with huge contributions to global welfare, said an official late Friday. In a ceremony honoring charitable Kuwaiti figures held at the British House of Lords, the undersecretary for ruling family affairs at the Kuwaiti Amiri Diwan Sheikh Sabah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah said that holding the event at such esteemed place was a great indication of the UK recognition of Kuwait's charitable efforts. Sheikh Sabah Nasser Al-Sabah thanked House member Lord Mohamed Sheikh for allowing him the opportunity to deliver a speech on Kuwait's charitable efforts. The 2014 UN honoring of Kuwait as an international humanitarian center and His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah as a humanitarian leader are great indications of Kuwait's grand global status, said Sheikh Sabah Nasser Al-Sabah, adding that the current event adds to his country's reputation.

Under His Highness the Amir's leadership, Kuwaiti charitable societies have spread their efforts globally to reach all those who in need, said the official. He affirmed that the current status quo had lead Kuwaiti to increase its humanitarian efforts in parts of the world devastate by war and mayhem, noting that the Gulf nation had hosted several conferences and events to help other world countries to withstand suffering and destruction caused by crises whether natural or manmade. In 2010, Kuwait hosted a reconstruction conference for eastern Sudan, which managed to gather \$3.5 billion, said Sheikh Sabah Nasser Al-Sabah who noted that his country donated \$550 million for the cause. The Non-Government Organizations' (NGO) contributions was at \$120 million, the Kuwaiti official indicated. He also touched on the three conference for Syria and nearby countries in Kuwait, which gathered \$eight billion for the cause. He added that Kuwait also co-organized the fourth conference in the UK, which gathered \$10 billion for Syria. Of which, Kuwait donated \$1.6 billion, he said.

Sheikh Sabah Nasser Al-Sabah said that the parallel four NGOs conferences for Syria, hosted by Kuwait had also contributed \$1.6 billion. Last February, the Kuwait International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq managed to conjure up \$30 billion, indicated Sheikh Sabah Nasser Al-Sabah, adding that Kuwait contributed a sum of \$two billion for the conference while NGOs donated \$337 million.

Meanwhile, Lord Sheikh deemed Kuwait as a “super power” within the domain of humanitarian efforts and charity, lauding His Highness the Amir for his generosity, which is befitting of the UN global humanitarian leader. Lord Sheikh commended the distinguished Kuwaiti-British relations, saying that Kuwait is one of the UK's main partners and allies. The British House of Lords member also praised Kuwait's strong economy, commending steps by the Kuwaiti government to diversify its economic resources and output. He noted that the Islamic banking sector, which Kuwait is known for, would have a great impact on world economy in the upcoming years. Meanwhile, Head of the Al-Babtain Foundation for Poetic Creativity, Abdulaziz Al-Babtain said that the Kuwaiti public and popular stance had always favored providing a helping hand in accordance with the tenets of the Islamic faith. Al-Babtain said that the strong relations linking Kuwait and Britain was reflective on the humanitarian domain with the UK allowing Kuwaiti charitable societies to operate in the country without restriction.

Also delivering his speech to the event was Ambassador of Kuwait to the UK Khaled Al-Duwaisan, who lauded his country's gracious gesture towards all who suffer around the globe. The ceremony for Kuwaiti charitable figures saw the honoring of Sheikh Dr Khaled Al-Mathkour, the late Abdurrahman Al-Sumait, Dr Adel Al-Youssefi, the late Jassem Al-Kharafi, the late Mubarak Al-Hasawi, the late Abdullah Al-Muttawa, Ma'ali Al-Asousi, and Hanan Al-Qattan. The ceremony also saw the honoring of Najat charitable society, the Kuwaiti society for humanitarian work, and Al-Rahma international society. —KUNA



Sheikh Sabah
Nasser Al-Sabah

Gulf Bank witnesses first group of interns for 2018



KUWAIT: Building on its commitment to supporting Kuwait's youth, Gulf Bank recently launched its re-vamped internship program, and witnessed the graduation of its first group. The program has been designed for Kuwaiti students who are in their 2nd to 4th year of colleges and universities, to raise their practical understanding of the banking industry and the working atmosphere within the financial institutions.

The students, who participated in the inaugural one-month training program, were from the American University of the Middle East and the American College of the Middle East. Throughout the program,

students were granted the opportunity to work across the different branches of the bank, as well as the different divisions within Gulf Bank's head office.

Highlighting the objectives of the program Salma Al-Hajjaj, General Manager for Human Resources at Gulf Bank said: “We believe that college and university students, have all the right to decide on the career path they want to take post-graduation, and that the only way to achieve this is to go through internship programs, designed to present them with a realistic idea of what it means to work for a bank, away from the pure theoretical understanding. Gulf Bank's new internship

program allows students to experience the operations of a bank, its different divisions and the various responsibilities that could be undertaken, based on their backgrounds and their own preferences as well”

“As a leader in our sector, we have a responsibility towards young Kuwaitis who want to pursue a career in the banking industry, and we have always been keen on providing them with the needed trainings as well as guidance and supervision required. We wish the students a bright career and future ahead, and we look forward to welcoming more groups of enthusiastic students to join our intern-

ship program” added Hajjaj

The Bank has successfully implemented several initiatives over the past years, such as executive training programs and its long-term sponsorship of INJAZ Kuwait offering professional skills and entrepreneurial training for middle school, high school and university students. The Bank is also particularly proud of the popularity and effectiveness of its internal AJYAL Development Program which nurtures young Kuwaiti employees early in the careers, aiming to develop them into ‘holistic bankers’ and prepare them for leadership positions at Gulf Bank and in our country.

ABK participates in KU Job Fair

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) yesterday announced its successful participation in the College of Business Administration at Kuwait University job fair, which was held from the 13th - 15th March 2018, at the University campus. ABK's participation reinforces its commitment to playing an active role in supporting Kuwait's youth during the early stages of their work life. Commenting on the Bank's involvement, Hamza Enki, General Manager - Human Resources at ABK said, “ABK participates in these job fairs to support fresh graduates and to nurture their skills and abilities by increasing their knowledge on what the banking industry entails and the requirements needed to pursue a career in banking through the ‘ABK Academy.’”





No room for debate as Sisi poised for 2nd term

Trump’s lawyer claims ‘porn star liable for \$20 million’



JISRAYN: A Syrian government soldier walks past rubble and destroyed buildings down a street in the town of Jisreen in the southern Eastern Ghouta yesterday. —AFP

Can Russia forge peace in Syria?

Putin has failed to secure a deal acceptable to other world powers

PARIS: Nearly two and a half years after the Russian military began an intensive bombing campaign in Syria in support of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, Russia is struggling to engineer a political solution in the war-ravaged country, analysts say. The Kremlin has presented its landmark Syria operation as a success, shrugging off western criticism over the killing of civilians while claiming to have withdrawn a significant part of its forces.

But the Russian military is still fighting, and President Vladimir Putin has so far failed to secure a deal deemed acceptable to other world powers to allow him to end the intervention. “During the battle against the Islamic State group (IS), it was easier for the various parties (Russia, Turkey, Iran, US) to find common ground. Now that the fight against IS is over, each has its own agenda and Russia is suddenly lost,” said Pavel Baev from the Oslo Peace Research Institute.

Having controlled swathes of territory across Iraq and Syria, IS has been pushed out by a US-led coalition in Iraq and a Kurdish-led militia in Syria, while Russia and Iran have worked with Assad’s forces to win back land from IS and

other rebel groups. But without a common enemy, international alliances have splintered.

Under pressure

Turkish-led forces are now pounding the Kurdish-majority region of Afrin, while the Syrian regime is bombarding the rebel enclave of Eastern Ghouta, near Damascus, in defiance of international calls to halt the fighting. Putin, who last December praised the Russian army for having “brilliantly accomplished” their mission, has forces involved in the Eastern Ghouta assault. As regional powers fight separate battles, the divergent aims do not necessarily match the objectives of



Many also see Moscow as vital to any future solution

the Kremlin, and another major player, Iran, is also unlikely to want to give up influence it has gained. “Russia is under pressure from Israel and the United States to moderate Assad’s dependence on Iran, which pays for the regime’s security. But Moscow does not have enough financial resources” to take the place of Tehran, argues Baev. And while Putin’s strong backing for Assad has made him a major player in the Middle East, it has also tied Russia to the fortunes of the regime. “Moscow is on a ridge. It is in a very uncomfortable leadership position which must take responsibility,” said Julien Nocetti, researcher at the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI).

Peace talks

Forging a peace deal has so far proved impossible in a multi-sided proxy war that has killed hundreds of thousands and seen millions more flee their homes. Despite separate Russian and EU efforts to push peace talks, Assad has seemed more intent on his forces bombarding rebel-held pockets, while Syria’s main opposition and the Kurds also snubbed a Syria peace congress hosted by Moscow in January.

“It is a mistake to believe that Russia has total control over the Syrian executive. Moscow has a tangible influence in the Syrian army and intelligence, but has no illusions about Assad’s degree of personal loyalty. The boss/client relationship is sometimes for the benefit of the client,” said Nocetti. That too could complicate Russian peace efforts, particularly as Washington still publicly insists Assad must go.

Analysts struggle to see how Russian diplomacy can bring lasting peace to such an intractable conflict, but many also see Moscow as vital to any future solution. “There will be no political solution without Russia,” said Mathieu Boulegue from think tank Chatham House. “It is the only non-regional diplomatic player able to talk with everyone else.” —Reuters

Russia expels 23 British diplomats as crisis deepens

MOSCOW: Russia expelled 23 British diplomats yesterday in a carefully calibrated retaliatory move against London, which has accused the Kremlin of orchestrating a nerve toxin attack on a former Russian double agent and his daughter in southern England. Escalating a crisis in relations, Russia said it was also shutting down the activities of the British Council, which fosters cultural links between the two countries, and Britain’s consulate-general in St Petersburg.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said it was giving the 23 British diplomats one week to leave the country. The move, which was tougher than expected, followed Britain’s decision on Wednesday to expel 23 Russian diplomats over the attack in the English city of Salisbury which left former Russian spy Sergei Skripal, 66, and his daughter Yulia Skripal, 33, critically ill in hospital.

Moscow announced the measures on the eve of a presidential election which incumbent Vladimir Putin should comfortably win. Putin has cast his country as a fortress besieged by hostile Western powers with him as its defender, and state media is likely to portray the anti-British move in that context. The Foreign Ministry said Moscow’s measures were a response to what it called Britain’s “provocative actions and groundless accusations”. It warned London it stood ready to take further measures in the event of more “unfriendly steps”.

Relations between London and Moscow have crashed to a post-Cold War low over the Salisbury attack, the first known offensive use of a nerve agent in Europe since World War Two. The Russian Foreign Ministry summoned the British ambassador, Laurie Bristow, to a meeting yesterday morning in central Moscow at its Stalin-era headquarters during which he was informed of the retaliatory measures. Bristow told reporters afterwards that Britain had only expelled the Russian diplomats after Moscow had failed to explain how the nerve toxin had got to Salisbury.

“We will always do what is necessary to defend ourselves,” the ambassador told reporters. Britain’s foreign ministry said it had anticipated Russia’s response and the National Security Council would meet early next week to consider next steps. “Our priority today is looking after our staff in Russia and assisting those that will return to the UK,” it said in a statement. “Russia’s response doesn’t change the facts of the matter – the attempted assassination of two peo-



SAINT PETERSBURG: Russian police guards a British Consulate General’s building in Saint Petersburg yesterday. —AFP

ple on British soil, for which there is no alternative conclusion other than that the Russian State was culpable.”

War of words

Russia’s response was more robust than expected. The closure of the British Council’s Moscow office will sever cultural ties, while that of the consulate-general in St Petersburg will end Britain’s diplomatic presence in Russia’s second city. Russian news agencies cited politicians in Russia’s upper house of parliament as welcoming the move to close the British Council, alleging it had been used as a cover by British spies. British lawmaker Tom Tugendhat, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, said the move to close the organization’s office would hurt the Russian people.

“It’s a great shame for the Russian people that they’re closing the British Council which has done an awful lot to educate Russian people in the English language and to help them get jobs and opportunities around the world,” he told the BBC. Amid calls from British politicians across the spectrum to take further action against Russia, former British ambassador to Russia, Sir Roderic Lyne, told the BBC that Britain should avoid getting dragged into a prolonged show down with Russia. “I don’t think it would be sensible to get dragged down into a mud wrestling battle with a gorilla,” Lyne said. Russia has complained that Britain has failed to provide any evidence of its involvement in the Salisbury attack and has said it is shocked and bemused by the allegations. Britain has escalated a war of words with Russia over the incident in recent days. On Friday, British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said it was overwhelmingly likely that Russian President Vladimir Putin himself had made the decision to use a military-grade nerve toxin to strike down Skripal. —Reuters

Facing raids and jail, anti-Kremlin opposition set to monitor election

MOSCOW: In a packed room, supporters of Russia’s main opposition leader Alexei Navalny scribble notes as a lecturer gives tips on how to nab ballot-stuffers at today’s polls. Keep toilet breaks discreet, avoid getting into fights and resist invitations from polling station officials to slip away for lunch, says lecturer Nikolai Levshits. “On March 18 you’re the main heroes of the day,” he said.

“Just your presence at the polling station halves the risk of violations,” Navalny, whose bid to stand for president was scuppered by a criminal conviction, has urged supporters to boycott the polls. He dismisses even the nominally oppositional candidates as hand-picked by President Vladimir Putin. But he nevertheless told supporters to chronicle violations as authorities are expected to go all-out to boost turnout after a lacklustre campaign. “We are putting out a huge number of observers for the first time. It’s a very complex process. (The authorities) are really bashing us,” Navalny told Echo of Moscow popular radio station on Wednesday.

Across Russia, law enforcement has raided the offices of Navalny supporters and detained and jailed organizers. Navalny has urged against street protests on polling day as a potential “gift to the Kremlin.” Nevertheless, another opposition figure Ilya Yashin told AFP he expected some protest activity. On election day, “there probably could be some demonstrations because we see there are a lot of discontented people,” Yashin said. “Probably some will want to voice protest against the procedure that’s being foisted on us under the guise of elections.”

‘I can’t sit idly by’

The 60 or so would-be observers at Navalny’s campaign office in Moscow included students, a journalist at a Kremlin-loyal newswire and an actor with a number of film and television roles. Most say they have never observed at elections before. “The fact that Navalny isn’t a candidate is

very sad of course, but it’s not a reason to throw in the towel,” said 19-year-old student Ivan Orlov. “I realized I can’t sit idly by,” said Oleg Dulinin, a 44-year-old actor in a bright flower-print shirt.

“There’s no point voting now-for the authorities, you’re just like a little insect,” he added. Navalny has said that he expects some 26,000 supporters to work as observers. Nikolai Lyaskin, the head of the Moscow campaign office, bounded in and urged people to monitor the densely populated region around Moscow. “It’s Dagestan in our backyard,” he said, referring to a North Caucasus region notorious for ballot-stuffing and unbelievably-high turnout figures. “We will get absolutely loads of falsifications” in the suburbs, he says, while Moscow itself is likely to be under closer scrutiny and more law-abiding.

Crackdown

Lyaskin was hit over the head with an iron pipe in September and spent 15 days in cells this year for breaching rules on organizing protests. He is still under a travel ban meaning he won’t be able to leave Moscow himself. Amnesty International in a statement this week warned of a “fierce crackdown” on activists, with “prominent opposition voices arbitrarily detained and charged with politically motivated offences.”

A burly bodyguard stood by as opposition campaigner Yashin in Moscow this week presented a damning report on Putin’s rule. The pamphlet detailing corruption and cronyism is dedicated to the memory of opposition campaigner Boris Nemtsov, who was gunned down close to the Kremlin three years ago. Days before, police confiscated the main print-run of the report as it was being handed over in an underground car park. “It reminded me of a spy movie,” said Yashin. Such a reaction shows “how explosive it is for Putin’s political position to disseminate the truth,” he said.

Asked if now was the most dangerous time to be an opposition activist in Russia, he told AFP: “What do you think, after the death of Boris Nemtsov, is it dangerous or not? I think there are certain risks.” In the north-western city of Saint Petersburg, 11 people from Navalny’s campaign team have been arrested and six received sentences of up to 25 days. “They are shutting down the most active people. It’s a preventative measure,” said Polina Kostyleva, a pro-Navalny activist. “The main task of the authorities is to prevent anyone raining on their parade.” —AFP

International

No room for debate as Egypt's leader poised for second term

A succession of would-be candidates abruptly sidelined

CAIRO: With Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi on the cusp of winning a second term in this month's election, what's left of the opposition is reduced to praying he will step aside in four years. There is little else his critics can realistically hope for after Sisi eviscerated his opposition in his first term. In the run up to the March 26-28 election, a succession of would-be candidates were abruptly sidelined like doomed characters in an Agatha Christie novel.

"Watch out. That stuff that happened seven or eight years ago (the 2011 democratic uprising) will not happen again in Egypt... it looks like you really don't know me well. Ha ha," Sisi said in a January speech after his latest rival, a reserve military general, was detained for announcing his candidacy. Such words play well with Sisi's supporters, including many Egyptians who have had enough of the turmoil that followed the 2011 uprising that ousted president Hosni Mubarak.

“The priority is to fix the situation”

The 'higher interest'
A former army chief, Sisi was first elected in 2014, a year after he ousted his bungling predecessor Mohamed Morsi. Morsi was the country's first freely elected civilian president, but also a divisive Islamist whose policies sparked massive protests. Since then, the country has grappled with a persistent jihadist campaign that killed hundreds, along with long-deferred economic reforms that have resulted in sky-rocketing inflation.

"The priority is to fix the situation, and not necessarily according to the traditional standards of a democracy," said Mostafa El-Feki, a prominent government supporter and head of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, a major library in Alexandria. "This is his priority, and this is the higher interest of the Egyptian people. I and most Egyptians believe he is on that course." But it is difficult to ascertain what most Egyptians believe, given scant independent opinion

polls and a domestic media that often touts Sisi's achievements while underplaying criticism against him.

His security services tolerate little outright dissent like that which foreshadowed the 2011 uprising. For now, the opposition—a collection of small parties and groups that hold little sway on the street—is merely trying to “exist,” said Khaled Dawoud, a prominent dissident. Mohamed Anwar Sadat, who withdrew his candidacy in January citing restrictions, said he hoped Sisi would begin democratic reforms in his second term—his last, unless the constitution is amended to allow him more time in power. “It would be a golden opportunity for the president to start dealing with the political file and reforms and look into building real institutions that can fulfill their role,” Sadat said.

Sisi faced two heavy-weight rivals in the election: former military chief of staff Sami Anan, who was detained, and former premier Ahmed Shafiq. The latter was deported from his exile in the United Arab Emirates

after declaring his candidacy, and on his arrival was driven by government officials straight to a hotel where he stayed until he withdrew his candidacy. Another, a military colonel, was jailed for six years for announcing his candidacy while still an officer. The last remaining candidate, Moussa Mostafa Moussa, an ardent Sisi loyalist, entered the race just as it appeared Sisi would embarrassingly have to stand alone in a throwback to referendums held by autocrats.

‘It’s existential’

Sadat said Sisi would probably have won even with Shafiq and Anan in the race. But the authorities were not keen on debates. “Perhaps the concern was if there were real candidates there could have been debate on their priorities, there would have been a discussion, and I think



KHARTOUM: Egyptians living in Sudan walk near the Burj Al-Fateh hotel on the banks of the Nile river (background) as they arrive at the Egyptian embassy in Khartoum to cast their ballots, as expatriates vote early in the Egyptian presidential elections that are to be held at the end of the month. —AFP

they didn't want one in the current period," he said.

Michael Wahid Hanna, a senior fellow at the Century Foundation think tank, said the government's approach was “one of zero tolerance”. “The Sisi regime is not going to allow space that could allow political forces to grow and gain confidence,” he said. Sisi and his supporters often portray Egypt as a victim of a foreign plot. Its agents, according to this theory, could include anything from Islamic State jihadists to foreign-funded civil society groups or foreign media outlets.

Following Morsi's ouster and a bloody crackdown on

his supporters that killed and jailed hundreds, wiping out the Muslim Brotherhood movement as a political force, Washington sanctioned Egypt by temporarily suspending military aid. Such international censure against crack-downs on dissidents or civil society groups have little effect on Sisi, a former Barack Obama administration official said. “They believe the state will collapse,” she said, on condition of anonymity. “It's existential for them. Almost anything can be sacrificed (to prevent that outcome). In that situation it is very hard to imagine the external leverage that would be sufficient.” —AFP

African, EU focus anti-trafficking efforts at source

NIAMEY: Thirteen African and European countries and the EU agreed Friday that efforts to crack down on migrant trafficking to Europe should also focus on economic woes that prompt poor Africans to seek a better life in Europe. In ministerial-level talks, they agreed to “attack underlying causes of irregular migration,” according to a joint statement. “The economic problem... is also the basis for the migration phenomenon,” Niger Interior Minister Mohamed Bazoum said. The countries also vowed to strengthen national laws to prosecute traffickers and improve coordination among police and judiciary in fighting human smuggling.

The one-day “conference on coordination of the struggle against traffickers of migrants” took place against a backdrop of renewed concern in Europe over illicit migration, three years after a massive human influx led to a rise in xenophobia and far-right populism in several EU states. It was attended by ministers from Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal, with representatives from France, Germany, Italy and Spain, the European Union and United Nations. The communique called for “developing the conditions for an economy to emerge that is an alternative to the underground economy of illicit trafficking of migrants.”

To achieve this requires “an overall approach, with solidarity,” it said. Reflecting the issue's priority, France sent two senior ministers—Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian and Interior Minister Gerard Collomb, who urged participants to take action “as close as possible to the countries of origin.” Niger, one of the large nations lying south of the Sahara in West Africa, has become one of the main routes for African migrants heading north to the Mediterranean coast in the hope of crossing to Europe. Collomb said because of a series



NIAMEY: A general view of ministers from 13 African and European nations attending a summit on migration in Nigerien capital Niamey. —AFP

of preventive measures taken by Niger, the number of Europe-bound migrants passing through the country had “dropped drastically” from 330,000 in 2016 to 70,000 last year. “If all the countries put such measures in place we can reduce the number of arrivals in Europe,” he said. Two Africa-EU summits in 2017 put the focus on training police and paramilitary gendarmerie forces, help with conducting border checks and the creation of identity databases.

Europe's part in taking on irregular migration in Africa gained force with “migratory pacts” signed in 2015 in

Valetta, capital of Malta, which built on previous accords to reach a global approach dating back to 2006. One of the challenges, in the eyes of French delegates, is to persuade African countries to agree more readily to provide documents enabling the return of their nationals who lack the required papers. The French parliament is due in coming months to debate a government bill on immigration, which has already made waves among some supporters of the government who consider the new measure too severe. —AFP

Overly opulent? Trump cabinet under fire for ethics excess

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump's cabinet may be the wealthiest in modern US history, but several members have been embroiled in money-related scandals including private flights, luxury dining sets and Wimbledon tickets—all at taxpayer expense. Speculation mounted Friday over whether the axe would fall on any more officials within the president's inner circle, as Trump hinted at making additional changes a day after sacking Secretary of State Rex Tillerson this week.

Political attention might be turned to whether National Security Advisor HR McMaster will be the next ousted, but recent ethical misjudgments and questionable decisions made by several Trump advisors have put the cabinet under a cloud of controversy. Accusations of high-flying excesses have swirled since Trump's inauguration 14 months ago. Last year the target was health secretary Tom Price, who reportedly spent more than \$400,000 of public money on trips using private aircraft.

Trump, who has repeatedly pledged to drain the swamp in Washington, said in September he was “not happy” about the development. Price was ousted days later.

It turned out Price was the tip of the iceberg. Five other cabinet members are under scrutiny for their behavior. “Trump cabinet officials have a track record of unnecessary, extravagant expenditures at taxpayer expense,” said Melanie Sloan of ethics watchdog American Oversight, which filed Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests for documentation that could expose government abuse.

“It seems it's not only the president who has a penchant for luxury.” The most recent flap involves Housing Secretary Ben Carson, who stands accused of spending \$31,000 of taxpayer money on a new dining set in his office dining room. Carson has insisted he was “as surprised as anyone” about the ordering of the set. But emails obtained by American Oversight show Carson and his wife helped select the furniture themselves. Carson says he has cancelled the order.

Castle tours, military flights

Deep palace intrigue surrounds Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin, whose tenure started out well but whose standing with the White House has eroded. He is accused of spending \$122,000 on a nine-day trip to Europe with his wife, which included sightseeing at castles and taking in professional tennis matches. “Secretary Shulkin improperly accepted Wimbledon tickets,” the VA's inspector general said last month in a scathing report. It also said Shulkin's chief of staff doctored emails so the agency could justify including his wife on the trip. Facing concerned lawmakers, Shulkin told a Senate budget hearing that “the distraction



WASHINGTON: National Security Advisor HR McMaster leaves the Eisenhower Executive Office Building on the White House campus in Washington, DC. —AFP

tion is something I deeply regret.” Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke has come under some of the most intense scrutiny, most recently over reports that his department was spending nearly \$139,000 to upgrade three sets of double doors in his office. Zinke told Congress this week that he managed to negotiate the cost down to \$75,000.

He is also under pressure over costly US Park Police helicopter flights last July that allowed him to return to Washington for a horseback ride with Vice President Mike Pence, and several other flights on non-commercial aircraft.

Environmental Protection Agency

administrator Scott Pruitt has faced a public backlash for taking dozens of first-class flights, which he said were necessary to avoid “unprecedented” personal threats. House Oversight Committee chairman Trey Gowdy, a Republican, has pressed Pruitt for answers about the travel excesses. Pruitt told CBS News that he and his security detail were making adjustments, and that Pruitt would be flying coach far more often. More recently, Pruitt has found himself in hot water over his agency paying \$43,000 to install a custom, sound-proof booth in his office so he can communicate securely with government officials. —AFP

News in brief

Plane crashes into house

MANILA: Ten people were killed when a small plane crashed into a house just outside the Philippine capital yesterday, police and aviation officials said. The twin-engine aircraft crashed shortly after taking off in Plaridel town, killing all five aboard as well as three children, a mother and a grandmother from the family in the house, said Superintendent Julio Lizardo. “We had to dig through the rubble to find the bodies,” he said, explaining why the toll rose from an initial figure of seven dead. Officials declined to say what may have caused the crash of the Piper PA-23 Apache, operated by a local charter company. —AFP

‘Snake whisperer’ dies

KUALA LUMPUR: A Malaysian firefighter dubbed the “snake whisperer” has died four days after he was bitten by a wild cobra while responding to a call to catch the aggressive reptile, an official said yesterday. The spitting cobra bit 33-year-old Abu Zarin Hussin on Monday in the central state of Pahang, where he subsequently succumbed its venom in hospital on Friday. The firefighter had gained celebrity status in Malaysia for his ability to closely handle deadly snakes. He was pictured in photos and videos widely circulated online kissing king cobra snakes on the mouth, and appeared on TV show Asia's Got Talent last year rubbing his nose against a serpent's head. —AFP

4 skiers feared dead

GENEVA: Four people were feared dead yesterday after an avalanche hit the Swiss ski area of Vallon d'Arbi, with one body already recovered and rescue workers searching for three others. Police in Valais canton said that search operations continued until 3:30 am yesterday, then resumed after a break at 9:00 am. “During the night, one body was recovered. The formal identification process is ongoing,” the police statement said. Those still missing were identified as a Swiss citizen and two French nationals. Vallon d'Arbi is a route best suited to skilled skiers, which is sporadically closed for safety reasons. —AFP

Migrant boat sinks; 15 die

ATHENS: Fifteen people, including at least five children, drowned yesterday when the small boat they were travelling on capsized in the Aegean Sea, Greek coast guard officials said. The incident occurred off Greece's Agathonisi island, which is close to the Turkish coast. The identity and nationality of the victims was not immediately known. “At least four more (migrants) were unaccounted (for),” a coast guard official told Reuters. Three others were rescued. Yesterday's incident was thought to be the highest death toll of migrants trying to reach outlying Greek islands in months. —Reuters

100 flights canceled

LONDON: A fresh bout of snow yesterday forced the cancellation of more than 100 flights in and out of London's Heathrow Airport, with a bad forecast threatening further disruption. Transatlantic flights were among more than 115 grounded so far, with British Airways cancelling multiple domestic flights to Edinburgh, Glasgow and Manchester and services to European destinations. “While this weekend's weather may result in minor delays and some airlines consolidating flights, significant disruption at Heathrow is not currently expected,” said a Heathrow spokesman. —AFP

Russia spat bolsters UK's PM, reopens opposition wounds

May's response to poisoning of ex-spy exposes ideological rift

LONDON: British Prime Minister Theresa May's response to the suspected Russian poisoning of a former spy has soothed Brexit divisions with her party, but has starkly exposed the ideological rift within the opposition Labor ranks. May's decision to expel 23 diplomats and suspend high-level contacts with Russia over the nerve agent attack on former double agent Sergei Skripal received cross-party and media support, heralding a ceasefire in the bitter row over Brexit. "The prime minister makes a compelling case for Kremlin culpability in the Salisbury incident and is right that such a reckless, hostile act by another state requires a robust response," the centre-left Guardian, normally a critic, said in its editorial.

May has recently faced rebellions from pro-EU MPs within her Conservative Party, delivering her a damaging parliamentary defeat over her Brexit strategy. But leading rebel Anna Soubry praised May's announcement on Wednesday in the House of Commons, saying "the length of breadth of this place has completely supported not just the wise words and the leadership of the prime minister but also her firm actions." "The response has been prudent, some have found it underwhelming but it is important to keep room for escalation as more evidence comes in," Kadri Liik, a senior policy fellow at European foreign policy think-tank ECFR, told AFP.

May's response is in sharp contrast to opposition Labor leader Jeremy Corbyn, whose response to the crisis appears to have shattered the truce reached with centrist MPs following his better-than-expected performance in last year's general election. The veteran leftist, recently accused by a Conservative lawmaker-who later retracted the claim-of passing secrets to a Czechoslovak agents he met in the 1980s, refused to blame the Kremlin outright, asking May if she had provided samples of the suspected poison to Moscow for analysis.

Labor MP Ben Bradshaw led the thinly-veiled criticism,

telling parliament that "most of us on these benches fully support the measures she has announced." Colleague Yvette Cooper demanded "unequivocal" condemnation while former Labor minister Pat McFadden said defending Britain when threatened was an "essential component of political leadership". About 20 Labor backbenchers signed a motion stating the Commons "unequivocally accepts the Russian state's culpability".



British PM faces rebellions from the pro-EU MPs

'Anti-Corbyn agenda'

In the media, the Daily Telegraph denounced Corbyn's "craven posturing" while the Guardian called his response "dispiriting." "He sounded too keen to find another explanation," said its editorial. "He hasn't got the tone right," added Liik. "Of course they need evidence, but that doesn't mean you should diminish the gravity of the crimes, because what happened was outrageous."irate MPs targeted Corbyn spokesman and strategist Seumas Milne after he later doubted the findings of Britain's intelligence services.

"There is a history between weapons of mass destruction and intelligence which is problematic, to put it mildly," he told reporters, in reference to the Iraq War. Milne's appointment in 2015 raised eyebrows given previous opinion articles he had written in the Guardian, in which he



SALISBURY: Police officers escort an army truck, carrying a freight container laden with the car of Sergei Skripal, as it is driven from the Churchfields industrial estate in Salisbury, southern England as part of investigations and operations in connection with the major incident after an apparent nerve agent attack in Salisbury. —AFP

said "Putin has now become a cartoon villain and Russia the target of almost uniformly belligerent propaganda across the western media." Centrist Labor MP Chuka Umunna tweeted that "Milne's comments do not represent the views of the majority of our voters, members or MPs."

However, polls have yet to be released showing whether criticism within Westminster has translated to the electorate, with much of Corbyn's success based on defying

the establishment and opposing the Iraq War. Long-time ally and shadow interior minister Diane Abbott tapped into these sentiments when defending her boss. "If we are to persuade any other nation to take significant measures alongside us, they may ask for a higher burden of proof," she said. "The same outlets now condemning the Labor leader recently tried to label him as a Czech spy. They have an anti-Corbyn agenda."—AFP

Crimea to vote Putin for the first time amid crackdown on dissent

SIMFEROPOL: In Crimea, which votes this weekend in Russian presidential elections for the first time since annexation from Ukraine in 2014, loudspeakers blast out the message: "Choose a president! Choose a future!". Local authorities say the polls are a chance to thank President Vladimir Putin for taking control of the peninsula, but activists have complained of a crackdown ahead of what Kiev maintains is an illegal vote.

Crimea has suffered under Western sanctions following a hastily organized referendum to rejoin Russia four years ago, but the Kremlin is making efforts to ease the area's isolation. "We see the election as a second referendum and as an opportunity to thank Putin for what he did in 2014," said Alexander Formanchuk, an adviser to Sergei Aksyonov, the Moscow-installed Crimean leader.

With Putin sure to return to the Kremlin with a landslide today, authorities across Russia have led a campaign to convince people to turn out to vote. On the Black Sea peninsula, this campaign is even more intense, with election posters covering public transport as well as the loudspeakers blaring in public areas. Formanchuk - who calls the result "absolutely predictable" - told AFP he is convinced most Crimeans will take part, saying the peninsula has a history of high voter turnouts. He cited the 2010 Ukrainian presidential election when Crimea overwhelmingly supported pro-Kremlin Viktor Yanukovich, currently living in exile in Russia, as an example.

Putin's flying visit

Vladislav Ganzhara, who was seven years old and a Ukrainian citizen when Vladimir Putin first came to power in Russia, is now a Kremlin-loyal MP in the Crimean parliament. He brushed off threats from Kiev that organizers of the vote in the peninsula could face criminal charges in Ukraine, and said it did not matter if the outcome of the election was already known. "If you support a team, you go to a game even if you know it will win because it is the strongest," he told AFP. This week Putin paid a flying visit to Crimea, where several thousand supporters queued for up to five hours to see him speak. The president was late and spoke for less than two minutes before taking a helicopter out of the port city of Sevastopol.

"Even if he was a bit late, it's because of his busy schedule. People would have waited for him long into the night," Ganzhara said. The Russian leader earlier visited the construction site of the Kerch bridge, Moscow's major construction project to unite the peninsula with Russian mainland. He also opened a new "international" airport, despite no flights from outside Russia flying to the disputed peninsula, as part of a wider move to counter the area's isolation.

The price to pay

Much of the peninsula's food supplies arrive by ferry from Russia, often resulting in shortages in shops. Since Crimea is cut off from the global banking system, locals make the two-hour voyage by ferry and car to Russia's southern city of Krasnodar to withdraw cash with international cards. Anastasia Arslanova, a 35-year-old lawyer from Sevastopol, said life has become more expensive but that it is a price she is willing to pay to be part of Russia. "We are Russian and we feel good in Russia," she said.

Moscow's supporters often blame Crimean bureaucrats for economic hardships rather than the Kremlin and Putin himself. Those Crimeans who do criticize Russian rule say they have faced increased pressure from local security services, who have been given a carte blanche on the peninsula. —AFP

Britain and Russia spy sagas: Past sanctions

LONDON: Russia announced yesterday the expulsion of 23 British diplomats in a tit-for-tat move following London's response to a nerve agent attack against a Russian former double agent in England. They are the latest sanctions by London and Moscow in spying affairs:

The Cold War

In September 1971 Britain expelled a record number of 105 Soviet diplomats and officials after Moscow refused to clarify the activities of 440 of its citizens in Britain. Moscow in turn expelled 18 Britons. In September 1985 Moscow and London engaged in a furious six-day exchange of spy expulsions, declaring a draw after 31 on each side had been sent packing. This followed the defection to Britain of the KGB's London station chief, Oleg Gordievsky. In May 1989, 11 Soviet diplomats and journalists were thrown out for spying. Meanwhile 11 Britons were sent home from Moscow in a tit-for-tat move.

Post-Soviet era

In May 1996 Britain ordered the expulsion of four Russians working at the London embassy, in response to the kicking out of four British diplomats from Russia. According to Moscow, the Britons were in contact with a Russian working for British intelligence. In January, 2006 Moscow said it had uncovered four British spies who enjoyed diplomatic status and engaged in the alleged illegal funding of pro-democracy and human rights groups.

Russia's intelligence service accused British diplomats of involvement in a spy ring in which agents allegedly passed secrets through a high-tech communications system hidden in a fake rock in a Moscow park. Russian President Vladimir Putin then cracked down on non-governmental organizations, forcing several of them to close down. In January 2012 a former top aide to then British Prime Minister Tony Blair admitted that Britain had a spy plot involving a fake rock.

The Litvinenko affair

July 2007: Britain expelled four Russian diplomats and hit Moscow with visa restrictions after Moscow refused to extradite Andrei Lugovoi, the main suspect in the murder of ex-Russian agent Alexander Litvinenko. Litvinenko was poisoned in London in 2006 with the radioactive substance polonium-210, in the most notorious of a rash of suspicious deaths of high-profile Russian exiles in Britain. Moscow responded with the expulsion of four British diplomats, suspended counter-terrorism cooperation with London and also stopped issuing visas to British officials.

In 2008 two branches of the British Council cultural organization in St Petersburg and Yekaterinburg were then closed following pressure from Russian authorities for alleged tax irregularities. In January 2016, after a British probe found that Moscow was responsible for the Litvinenko affair, the British government summoned Russia's ambassador, and froze the assets of Lugovoi and a second suspect, Dmitry Kovtun.

Poisoning in English city

On March 4 spy Sergei Skripal, 66, and his daughter Yulia, 33, are found unconscious, slumped on a bench outside a shopping centre in Salisbury. They are currently in critical condition in a local hospital. Skripal is a former colonel in Russian military intelligence who was jailed in his country for betraying agents to Britain's



MOSCOW: The entrance of the 'Intelligence' spy themed bar near the famous KGB and current FSB building on Lubyanka square is seen in Moscow. Britain and its allies France, Germany and the United States have pointed the finger at Moscow over the nerve agent poisoning of former double agent Sergei Skripal, who remains in critical condition along with his daughter Yulia. —AFP

M16 secret service and moved there in a spy swap in 2010. On March 7 police say that the father and daughter have been poisoned by a highly toxic nerve agent.

London accuses Moscow

On March 12 British Prime Minister Theresa May says it is "highly likely that Russia was responsible for the act", saying Moscow could be directly to blame or may have "lost control" of the nerve agent. She tells British lawmakers that the military-grade nerve agent used was identified as belonging to a group of nerve agents known as Novichok and of a type developed by Russia.

Called "newcomer" in English, Novichok refers to a group of powerful and deadly chemical compounds reportedly developed by the Soviet government towards the end of the Cold War in the

1970s and 1980s. Moscow rejects the claims as "provocation". The US says it stands "in solidarity" with Britain. France and Germany make similar statements the following day. On March 13 Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov says that Moscow is "not guilty" of the poisoning and is ready to cooperate with London. Two days later Lavrov's deputy Sergei Ryabkov says Moscow never had any programs to develop the Novichok nerve agent.

On March 14 London says that Moscow is "culpable" and it will expel 23 of the 59 Russian diplomats present in the United Kingdom. It also suspends high-level diplomatic contact with Moscow and will keep royals at home during the 2018 football World Cup. Russia's foreign ministry slams London's "choice for confrontation", adding that retaliation will follow shortly.—Agencies

Porn star liable for \$20 million: Trump's lawyer

LOS ANGELES: Donald Trump's lawyer claims porn actress Stormy Daniels is liable for at least \$20 million for violating a nondisclosure agreement she says prevents her from discussing an affair with the president, according to a Friday court filing. A lawyer for Michael Cohen's Essential Consultants limited liability company—which paid Daniels \$130,000 under the agreement-made the filing, which said that Daniels violated the deal "at least" 20 times.

"The Settlement Agreement provides for liquidated damages of one million dollars (\$1,000,000) per instance of breach," the court filing says. Daniels signed the agreement pertaining to an alleged affair a decade earlier shortly before the 2016 election, leading to allegations that the payment amounted to an illicit contribution to Trump's campaign. Lawyer Michael Avenatti filed a lawsuit on behalf of Daniels earlier this month seeking to toss out the confidential settlement.

The suit alleged that Daniels began an

"intimate relationship" with Trump in the summer of 2006 that continued well into 2007. The White House has denied any sexual encounter between Trump and Daniels who has offered to return the \$130,000 she received so that she can be free to "speak openly and freely about her prior relationship with the president and the attempts to silence her." She is also asking to be allowed to publish text messages, photos and videos relating to the president, Avenatti said in a letter to Cohen. Using the pseudonyms Peggy Peterson and David Dennison, Daniels and Trump were to sign the agreement, along with Essential Consultants.

'Bullying tactic'

But Trump never signed, providing the basis for Avenatti's attempt to have it thrown out and release Daniels from her obligations. Avenatti took to Twitter on Friday to criticize the court filing. "The fact that a sitting president is pursuing over \$20M in bogus 'damages' against a private citizen, who is only trying to tell the public what really happened, is remarkable. Likely unprecedented in our history. We are NOT going away and we will NOT be intimidated," Avenatti wrote on the social media site. "The filing today is yet another bullying tactic from the president and Mr Cohen. They are now attempting to remove this case to federal ct in order to increase



WASHINGTON: This combination of file pictures shows US President Donald Trump and adult film actress/director Stormy Daniels. —AFP

their chances that the matter will be decided in private arbitration, thus hiding the truth from the public," he wrote.

According to the court filing, Essential Consultants began an "arbitration proceeding" as provided for by the agreement at the end of February. Essential Consultants "intends to file a Petition to Compel Arbitration with this Court at the

earliest possible time permitted... to compel this action to the Pending Arbitration Proceeding," the filing says. Trump has ample reason to want to keep the affair quiet. The issue could hurt the president with religious voters, who were key to his electoral success, and appears to have already caused strains between the president and First Lady Melania Trump.—AFP

International

With Rohingya gone, Myanmar ethnic Rakhine seek Muslim-free 'buffer zone'

'Rakhinisation' plan to upend the demography

KOE TAN KAUK: Buddhist flags hang limply from bamboo poles at the entrance to Koe Tan Kauk, a "model" village for ethnic Rakhine migrants shuttled north to repopulate an area once dominated by Rohingya Muslims. The new arrivals are moving to parts of Rakhine state mostly "cleared" of its Rohingya residents, whose villages were bulldozed and reduced to muddy stains on a landscape of lush farmland. The Rakhine migrants, who come from the poor but relatively stable south, are-for now-few in number.

But they carry great expectations as the pioneers of a donor-led "Rakhinisation" plan to upend the demography of the once majority-Muslim area. "We were really afraid of those Kalars and didn't plan to come here," Chit San Eain, a 28-year-old who has moved with her husband and toddler into a basic hut in Koe Tan Kauk tells AFP, using a pejorative term for Muslims. "But now that they are no longer here, we have the chance to meet again with our relatives who live up here," she added, the ruins of a Rohingya settlement lying a few kilometers away.

Nearly 700,000 Rohingya have been driven from northern Rakhine into Bangladesh since August 25 last year by a Myanmar army offensive against Muslim militants. Another 300,000 Rohingya were pushed out from the south and centre of Rakhine by army campaigns stretching back to the late 1970s. The UN has branded last year's military crackdown ethnic cleansing, with a top official saying it carried all the "hallmarks of genocide." Myanmar vigorously denies the allegations and says refugees are welcome to return. But so far it has agreed to allow back only 374 of 8,000 refugees whose names have been put forward for

the initial phase of repatriation. Many traumatized Rohingya in Cox's Bazar camps are also refusing to be repatriated to Rakhine-where holding camps and hostile neighbors await them. In their absence a blizzard of development projects, government and army-sponsored or privately funded, are transforming northern Rakhine. Taking space vacated by fleeing Rohingya is an old game in a state seen as the frontline of a Buddhist nation's fight against encroaching Islam. "The military has been engineering the

social landscape of northern Rakhine State so as to dilute the Rohingya population since the early 1990s," says Francis Wade, author of "Myanmar's Enemy Within: Buddhist Violence and the Making of the Muslim 'Other'".

The Muslim minority are denied citizenship and labeled "Bengalis", outsiders who-the logic runs-have successfully been

pushed back to their country of origin. In a pattern with echoes of "the Israeli settler project in the West Bank" Buddhist communities then move in, altering the "facts on the ground" gradually rubbing out Muslim rights to the land, he added. "I'd expect to see more Buddhists settle there over the coming years. And then we'll forget what the area once was, and that process of erasure will be complete."

Rohingya out, Rakhine in

Chit San Eain is the beneficiary of the Ancillary Committee for the Reconstruction of Rakhine National Territory in the Western Frontier (CRR), a private scheme established shortly after the refugee crisis began. In a zone under a strict army lockdown the resettlement plan could not fly without military consent.



Muslim minority denied citizenship, labeled 'Bengalis'

A library in Haiti: A community effort

CITE SOLEIL: Book by book, and with donations large and small-some from people who are illiterate-a library is taking shape in one of the poorest places in destitute Haiti. Cite Soleil, a slum in the capital Port-au-Prince that is home to half a million people, used to be known for how dangerous it was as gangs fought each other in its narrow alleys for control of the neighborhood. That violence ended about two years ago, and one of the young men living in the slum came up with the idea of building a place for people to read and learn.

"The youths who were fighting each other reached an understanding. They wanted peace. So we said we needed to create a movement to get guns out of kids' hands and replace them with books," said Joseph Benson, 27. Access to education is weak in Cite Soleil, which opens onto Port-au-Prince Bay-it has only one public high school. Nationwide, half of all Haitians cannot read or write, according to the UN children's agency (UNICEF).

Over the years, Haiti has seen many social development projects win financing from non-governmental organizations or foreign countries but many did not make it off the drawing board. Of those that did, many fizzled out due to lack of public support. The youths behind the library project were acutely aware of this, and went directly to the people of Cite Soleil.



PORT-AU-PRINCE: Workers are seen during the construction of the library 'Konbit bibliotek Site Soleil' in a neighborhood of the commune of Cite Soleil, in the capital of Haiti Port-au-Prince. —AFP

"We decided we had to get everyone in Cite Soleil involved. So we took to the street and started asking for donations," said Benson.

'Everyone needs to participate'

The name of the project features the Creole word 'konbit', which recalls collective work done in the countryside in this Caribbean country, the poorest in the Americas. Over the course of a year, the equivalent of around \$74,000 and some 10,000 books have been collected. Construction began a month ago. The library complex will include a conference room, a cafeteria and a computer lab, and the completion date is unclear. The total budget for the project will be about \$500,000 so fundraising is ongoing-and easier as residents see the project unfold.

Everybody who donates gets their picture taken. Help is also coming in from foreigners. The donating spirit has even hit a police station across the

street from the job site: it is donating water for two months to help prepare cement. An officer assigned to Cite Soleil has become one of its biggest champions. "As I am directly involved in security issues, I understand the need to reach out to young people," said Ricardo Antonio Joseph, who belongs to a unit specializing in crowd control.

Joseph finagled a donation of 550 books from a publishing house where he has contacts. More than 4,000 donors altogether have chipped in toward building the library. "If we want calm to remain here, everyone needs to participate. It's not just the job of elected officials or residents of Cite Soleil, but it's everyone's responsibility," said Joseph. Louino Robillard, one of the leaders of the project, said he has been moved by donations from the poorest of Haitians. "What has really pleased me and motivated me are people who do not know how to read but who still give money and say, 'Here are my 50 gourdes.' —AFP

Officials scramble to make Trump-Kim summit a reality

WASHINGTON: Senior officials staged a flurry of calls and top-level meetings on Friday as they scrambled to make a proposed nuclear summit between US President Donald Trump and North Korea's Kim Jong Un a reality. There was no immediate breakthrough, but North Korea's foreign minister was to remain in Stockholm into Saturday for further talks with Swedish leaders, as the Scandinavian intermediary strives to pave the way for talks that could end a threat of nuclear war. From Washington, Trump called his South Korean counterpart Moon Jae-in, whose government last week passed an apparent summit invitation to Trump from Kim. Trump accepted on the spot and triggered a race to set a credible agenda for what could be a historic breakthrough.

Rampant skepticism

At the same time, foreign ministers Kang Kyung-wha of South Korea and Taro Kono of Japan were in Washington for talks at an under-staffed US State Department, left in turmoil by Trump's abrupt and brutal Twitter-sacking of former secretary of state Rex Tillerson. "I think we're cautiously optimistic that the talks will happen and that this will be a breakthrough for a peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue," Kang told the PBS NewsHour.

The abrupt decision to accept the summit has triggered much skepticism from Korea observers but, after his call with Moon, Trump's White House remained cautiously

optimistic that his strategy of making military threats backed by crippling real-world sanctions had forced Kim's hand. Trump and Moon "agreed that concrete actions, not words, will be the key to achieving permanent denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, and President Trump reiterated his intention to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un by the end of May," the White House said.

"The two leaders expressed cautious optimism over recent developments and emphasized that a brighter future is available for North Korea, if it chooses the correct path." Before a date or a venue for the summit can be set, North Korea will have to publicly confirm that it sent the invitation and intends to honor it, by attending a meeting to discuss giving up its nuclear arsenal. There had been speculation that Pyongyang might do so Friday, when Ri Yong Ho met Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Lofven and Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom, but afterwards Swedish officials said the talks would be extended into Saturday.

Sweden has longstanding ties with North Korea. Its diplomatic mission in Pyongyang, which opened in 1975, was the first Western embassy established in the isolationist country and now represents US, Canadian and Australian diplomatic interests, with Sweden playing a key liaison role. Ri and Wallstrom dined at the foreign ministry on Thursday evening, then met again on Friday at Villa Bonnier, a lavish building near the US embassy used by the government for official functions. "It was a good and constructive atmosphere. We'll see what happens next," Wallstrom told reporters after Friday's talks. Ri made no comment as he left.

"If we can use our contacts in the best way, we will do so," Wallstrom said, noting the situation on the Korean peninsula was "of interest to us all." Ri's delegation included Choe Kang Il, deputy director general of the foreign ministry's North America section. —AFP



RATHEDAUNG, Myanmar: Rakhine villagers walk past homes in Koe Tan Kauk village, Rathedaung township in Myanmar's Rakhine State. —FP

Funded by ethnic Rakhine donors, the CRR's ambition is to establish a "Muslim-dry" buffer zone running the nearly 100 kilometers from state capital Sittwe to Maungdaw town, according to Oo Hla Saw, a Rakhine MP who advises the committee. "All of this area was under the influence of Muslims. After the military operations, they had to flee... so we have to establish this area with the Rakhine population," he said. The CRR will fund jobs and homes "so this little population can grow and grow," he added.

It's a trickle so far, with around 64 households-some 250

people-moved by the CRR, with 200 more families on a waiting list. They are among the poorest of the poor, mostly daily wage laborers from Thandwe around 600 kilometers to the south or squatters from Sittwe. Two village tracts, Koe Tan Kauk near Rathedaung and Inn Din near Maungdaw, have been designated for the scheme so far. The army concedes the second site was the scene of extrajudicial killings of Rohingya captives as violence engulfed the region last August. Koe Tan Kauk was a similarly mixed settlement of Buddhist and Muslim homes.—AFP

Australia warns on encrypted apps as Southeast Asia vows terror cooperation

SYDNEY: Use of encrypted messaging apps to plan terrorist attacks is the greatest threat facing intelligence agencies in modern times, Australia warned yesterday as Southeast Asian leaders vowed closer cooperation to counter extremism. An ASEAN-Australia special summit in Sydney heard that use of the "dark web" was a spiraling problem and countries in the region must work together to keep on top of it.

Australia's Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton told the meeting "the use of encrypted messaging apps by terrorists and criminals is potentially the most significant degradation of intelligence capability in modern times". He said the only way to deal with the problem, and the increasing use of the internet by groups like Islamic State to radicalize and recruit new members, was together. "We have to be constantly alert, constantly working with our neighbors in the region," said Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, pointing to the increasingly trans-national nature of terrorism.

"Sharing of intelligence is critically important. As we all know, what may appear to be a not especially important, not especially consequential piece of intelligence, may be the piece that connects the jigsaw for somebody else's investigation. "Trust, sharing, collaboration, it is absolutely critical." Leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian

Nations signed a memorandum of understanding after a day of counter-terrorism talks, agreeing to work together to develop "best practice counter-terrorism legislation".

They also agreed to regional dialogues and workshops covering electronic evidence, financial intelligence, and ways to tackle online radicalization. Canberra is already helping Southeast Asian states choke terrorist financing and counter violent extremism. The problem has been exacerbated by jihadists now being forced out of Syria and Iraq with the Islamic State caliphate mostly crushed, and into other countries. The issue was driven home last year when pro-Islamic State militants seized the southern Philippine city of Marawi, with Australia aiding Manila to win it back.

'Warped and evil'

Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak praised Australia's initiative to strengthen cooperation, and said countering online extremist propaganda was especially critical. "This is our new main battleground, to win the hearts and minds of our youth through social media, so that they do not easily succumb to the warped, perverse and evil ideology of Daesh," he said, referring to Islamic State. Najib added that "the more we work together on these issues the more successful we will be". "The more united we are, the more effective we will be in combatting this terrible and inhumane scourge. None of us is safe from it but together we will be safer."

Australia has suffered six terror attacks in recent years and disrupted 14 more, including a plot to bring down a plane departing Sydney. In response, Canberra has consolidated key functions such as national security, immigration, counter-terrorism, cyber-security, and border protection under a newly-created Home Affairs department, headed by Dutton. —AFP



Oman Exchange opens two new branches- Reggae and Bneid Algar

Oman Exchange Company WLL, a leading exchange company in Kuwait founded in 1979, opened 2 new branches, their 20th & 21st branch last week. A new branch in Riggae (Block 2) was opened on Wednesday 28th Feb and in Bneid Al Gar (Block 1) on Thursday 1st March. Both branches were inaugurated by Mr Zahid Kalolwala, General Manager of Oman Exchange, in front of a large gathering of well-wishers, customers and Oman Exchange officials.

With a well spread out and expanding branch network across Kuwait, Oman Exchange continuously strives to deliver a comprehensive range of innovative, affordable, secure and fully compliant financial products and services such as individual and commercial remittances, instant money transfers, currency exchange, payment solutions and other value added services, all designed to simplify and speed up transactions for both, businesses and individuals, with commitment of competitive rates and charges, customer service and customer satisfaction.

Oman Exchange is reachable on 1886626 or info@omanexchange.com.

Afghan baby Donald Trump...

Continued from Page 1

name", while others have accused him of endangering the boy's life. There are even suggestions Sayed is using the moniker to wangle asylum in the United States - a charge the 28-year-old teacher vehemently denies. "I didn't know at the beginning that Afghan people would be so sensitive about a name," Sayed told AFP, as Donald played with a music app on his father's Samsung smartphone in their carpeted room. Sayed says someone posted the picture online, sparking the controversy that forced him to close his Facebook account. Even Sayed's neighbors in the heavily Shiite area of Kabul where they live have threatened the family and told them to leave. "When I go out of the house I feel intimidated," he said.

Donald was born in the central province of Daikundi, a few months before the 2016 US presidential election, on the farm where Sayed's parents and grandparents grew almonds, wheat and corn. Sayed was inspired to call his son Donald Trump after reading the Persian language versions of the businessman's books, including "How to get rich", which he borrowed from the local library. "I did a lot of research about him and that motivated me to choose his name for my son," he explained.

Trump hails FBI official's firing...

Continued from Page 1

engineer Mueller's dismissal, potentially sparking a constitutional crisis. Mueller is also examining whether Trump might have obstructed justice, including through his firing last May of Comey.

"Andrew McCabe FIRED, a great day for the hard working men and women of the FBI - A great day for Democracy," Trump tweeted soon after the firing. "Sanctimonious James Comey was his boss and made McCabe look like a choirboy. He knew all about the lies and corruption going on at the highest levels of the FBI!" Trump wrote.

McCabe pushed back hard, denying any impropriety and saying he was the victim of a Trump administration "war" against the FBI and the special counsel. The move could add to discontent inside the FBI, where Comey and McCabe are widely respected. The Justice Department said an internal investigation had found that McCabe made unauthorized disclosures to the media, and had not been fully honest "on multiple occasions" with the department's inspector general.

Thousands of Syrians flee...

Continued from Page 1

food and medicine shortages in the enclave, which is within mortar range of central Damascus. Yesterday, rebel artillery fire killed one person in the capital, the Observatory said.

In northwestern Syria meanwhile, more than 200,000 civilians have fled the Kurdish-majority city of Afrin in less than three days, according to the monitor. Yesterday, a Turkish air strike killed 11 civilians in the city as they tried to leave, it said. "There was fierce fighting throughout the night... as the Turkish forces and their Syrian allies tried to break into the city," the Observatory said.

The monitor says more than 280 civilians have been killed since the Afrin battle began, but Ankara has denied the reports and repeatedly said it takes the "utmost care" to avoid civilian casualties. Turkey and its Syrian Arab rebel allies have waged a nearly two-month offensive on the Afrin enclave, which is held by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG). Earlier this week, they largely surrounded the enclave's sole city, which was home to some 350,000 people, including people displaced from other parts of the enclave

He hopes his son will "be as successful", adding that photos of the older Trump already make his younger namesake "happy". But bemusement turned to anger when Sayed's parents realized the couple was serious about the name. As relations broke down the young family moved to Kabul, and they are now estranged from their relatives. Their life could not be more different from the one enjoyed by their son's namesake, who divides his time between the White House and his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida.

The family of five is squeezed into a spartan room overlooking a small courtyard and outdoor bathroom, which they rent for 2,000 Afghanis (\$30) a month. Beyond their metal front gate is a warren of dirt lanes barely wide enough for a car, mud-brick houses and putrid open drains. A few blocks from their house several drug addicts loll on a grassy strip in the middle of a busy road injecting themselves or sleeping off a hit.

During the interview, Sayed's wife Jamila washed the family's dirty clothes in a small machine outside while keeping an eye on the couple's daughter Fatima, nine, and eldest son Karim, eight. Despite the controversy Donald's parents have not broken the law by giving their son an un-Islamic name, according to Rohullah Ahmadzai, a senior advisor at the Population Registration Office in Kabul. He said they have the legal right "to name their children whatever they want" - even after American presidents.

While Sayed is worried about his family's safety, particularly Donald's, he remains stubbornly unrepentant. "It's likely... that he will be harassed or beaten by his classmates," he said matter-of-factly. "I won't reconsider (his name). To hell with the other people." — AFP

"The FBI expects every employee to adhere to the highest standards of honesty, integrity and accountability," Attorney General Jeff Sessions said in a statement.

Lack of candor under oath is a firing offense at the FBI, but the politically charged context of the move raised serious questions among McCabe's backers. In a stinging response to the president, former CIA chief John Brennan tweeted yesterday: "When the full extent of your venality, moral turpitude and political corruption becomes known, you will take your rightful place as a disgraced demagogue in the dustbin of history."

Details of the inspector general's probe were not made public, but it involved the FBI's handling of the 2016 investigation into Trump's election rival, Democrat Hillary Clinton. Trump has repeatedly accused McCabe and Comey of having protected Clinton from prosecution, including over her misuse of a private email server while she was secretary of state. McCabe hit out following his sacking in a blistering statement. He said the inspector general's probe "became part of an unprecedented effort by the administration, driven by the president himself, to remove me from my position, destroy my reputation, and possibly strip me of a pension that I worked 21 years to earn. It is part of this administration's ongoing war with the FBI and the efforts of the special counsel investigation." — AFP

already overrun.

A single escape route remains open to the south to territory still held by the YPG or controlled by the Damascus government. In a regime-held area just outside Afrin, Syrians who had fled their homes were sleeping in mosques and schools - some even in shops, a displaced person there said. "Some sleep in cars or on the roadside," said the person, asking not to be named, adding that rent prices in the area had soared.

Late Friday, a Turkish bombing raid struck the city's main hospital, killing 16 civilians, the Observatory said. Turkey's military denied hitting the hospital, saying that its operation in Afrin "is carried out in such a way as to not cause any harm to civilians". Hospital director Jiwan Mohammed told state news agency SANA the strikes had put the hospital - until then, the city's only functioning medical facility - out of service. Turkey says the YPG is a "terrorist" offshoot of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). But the Kurdish militia has also formed the backbone of a US-backed alliance that has successfully expelled the Islamic State jihadist group from large parts of Syria.

Yesterday, the head of Syria's main opposition group accused the United Nations of failing to prevent violence in Syria including in Eastern Ghouta. "We hold the United Nations, the Security Council and the international community ... directly responsible for their silence around these crimes and for failing to take action to prevent" them, Nasr Al-Hariri, the president of the Syrian Negotiation Commission, said. — AFP

Trump back-to-back visitors unlikely to resolve Gulf dispute

WASHINGTON: Saudi, Emirati and Qatari leaders will beat a path to US President Donald Trump's door in the next few weeks for back-to-back visits that are unlikely to solve a long-running dispute among America's Gulf allies. Washington is keen to end the standoff between Qatar on one side and several other Arab nations on the other. The rift has divided the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) group of nations and hurt US-led efforts to maintain a strong front against Iran.

The United States was hoping to host a US-GCC summit later this year but the prospects of that happening appear slim given that the rival leaders are still at odds. "They don't see eye to eye. They're not ready to solve this crisis," a senior administration official said, referring to the parties embroiled in the Gulf crisis. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt cut off travel and trade ties with Qatar last June, accusing it of backing their arch-rival Iran and supporting terrorism. Qatar denies the charges and says the boycott is an attempt to impinge on its sovereignty and rein in its support for reform.

Washington has strong alliances with the rival sides. Qatar hosts the largest US air base in the region which has been crucial to its anti-Islamic State military campaign in Syria and Iraq. At the same time, the Trump administration has forged even closer ties with Qatar's rivals, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman will meet with Trump on Tuesday in Washington and the

Qatar dispute is unlikely to be at the forefront of issues the young leader will want to discuss, diplomats say. Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani then meets Trump on April 10 in the White House. And, keen to have the last word with Trump, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed has sought to meet Trump after a scheduled meeting with the Qatari emir, the senior administration official said.

Originally, the crown prince, sometimes known in the West as MBZ, was due to meet with Trump on March 27. "MBZ in fact had asked Trump to be last," the senior administration official said. No new dates have yet been set. The leaders are likely to talk to Trump about countering Iran, combating extremism, and deepening economic and military partnerships.

"There appears to be little to gain - and a bit to lose - in Gulf partners agreeing to another US-GCC Summit of leaders hosted by President Trump at Camp David," said a former senior US official who worked on regional issues. "They have more to gain prosecuting their independent agendas in the bilateral visits to Washington already scheduled," the former official said.

The Arab countries' boycott disrupted Qatar's imports and triggered the withdrawal of billions of dollars from Qatari banks by depositors from the four states. Qatar, the world's top exporter of liquefied natural gas, developed new trade routes and deployed tens of billions of dollars from its massive sovereign wealth fund to protect its banks. The UAE in particular bristles at alleged Qatari support for Islamists throughout the region.

The Trump administration is worried that the split among Sunni Muslim US allies can benefit Iran in the tussle for influence in the Middle East. So far, neither Saudi Arabia nor the UAE feel their demands have been met to resolve the dispute. At the start of the crisis, the four countries sent Doha a list of 13 demands, including closing the state-funded Al Jazeera television station

Xi gets second term with ally...

Continued from Page 1

HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday sent a cable to Xi congratulating him on his reelection. The Amir lauded the strong ties with the Chinese government and people, affirming that Kuwait is eager to continue distinguished cooperation with China. 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 cables.

Xi and Wang shook hands as the legislators heaped on applause. As part of the package of constitutional amendments, Xi and Wang for the first time took the oath of office by pledging allegiance to the constitution. Xi put his left hand on a red-covered book containing the charter, and raised his right fist to take his vow. "I pledge loyalty to the constitution of the People's Republic of China" Xi recited, vowing to "strenuously struggle to build a rich, strong, democratic and civilized" country.

Elevating Wang allows Xi to keep a formidable ally by his side, as China's most powerful leader since Mao Zedong cements his authority and sets his sights on a possible lifelong tenure - a move that has drawn criticism online. Wang, 69, stepped down from the Communist Party's ruling council in October under informal retirement rules. But he has kept a prominent profile, sitting at the same table as the seven members of the Politburo Standing Committee during the public sessions of the National People's Congress while receiving fervent applause from the delegates as he voted.

Wang's appointment shows that "he's a really important political advisor", said Kerry Brown, director of the Lau China Institute at King's College London. "He's a very capable politician, so it makes sense he would still be around," Brown told AFP, noting that "it also shows we're in an unconventional time in Chinese politics." Wang was at the frontline of Xi's anti-corruption crusade, heading the party's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, which has punished 1.5 million officials in the past five years, from low-level cadres to regional leaders and gen-

erals. He stepped down last year. Known internationally in his previous role as China's pointman on trade, Wang could help Xi deal with increasingly tense relations with the United States amid fears of a looming trade war, analysts say. Xi's real power stems from his title as general secretary of the Communist Party, but analysts say Wang could provide extra heft to his presidency, even though the vice president has largely been a ceremonial post in the past.

Xi is keeping Wang by his side because of his "talent and ability", according to Hua Po, an independent Chinese political commentator. "Choosing Wang as vice president is certainly to consolidate his power," Hua told AFP. "Xi is already a very powerful man. The problem is that he has too few people who are loyal and competent for his use, so he has to retain Wang and give himself more time to cultivate more talented people."

Wang replaces Li Yuanchao, a relatively low-profile politician who has represented Xi on trips abroad. In his former position as vice premier, Wang periodically travelled to the United States, where then-president Barack Obama once gave the Chinese delegation a signed basketball. An "amazing" economist, he could now form a "dream team" with another member of the party leadership, Wang Yang, to deal with concerns that US President Donald Trump policies will trigger a trade war, Brown said. "Maybe they'll be able to come up with a solution for this massive brewing storm with America about imbalances and tariffs."

China's capital was engulfed in a rare flurry of swirling snow yesterday, sending delegates of the congress scurrying from the Great Hall of the People after the vote. Legislators beamed when talking about Xi - a stark contrast from the criticism that Chinese people expressed online when term limits were lifted last week, prompting censors into action.

"Our Chairman Xi is too great, truly he is too great," said Du Meishuang, a Chinese opera singer and delegate from Chairman Mao's home province of Hunan. "I hope he will rule for life, truly, this is the common people's heartfelt wish." She said the single vote against his deputy Wang was not a problem: "His age is quite advanced, maybe that was the reason." "All Chinese are looking forward" to Xi continuing on, said Zhang Fanhua, a delegate from Anhui, as he hurried into the falling snow. "This is a great happiness for the country and the nation." — Agencies



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Sports

Scotland deny Italy in Six Nations thriller

Italy finish at the bottom for third straight year

ROME: Scotland denied Italy by snatching a last-gasp 29-27 win in a thrilling Six Nations finale at the Stadio Olimpico in Rome yesterday.

Italy had led 17-12 at half-time but suffered their 17th straight defeat after a 79th minute penalty by Greig Laidlaw handed Scotland victory.

"I'm destroyed for the lads and the fans but we've seen our future, the style and the game that we want, the quality of our young players," said Italy coach Conor O'Shea.

Scotland move provisionally second in the Six Nations table but a win for either France or Wales, who play each other in Cardiff later Saturday, will move them to third.

Italy finish bottom of the table for the third straight year with five defeats in five games, with captain Sergio Parisse suffering his 100th Test defeat.

Italy's losing streak in the Six Nations stretches back to 2015 against Scotland in Murrayfield.

The Italians had gotten off to a blistering start with Tommaso Allan, who played for Scotland at U-20 level, winning the man of the match award as he accounted for 22 of Italy's points.

The 24-year-old touched down after 14 and 45 minutes with Matteo Minozzi getting a third for the

hosts after 21 minutes.

Scotland's Fraser Brown (10) and John Barclay (25) both scored tries, in the first half for Scotland, with Sean Maitland (61) and Stuart Hogg (71) adding two more in the second half.

Scotland led 5-3 after ten minutes when Brown touched down after Allan's opening penalty, but Laidlaw sent the conversion wide.

But Allan pulled Italy ahead 12-5 after quarter-of-an-hour to the delight of the 60,000 crowd with Minozzi slotting down as the hosts opened up a 17-5 lead after 22 minutes.

Back after the break Sebastian Negri looked to have scored a try as he burst through the post to dot down but it was disallowed because of a knock-on in the build-up.

But two minutes later Allan broke as newcomer Jake Polledri created an opportunity from following a sloppy turnover in the

Scottish midfield offloading to Allan who raced through and then converted to open up a 12-point lead after 46 minutes.

Maitland pushed through for another try with Laidlaw converting from a tight angle to pull Scotland 24-19, before Hogg pulled the Scots level and Laidlaw converting.



ROME: Italy's Sergio Parisse vies with Scotland's Tim Swinson during the Six Nations international rugby union match between Italy and Scotland at the Olympic Stadium in Rome, yesterday. — AFP

Allan edged Italy ahead again with a penalty but Laidlaw slotted in a penalty in the dying seconds for his ninth point of the afternoon to break Italian hearts.

Scotland's title hopes had been extinguished with defeat to Ireland last week, as Italy took the Wooden Spoon for the 13th time even if they had managed a win at the Stadio Olimpico. — AFP

Victorious Kuwait shooting team returns home



By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The Kuwait National men and women teams arrived to a hero's welcome yesterday after participating in the Arab Shooting Championship that was held in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt in the 10m Air Pistol and Rifle.

The team were received by President of the Arab and Kuwait Shooting Federations Engineer Duaij Al-Otaibi, Secretary General Obaid Al-Osaimi and Kuwait Shooting Sport Club officials.

Engineer Duaij Al-Otaibi said Kuwait Shooters results during the Arab Championship were good, and he thanked the head of the delegation Dr. Nedal Asem, officials, coaches and players who participated in the tournament.

He congratulated the team on their results as they proved to be competitive in the rifle and pistol.

Eng Al-Otaibi dedicated the win to HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Kuwait people.

Meanwhile, results of the tournament were: shooter Mariam Erzouqi won the



individuals 10m air rifle silver medal with the score of 615.7 points. Meanwhile the team of Mariam Erzouqi, Fatima Emad and Zahraa Al-Saffar won the silver medal with 1826.7 points.

In the air pistol event Hamad Al-Namshan won the silver medal in the individual event with 575 points as the team of

Hamad Al-Namshan, Ali Al-Mutairi and Saad Al-Ajmi took third place with the score of 1690 points.

The tournament saw 300 shooters representing 12 countries, they are: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain, Iraq, Algeria, Tunis, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Oman in addition to the host country Egypt.

Wheelchair curling sets Pyeongchang pulses racing

PYEONGCHANG: It's probably the slowest sport at the Winter Paralympics, but curling has proved an unlikely hit, with spectators flocking to watch wheelchair-bound athletes skillfully slide stones over a sheet of ice.

The popularity of the niche sport has exploded in South Korea since February's Olympics when their women's side, nicknamed the "Garlic Girls", had a fairytale run and won a silver medal. Curling's new-found fame has spilled over to this month's Paralympics in Pyeongchang where 12 mixed teams, consisting of male and female athletes with leg impairments, have competed.

The rules are similar to able-bodied curling. Athletes slide stones over the ice, and whoever gets them closest to the centre of a

target at the end of each round can pick up points. There is one key difference in the Paralympic version, however—there is no sweeping, where athletes use a broom to vigorously rub the ice in front of a sliding stone to better direct it.

More than 54,000 tickets were sold for the wheelchair curling at the Games, while Mr. T—who tweeted about his love of the sport during the Olympics—has swung back into action, urging his followers to watch it at the Paralympics. Only para-ice hockey, a fast and furious sport that sees athletes competing in double-bladed sledges, has been more popular at the Pyeongchang Games. "It's a very entertaining game," Canadian wheelchair curler Ina Forrest, who lost the use of her legs aged 21 after a traffic accident, told AFP. "I think there's been a huge increase in the calibre of wheelchair curling."

'WHEELCHAIRS CURLING, MORE COOLER'

The Gangneung Curling Centre was packed out Saturday for the final two matches of the Paralympics, with spectators waving flags and banners, and roaring with excitement every time a stone slid into the target. China defeated Norway 6-5 in a nail-biting

final to win gold while Canada beat South Korea 5-3 in the bronze medal game, leaving the hosts in fourth place.

The crowd was particularly boisterous during South Korea's match, cheering loudly every time their side was doing well, and performing Mexican waves. The South Koreans' good performance has helped to bolster crowd sizes, with more home fans coming to watch. "The team got good results, making people even more interested in the game," said coach Beak Jong-chul. As well as a lot of spectators, wheelchair curling attracts by far the most ageing athletes of any sport at the Paralympics, with a good number of competitors over 50.

The oldest athlete in Pyeongchang competed in wheelchair curling—Germany's Harry Pavel, aged 67. And Canada's team included a mother of four and grandmother of 10 — Marie Wright, 57. Curling-mad Mr. T, who made his name playing big-hearted toughman B.A. Baracus in 1980s TV hit "The A-Team", has seemed even more enamoured of wheelchair curling than of the able-bodied version.

"I said it before and I'll say it again.. curling is cool fool! But wheelchairs curling, more cooler!" tweeted the star, known for his gold chains and mohican haircut. — AFP

Brumbies down Sharks to get season back on track

WELLINGTON: The under-performing ACT Brumbies got their season back on track with a 24-17 win over the Natal Sharks in their Super Rugby clash in Canberra yesterday. After starting the season with a win over the Sunwolves in Japan, the Brumbies then suffered two demoralising losses to Australian rivals the Reds and the Rebels.

But in their first home game of the season, the Brumbies dug deep in defence to hold off a late surge from the Sharks. With both teams scoring two tries apiece, flyhalf Wharenui Hawera's four penalties—two of them from beyond 50 metres—proved the difference.

The home side opened strongly and were well on top in the first 20 minutes, enjoying most of the possession and nearly all of the territory. They took an early lead with a Hawera penalty and a converted try to winger Lausii Taliauli.

The Sharks eventually began to get into the contest and were rewarded with a Robert du Preez penalty, but despite the Brumbies being reduced to 14 men when Lachie McCaffrey was shown a yellow card, the visitors couldn't take advantage and the ACT led 10-3 at the break.

McCaffrey made amends soon after the restart when he set up Wallabies winger Henry Speight to put the Brumbies out to a 15-3 lead. The Sharks came storming back when prop Thomas du Toi crashed over and du Preez converted to get back to

within five points.

Three Hawera penalties appeared to make the game safe for the Brumbies, but Sharks fullback Curwin Bosch showed some electrifying pace to score in the corner with four minutes to go. Du Preez converted and suddenly the visitors had a chance to get an unlikely draw.

But some desperate Brumbies defence in the closing stages ensured the home side held on for the win. "Tonight was a good match to win—the Sharks are a quality side and in good form too so it's nice to get a win at home," Brumbies captain Christian Leali'ifano said.

"(Hawera) was excellent tonight and confident the whole way through. He played an outstanding game."

HIGHLANDERS DOWN CRUSADERS

Earlier, two late penalties by Lima Sopoaga sealed a dramatic 25-17 victory for the unbeaten Otago Highlanders over the Canterbury Crusaders in a bruising clash in Dunedin. In a frantic finish, the All Blacks' fly-half, who shifts to England at the end of the season, stepped up after the Crusaders had narrowed the gap to two points with 25 minutes remaining.

The Highlanders scored three tries to two in the fast-paced, entertaining New Zealand derby as the defending champions Crusaders suffered a second successive loss. It is the first time in three years the Crusaders have suffered back-to-back defeats, having gone down 29-19 to the Wellington Hurricanes last week.

"It was a hell of a game. We knew it was going to go down to the wire," said a relieved Highlanders skipper Ben Smith. "We're still learning and it's still early in the competition. We just needed to make sure everyone was getting the right messages." — AFP

Highlanders beat Crusaders in frenetic match

DUNEDIN: Otago Highlanders flanker Elliot Dixon provided a vital second-half spark with some storming runs and a try while his side was reduced to 14-men to give them a 25-17 Super Rugby victory over the Canterbury Crusaders in Dunedin yesterday.

Flyhalf Lima Sopoaga added a try and slotted two late penalties for the home side, who moved to the top of the New Zealand conference with their third straight victory. The Crusaders were defeated just once last year on the way to a record-extending eighth Super Rugby title but have now lost successive games after they were beaten 29-19 by the Wellington Hurricanes last week.

They failed to take advantage of hav-

ing an extra man early in the second half when All Blacks winger Waisake Naholo was sin-binned for a head-high tackle on Heiden Bedwell-Curtis. While the Highlanders had bossed the early exchanges, the Crusaders opened the scoring from a well-worked move with winger George Bridge ghosting through a gap from the blindside.

The Highlanders, who were dominating the collisions, however, replied with Liam Colman and Lima Sopoaga both crossing in quick succession to give them a 14-7 lead. Mitch Hunt narrowed the gap to 14-10 with a 20th-minute penalty that ended the first half scoring despite a frantic tussle up to the break, highlighted by plenty of attacking intent, punishing spot tackles and lightning counter attacks.

The Crusaders were unable to capitalise on Naholo's absence as the home side extended their lead when Dixon was put over after props Siate Tokolahi and Aki Seuli had produced storming open-field runs and superb passes to put runners into space. — Reuters

Osaka stuns Halep as rising stars reach Indian Wells final

Kasatkina outlasts Venus in marathon match

INDIANA WELLS: Japan's Naomi Osaka made short work of a subdued world number one Simona Halep on Friday, the unseeded 20-year-old racing to a 6-3 6-0 semi-final victory to set up a surprise BNP Paribas Open final against Daria Kasatkina.

The Russian, also 20, continued her sparkling run of form earlier in the evening when she outlasted American veteran Venus Williams in a three-set slugfest lasting almost three hours.

Osaka's defeat of the top-seeded Halep stood out as the bigger of the two upsets, which played out under the lights on a chilly night in the California desert city of Indian Wells.

The Romanian had won all three of her previous meetings with the emerging Japanese player and looked poised to make a run to reclaim the title she won in 2015, but instead put in a puzzling performance full of uncharacteristic errors and little fight.

The match started as a cagey affair until it reached 3-3 in the opening set before Halep's game unraveled as she coughed up a litany of errors, paving the way for Osaka to reel off the next nine games without much resistance.

"It wasn't easy," Osaka said in a courtside interview. "I was really stressed out the entire time but I am really happy I could end it fast."

Halep offered few excuses for her baffling display but felt that the long wait to get on court had not helped her cause. "I just didn't feel the ball at all. I was out of the game today. I played okay until 4-3 but then

I just went out. I don't know why. I just lost my concentration," she said.

"She was better. She was more prepared and she was ready to play and ready to win the match. I was not."

KASATKINA OUTLASTS VENUS

While Osaka barely broke a sweat in her 64 minute victory, it was a different story for Kasatkina, who emerged the victor after a marathon 4-6 6-4 7-5 battle against Williams. Kasatkina took advantage of a sub-par serving night from the more powerful Williams as the match progressed, forcing long rallies that ultimately wore her 37-year-old opponent down over the course of the contest.

The Russian, who fought back after being two points away from losing in the contest in the third set, dropped her racquet and put her hands on her head in shock after Williams sent a backhand into the net on match point.

"I'm a bit tired," Kasatkina said after the two hour and 50 minute encounter. "One more to go." The win extends the Cinderella run for the tournament's 20th seed, who defeated grand slam champions Sloane Stephens, Caroline Wozniacki and Angelique Kerber without dropping a set before going the distance to take down Williams.

Williams played an excellent all-around game, mixing bruising groundstrokes with frequent approaches to the net and moving well around the court. However,



INDIAN WELLS: Naomi Osaka of Japan returns a shot to Simona Halep of Romania during semifinals of the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden on Friday in Indian Wells, California. — AFP

she was unable to rely on her big serve at key moments and ended up getting broken seven times.

Kasatkina will have to recover before facing Osaka for the first time in their fledgling careers today. Neither

Kasatkina nor Osaka have much experience in big matches with the Japanese player's only career final coming in Tokyo in 2016 and her opponent's lone singles title coming in Charleston last year. — Reuters

Kuwait Ninth Tennis Open tournament finals today

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Ninth Tennis Open Tournament continued at the Kuwait Tennis Center in Yarmouk Sports Club. The tournament which is being held under the patronage of President of Arab and Kuwait Tennis Federations, Honorary President of the Asian Tennis Federation will come to a conclusion tonight with the final match.

Meanwhile Farida Al-Ayyat won the girls under 18 category as she defeated Ritaj Hussein 6-2, 6-3.

Bojan Alicic won the over 45 category by defeating Vanlinton Gregorov 6-0, 6-0.

In the under 11 semifinals Hassan Jamal defeated Abdelalrahman Al-Abdallah 6-3, 6-0, and Mohammad Al-Awadhi defeated Yousuf Al-Linqawi 9-1, so Hassan Jamal and Yousuf Al-Linqawi will play in the final.

In the under 13 semi finals Yaqoub Mohammad defeated Abdelrazaq Abdal 6-3, 7-6 and Maxwel Indesit defeated Hussein Al-Shatti 6-0, 6-3. In the under 17 Essa Qabazard defeated Yousuf Al-Majdaly 6-1, 6-1 and Ahmad Khamis defeated Talal Antar 6-0, 6-1.

In the Men's individuals semi finals Abdelrahman Al-Awadhi defeated Abdallah bu Hamad 6-4, 6-3, and Abdelhameed Al-Shatti defeated Abdelredha Ibrahim 7-5, 6-3.

In the women's semi finals Sarah Behbehani defeated Tamara Alicic 6-0, 6-0, and Manar Al-Jazzaf defeated Aseel Al-Kandary 6-4, 6-3.

In the Men's doubles Abdelhameed Jumaa and Abdelrahman Al-Awadhi, Abdallah Al-Qallaf and Ali Ibrahim, Dawood Sayyed Hashim and Ahmad Khamees, Hassan Al-Mousa and Abdallah Al-Mukaimi all reached the semi finals. The finals will be played at 5 pm today at the main court of Kuwait Tennis Center, in Mishref.



Raonic books semi-final showdown with Del Potro

INDIAN WELLS: Milos Raonic, coming off an injury-riddled 2017, booked a semi-final clash with comeback king Juan Martin Del Potro at the ATP Tour's Indian Wells Masters on Friday. The 27-year-old Raonic defeated American Sam Querrey 7-5, 2-6, 6-3 to pick up just his fourth match win of the season and is seeking to capture his ninth career ATP Tour title.

He'll be up against the eighth-ranked player in the world in Argentina's Del Potro, who beat German Philipp Kohlschreiber 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 in the day's other quarter-final. "I am very happy I was able to put it together today," Raonic said. "I'm in the semis. I am happy with that. I know I can play better." Raonic lost in the final of this event in 2016 and has now made it to the semi-finals in his last three appearances.

Raonic didn't play in Indian Wells last year because of a string of injuries and surgeries that decimated his season. "It's been a catastrophe," he said of the time off due to injuries. The list of things that have put him in the infirmary in the past year is lengthy and might have sent another person into permanent retirement. "Let's go down the list. Right adductor, left glut at the beginning of the year. Then I tore my hamstring at the beginning of February. "After Wimbledon I had to have wrist surgery. Through the summer I tried to play a few events, tried to treat the issue. That wasn't possible. "I had surgery just before the US Open. And then in November I hurt my knee."

Del Potro can certainly sympathize

with Raonic. For Del Potro, reaching the semis is another feather in the cap of his comeback from injuries as he is back in the top 10 for the first time since 2014. "He has everything to be in the top again," Del Potro said of Raonic. "His game is so good. His serves are very strong. He's very good player. So he just needs a couple of weeks to improve his ranking and be where he deserves to be." Former US Open champ Del Potro stepped up his bid for a second straight tournament victory with his over two hour quarter-final win. Del Potro, who won a title earlier this month in Acapulco, Mexico, fended off a stern challenge from Kohlschreiber.

"It wasn't an easy match as everyone could see," the 2009 US Open champion said. "I was waiting for my chance to find my game and I did after the first set." The 29-year-old Del Potro improved to 15-3 on the season as he is looking to get back into the Indian Wells final for the first time since 2013, when he lost to Rafael Nadal.

"THANK GOD I'M HEALTHY"

Del Potro dropped to No. 1,045 in the world before beginning his comeback from three left wrist surgeries in 2016. "But thank God I'm here and healthy," he said. "I'm playing tennis again. I'm in the top 10 again. I have too much love from the crowd, for my fans, and I'm doing this because I love it." Del Potro hit five aces, had no double faults and won 75 percent of his first-serve points against world No. 37 Kohlschreiber. Del Potro said his back is giving him some trouble but he can still play with it.

"All my body feels tight," he said. "But this is the last effort of the weekend, and I'm in the semi-finals, and I'm trying to keep winning. "It's going to be a really tough, tough match tomorrow. But after that my body will have a few days to recover and I will need it." — AFP

Historic 13th World Cup win for Hirscher

ARE: Marcel Hirscher took the season closing giant slalom yesterday to equal the record of 13 wins in a single campaign. The 29-year-old Austrian entered a select club containing only two others members as he matched the number of wins achieved by skiing legends Ingemar Stenmark of Sweden in 1978-79 and Austrian Hermann Maier in 2000-2001. The victory was Hirscher's sixth in a World Cup giant slalom this season, he also won seven slaloms.

In 24 hours he could set a new out-

right record if he wins his favoured slalom, which brings the curtain down on the 2017/2018 season on Sunday. Last month's Olympic gold medallist in the giant slalom and combined was half a second clear of his rivals after the first leg despite a costly mistake, and he did not buckle on the second run as he chased his place in skiing history.

The Austrian was followed home in his 58th career World Cup success by Norway's Henrik Kristoffersen, quickest in the second leg, at .23sec with France's Victor Muffat-Jeandet at .26s.

Hirscher arrived at the Swedish ski resort of Are for the World Cup finals this week already assured of his fifth giant slalom crystal globe. He has also secured a record seventh overall World Cup title in a memorable season in which he secured his first Olympic title at his third Games. — AFP

Shiffrin crushes field in season-ending slalom

ARE: Mikaela Shiffrin, who has already clinched the event title, crushed the field to win the final World Cup slalom of the season in Are, Sweden. The American, who led by just under half a second after the first leg, completed her two runs in a combined time of 1min 46.42sec to finish 1.48sec ahead of Wendy Holdener of Switzerland with Swede Frida Hansdotter third another hundredth of a second back.

The gap between Shiffrin and Holdener in second, was larger than the gap between Holdener and the 12th place finisher, another Swiss Denise Feierabend. The drama in the second run occurred lower down the standings as Slovak Petra Vlhova, third after the first run, collapsed to 11th to drop from second in the event standings to fourth.

Holdener jumped up to second while Hansdotter nipped past Vlhova to take third by two points. For Shiffrin this was a seventh World Cup victory of the season, and 32nd in her career, in her favourite event. In total, Shiffrin, who turned 23 last Tuesday, has won 43 World Cup races.

She missed a medal in the slalom in the Olympics where she finished fourth but she did leave Pyeongchang with a gold in the giant slalom and silver in the combined. Shiffrin clinched the World Cup slalom title for the fifth time with victory last week in Osterschwang in Germany. She is also assured of her second overall title. — AFP



ARE: Slalom World Cup overall winner Mikaela Shiffrin of the US kisses the trophy as she celebrates on the podium after the Women's Slalom event of the Alpine Skiing World Cup in Are, Sweden, yesterday. — AFP

Sports

Warriors fall to Kings with Durant out, Casspi hurt

Celtics downed host Orlando 92-83

LOS ANGELES: Defending champion Golden State saw Kevin Durant sidelined for two weeks, Israeli forward Omri Casspi hurt and their bid to overtake Houston for the NBA's best record falter Friday with a 98-93 loss to Sacramento.

Buddy Hield came off the Sacramento bench to score 22 points to lead the Kings against a struggling Warriors squad without Durant and star guards Stephen Curry and Klay Thompson. Before the game, Durant was put onto the injured list with a rib cartilage fracture and set for re-evaluation in two weeks. The reigning NBA Most Valuable Player ranks sixth among all NBA scorers this season with 26.6 points a game. Durant also averages 6.8 rebounds, 5.4 assists and 1.9 blocked shots a game. Golden State was also without Curry, out with a sore right ankle, and Thompson, sidelined by a broken right thumb. Both will be evaluated next week.

Joining the injury list was reserve Casspi, who sprained his right ankle landing on a rival's foot in the second quarter after playing only six minutes. Golden State's Quinn Cook scored a career-best 25 points in 40 minutes on the court and Draymond Green added 14 points, 10 rebounds and seven assists. But the Kings (23-47) closed the game on an 11-3 run to capture their first back-to-back wins since late January. That dropped Golden State to 52-17 and 2 1/2 games behind Western Conference leader Houston for the best record in the NBA.

With injuries nagging them and the Rockets showing no sign of misfiring, the Warriors might not be able to overtake Houston for the overall playoff home-court edge. "It's a harrowing experience-I'm just trying to process it all," joked Warriors coach Steve Kerr. "Second in the confer-

ence would just be devastating."

Then he turned serious, trying to put the injuries and best-record chase into perspective. "We're not really paying too much attention to the standings. We are just playing," Kerr said. "We're in a good position big picture no matter what happens because our injuries are all relatively minor. We're very hopeful and confident that we'll have everybody back when it counts." That means when the playoffs start April 14.

RAPTORS OUTLAST DALLAS

The Warriors' loss left the level for second overall in the NBA with the Eastern Conference-leading Toronto Raptors, who matched the all-time best team win streak by winning their 11th game in a row, downing Dallas 122-115 in overtime. The Raptors, who own the NBA's best home record at 29-5, had 29 points from DeMar DeRozan, including a short jump shot with 53.1 seconds left in overtime that put the Raptors up 117-115. Jonas Valanciunas then made five of six free throws in the waning seconds to seal the victory, finishing with 21 points and 12 rebounds for Raptors. "I'm not completely happy, because I see the big picture, but I like the fight," Toronto coach Dwane Casey said. "I like the way the guys competed."

The Boston Celtics, second to Toronto in the East, downed host Orlando 92-83. The Magic connected on just 39.1 percent of their shots from the floor and were out-rebounded 55-40. Boston pulled down 16 offensive rebounds and out-scored the Magic in second-chance points 20-8. Guard Terry Rozier, starting in place of injured Kyrie Irving, and reserve Greg Monroe scored 17

“We’re in a good position no matter what happens”

”



OAKLAND: Quinn Cook #4 of the Golden State Warriors handles the ball during the game against the Sacramento Kings on Friday ORACLE Arena in Oakland, California. — AFP

points apiece for the Celtics. The Philadelphia 76ers rallied for a 120-116 home victory over Brooklyn, closing with a decisive 7-1 run. Robert Covington's 3-pointer with 35.9 seconds remaining put the Sixers ahead 116-115 and they wouldn't trail again. Philadelphia All-Star center Joel Embiid celebrated his 24th birthday with a game-high 24 points and a career-high 19 rebounds. Sixers' rising Aussie

star Ben Simmons finished two rebounds shy of a third straight triple-double with 21 points, 12 assists and eight rebounds along with three steals. Russell Westbrook posted his fourth successive triple-double to lead host Oklahoma City over the Los Angeles Clippers 121-113, while Goran Dragic scored 30 points to power Miami over the host Los Angeles Lakers 92-91. — AFP

India wary of Bangladesh power in sub-continent

COLOMBO: India's wicketkeeper-batsman Dinesh Karthik Saturday said Bangladesh are always a tricky opposition and that his team would bring high intensity to the Twenty20 tri-series final between the two sides today.

Skipper Rohit Sharma's team was the first to book its place in the final after winning three of its four games at Colombo's R. Premadasa Stadium. India hold a psychological edge going into the tournament decider, with a 7-0 record in T20s against lowly-ranked Bangladesh. But Karthik insisted India would not take Bangladesh lightly after the Shakib Al Hasan-led team stunned Sri Lanka, beating the hosts by two wickets on Friday to reach the final.

"In sub-continent conditions, (Bangladesh) are a very good team," Karthik told reporters. "When we play Bangladesh, if we win, it's like 'Ok, you've won against Bangladesh', but if we lose, it's like: 'Dude, you've lost to Bangladesh. What are you doing?'"

India went into the tournament without top guns Virat Kohli and Mahendra Singh Dhoni, and lost their opening match to Sri Lanka, but soon bounced back to win three straight games. Karthik, a powerful middle-order batsman who is mostly a second-choice wicketkeeper behind Dhoni, said the team has not lost focus in the absence of big names. "The first thing (Sharma)... said was that although we have a few of our other players missing, we're looking to play exactly the sort of cricket that we've played in the past one year. We're looking to win every match," Karthik said.

India are third in the world T20 rankings, with Pakistan at the top, while Bangladesh are 10th below minnows Afghanistan. — AFP

Rabada appeal hearing set for March 19

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa fast bowler Kagiso Rabada will have his appeal against a two-match suspension tomorrow as he seeks to play in the rest of the Test series against Australia. Rabada was found guilty of "inappropriate and deliberate physical contact with a player" after leaning his shoulder into Steve Smith when he dismissed the Australia captain in the first innings of South Africa's six wicket win in the second test in Port Elizabeth.

Rabada was given three demerit points by the International Cricket Council match referee Jeff Crowe, taking him past the tally of eight that triggers an automatic two-game suspension. New Zealander Michael Heron has been appointed as the judicial commissioner for the hearing, which will be held via videoconference on Monday, the ICC said in a statement.

Heron will then have 48 hours to arrive at a decision. The third test starts Thursday in Cape Town. The four-match series is tied at 1-1. Although there was contact made with Smith, Rabada has maintained it was accidental. He was the fifth player to be sanctioned by the ICC in a tempestuous Test series so far. The others were Australia's David Warner, Nathan Lyon and Mitchell Marsh, and South Africa's Quinton de Kock. — Reuters

Bangladesh's captain Shakib, Nurul fined

COLOMBO: Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan and reserve player Nurul Hasan have been fined 25 percent of their match fees and handed one demerit point each for code of conduct breaches during Friday's ill-tempered Twenty20 international against Sri Lanka.

Ugly scenes unfolded during the closing stages of Bangladesh's successful run chase when play was briefly halted as the tourists remonstrated about two shoulder-high balls at the start of an eventful final over from Isuru Udana.

A furious Shakib was seen gesturing from the boundary to batsmen Mahmudullah and Rubel Hossain to come off the field after the second bounce was not called a no-ball.

Nurul, who had entered the playing area carrying a team message, was seen pointing at Sri Lanka captain Thisara Perera. Shakib was found guilty of "conduct that is contrary to the spirit of the game", while Nurul displayed "conduct that brings the game into disre-

pute", the International Cricket Council (ICC) said in a statement yesterday.

Mahmudullah smashed a six off Udana's fifth delivery to secure a thrilling two-wicket victory for Bangladesh and a place in today's tri-series final against India.

"Friday's incidents were disappointing as you don't want to see such player behaviour during any level of cricket," match referee Chris Broad said. "I understand that it was a tense and an edge-of-the-seat match with a place in the final on the line, but the actions of the two players were unacceptable and cannot be condoned as they clearly went overboard."

"Had the fourth umpire not stopped Shakib and the fielders remonstrating, and then the on-field umpires not intervened between Nurul and Thisara, things could have become worse."

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) later issued an apology for the incident, accepting that their players did not display the "expected level of professionalism" in a tense situation. "The BCB regrets the unfortunate happenings during Friday's match... The Board accepts that conduct of the Bangladesh team in certain instances was unacceptable on a cricket field," BCB said in a statement on the ICC website (www.icc-cricket.com). "We understand that the events may have transpired due to the importance of the match and the pressure that comes with it but feel the expected level

Former England batsman Pietersen calls time on playing career

LONDON: Former England batsman Kevin Pietersen brought the curtain down on his playing career yesterday in a series of messages on social media after deciding not to travel with Quetta Gladiators to Lahore for their Pakistan Super League (PSL) playoff.

Pietersen, 37, who briefly captained England in 2008-09, spent the latter part of his career playing for a number of club teams across the world after controversially being told in 2014 that he was no longer in the national side's plans.

A hard-hitting batsman who often made playing unorthodox shots look easy, Pietersen was part of England's 2005 Ashes-winning side and helped them win the 2010 World T20 title.

His international career ended in 2014 when the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) sacked him, saying that then captain Alastair Cook had to be able to trust and rely on the support of all his players.

Pietersen played 104 Tests for England after making his debut against Australia at Lord's in 2005. He scored 8,181 runs at an average of 47.28 and struck 23 centuries and 35 fifties.

The South Africa-born Pietersen also played 136 one-day internationals-scoring almost 4,500 runs with nine centuries and 25 fifties-as well as 37 Twenty20 internationals.

It was in the shortest format that Pietersen delighted fans in India, playing for Delhi Daredevils and Royal Challengers Bangalore among others in the lucrative Indian Premier League.

SORRY HEART

"Boots up! Feet up! Family, animals, golf...! H O M E," the swashbuckling batsman tweeted yesterday, before following it up with another message to his 3.65 million followers. "Just been told that I scored 30,000+ runs which included 152 fifty's & 68 hundreds in my profes-



Kevin Pietersen

sional career. Time to move on."

Gladiators are due to face Peshawar Zalmi in Lahore on Tuesday with the final scheduled for Karachi next Sunday. All previous games in the Twenty20 league were in Dubai and Sharjah. In a video on the Gladiators' Twitter feed, Pietersen said: "... it is with a very hardened heart, a very sorry heart, that I have to leave Dubai, going back to London now."

"I wish I could travel but unfortunately family's very important, family decision, and I hope that you can respect my decision and my family's decision not to travel." The Gladiators tweeted: "You will be missed @KP24 Great career!! Thank you for everything. Wish

you could (have) stayed with us till PSL final but we respect your decision." Pietersen scored seven runs in his last match for the Gladiators against Islamabad United on Thursday.

"Well done @KP24 on an fantastic career ... Not everyone's Cup of Tea but you will do for me ... Best Batsman I had the pleasure to play with ... 1st England batsman that put fear into the Aussies .. #WellDone," former skipper Michael Vaughan tweeted.

"Well done Kidda what a career," former England paceman Darren Gough wrote in tweet, while the England and Wales Cricket Board simply tweeted: "Thank you @KP24!" — Reuters

Eriksen double sends Spurs into FA Cup semi-finals

Tottenham, chasing their first silverware under Pochettino

SWANSEA: Christian Eriksen proved Tottenham can thrive without Harry Kane as the Dane's double sent them into the FA Cup semi-finals with a 3-0 win at Swansea yesterday. With striker Kane sidelined for several weeks due to ankle ligament damage, Mauricio Pochettino's side received an inspirational performance from Eriksen at the Liberty Stadium.

The midfielder rose to the challenge with a majestic strike to open the scoring early in the first half of the quarter-final. After Erik Lamela increased Tottenham's lead before half-time, Eriksen struck again after the interval to make it seven goals in 10 matches against Swansea.

Tottenham, chasing their first silverware under Pochettino, are back in the Wembley semi-finals after losing to Chelsea at that stage of the competition last season. Pochettino was pleased with the way Tottenham took control without Kane and Dele Alli, who was only a late substitute.

"If you watch the last three games, we won with a different starting eleven and now today too," he said. "What is important is that everyone is available to play and the team is not affected by the names. We keep the same way, the same dynamic and that is so important.

"It was a very good performance. We fully deserved the victory. Now, Wembley for the semi-final." Swansea never got going on a freezing afternoon in south Wales and can now concentrate on trying to preserve their Premier League status.

Swansea's only chance to upset the form book came when they had an early appeal for a penalty

“ It was a very good performance ”

turned down when Tottenham goalkeeper Michel Vorm upended Nathan Dyer. But Tottenham were unruffled and quickly settled into a tempo that had the home side outnumbered and second best in midfield.

The visitors went ahead in the 11th minute through a wonderful strike by Eriksen, although Swansea manager Carlos Carvalhal appealed to the fourth official for VAR to overturn it. Carvalhal felt Martin Olsson had been fouled in the build-up, but there was no debate about the quality of Erikson's finish as the Dane curled the ball past Kristoffer Nordfeldt from the edge of the box after being set up by Lamela.

SPURS STROLL

Tottenham forward Son Heung-Min crashed the ball into the net off the underside of the bar in the 23rd minute only for the goal to be ruled out for offside, correctly concluded the officials in charge of the VAR technology. Eriksen then found himself in space again on the edge of the box, but his curling shot was brilliantly tipped onto the bar by Nordfeldt. A second goal for Spurs felt inevitable and it arrived on the stroke of half-time.

Once again, Swansea were chasing shadows and when Sissoko played in Lamela the Argentinian skipped past Tom Carroll and calmly passed the ball into the corner of the goal before Nordfeldt had time to move.

Swansea made a change at the break, replacing Kyle Naughton with Luciano Narsingh, but the pattern remain unchanged as Spurs pressed for a third goal. Tammy Abraham might have pulled a goal back



SWANSEA: Swansea City's English defender Kyle Bartley (21) blocks a shot from Tottenham Hotspur's Spanish striker Fernando Llorente (38) during the English FA Cup quarter-final football match between Swansea City and Tottenham Hotspur at The Liberty Stadium in Swansea, south Wales yesterday. — AFP

with a rare Swansea opportunity, but when Vorm parried a shot from Olsson, Abraham's diving header flew straight back to the Spurs keeper.

Nordfeldt then kept his team in the contest with a superb save to turn away Erik Dier's goal-bound long

range effort. Just past the hour, Spurs sealed the victory. The hard-working Lucas Moura played the ball back to Eriksen, who claimed a deserved second goal with a low shot from the edge of the box that had sufficient power to go through Nordfeldt's hands. — AFP

Stoke fears grow as Tosun earns Everton victory

STOKE CITY: Turkey forward Cenk Tosun struck twice after the break as Everton beat 10-man Stoke City 2-1 in the snowy Midlands to end a miserable run of away form in the Premier League yesterday.

Stoke had Charlie Adam sent off before halftime for a foul on Wayne Rooney but defended resolutely to hold the visitors at bay until the 69th minute when Tosun scored from close range after a goalmouth scramble. When substitute Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting poked in Joe Allen's free kick in the 77th minute, injuring himself in the process, it seemed second-bottom Stoke might salvage an important point in the relegation scrap.

But their hopes were crushed when Tosun beat England keeper Jack Butland with a diving header from Theo Walcott's delivery to end a run of five straight league defeats on the road for Everton. Stoke remained three points below the safety zone.

BOURNEMOUTH BEAT WEST BROM

Earlier, long-range goals from Jordan Ibe and Junior Stanislas helped Bournemouth grind out a comeback 2-1 home win over the Premier League's bottom team West Bromwich Albion yesterday.

The visitors dominated the first half as Salomon Rondon twice came close before he headed a Kieran Gibbs cross into the path of strike partner Jay



STOKE-ON-TRENT: Stoke City's English defender Glen Johnson (L) vies with Everton's English defender Leighton Baines during the English Premier League football match between Stoke City and Everton at the Bet365 Stadium in Stoke-on-Trent. — AFP

Rodriguez, who turned sharply and blasted the ball past keeper Asmir Begovic from close range four minutes after halftime.

The home side, who lacked any spark or creativity for most of the match, levelled out of the blue as Ibe's tame-looking shot from 25 metres in the 77th minute

bounced in front of goalkeeper Ben Foster.

But there was nothing Foster could do about the 89th-minute Bournemouth winner as Stanislas curled in a delightful free kick from 25 metres, handing West Brom a record-equalling seventh successive league defeat. — Reuters

FIFA gives VAR green light for WCup, lifts 30-year Iraq ban

BOGOTA: Video assistant referee technology (VAR) will make its debut at the World Cup in Russia this summer despite lingering opposition from within and outside football, FIFA president Gianni Infantino said Friday.

"We are going to have in 2018, for the first time, a World Cup with VAR," said Infantino after a meeting of the FIFA Council which, as expected, rubber-stamped the go-ahead given by the rule-making International Football Association Board (IFAB) in Zurich two weeks ago.

"This has been approved and we are really very happy with this decision." The World Cup, which takes place from June 14-July 15, will see VAR used to judge whether or not a goal has been scored, analyse whether a penalty should be awarded, decide on red cards and rectify if a player has been mistakenly sanctioned. "What we want is

to help and to give the referee the possibility to have extra help when he has to make important decisions, and in a World Cup we make very important decisions," added Infantino.

"It cannot be possible that in 2018 everybody, in the stadium or at home, knows in a few seconds if the referee has made a mistake but not the referee himself-not because he doesn't want to know about it but because we forbid him to know. "The VAR is helping the referee and we are going to have a more transparent and fairer game, and that's what we want."

VAR has been trialled since 2016 by 20 federations, including the German Bundesliga and Italian Serie A, with around 1,000 matches involved. But it has not been universally welcomed with even UEFA, the European governing body, still to be convinced.

"Nobody knows exactly how VAR will work. There is already a lot of confusion," said UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin, who insists that VAR will not be used in next season's Champions League.

"I am not at all against it but we must better explain when it will be used. We will see at the World Cup." One of the problems that dogs VAR, say its critics, is not the accuracy of its decisions but the time it takes to arrive at them. It's a drawback which has left many fans and purists frustrated that the flow of a game is interrupted.

"The intervention of VAR takes one minute on average in each game. If we lose a minute to correct mistakes, I think we have done something good," said Infantino earlier this week on a visit to Lima.

However, Colombia coach Luis Fernando Suarez added in an interview with AFP: "It seems hurried to me. I think we should do other trials in other tournaments, analyse them well, and then put it in place."

Suarez, who led Ecuador at the 2006 World Cup in Germany and Honduras in 2014 in Brazil, remains a fan in general of the use of technology in football, which he has witnessed close up. That came in the 2014 tournament when his Honduras team played France in Porto Alegre when the first goal decided through GLT (goal-line technology) was awarded to France. "It's good and necessary that there are changes but it's essential that we don't lose the essence of football," added Suarez.

Meanwhile, FIFA said it was lifting the three-decade ban on Iraq hosting international football with the cities of Arbil, Basra and Karbala given the go-ahead to stage official matches. "We are allowing international matches to be staged in the cities of Arbil, Basra and Karbala," said Infantino. However, FIFA added that they cannot "yet" agree to a request from the Iraqi authorities to organise matches in the capital of Baghdad. Iraq has not played full internationals on home turf since its 1990 invasion of Kuwait.—AFP

Live		Matches on TV
		(Local Timings)
ENGLAND FA CUP		
Wigan Athletic v Southampton	beIN SPORTS HD 2	16:30
Leicester City v Chelsea	beIN SPORTS HD 2	19:30
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE		
Manchester City v Brighton & Hove Albion	beIN SPORTS	15:00
West Ham United v Manchester United	beIN SPORTS	15:00
SPANISH LEAGUE		
Leganes v Sevilla	beIN SPORTS HD 3	14:00
Barcelona v Athletic de Bilbao	beIN SPORTS HD 3	18:15
Celta de Vigo v Malaga	beIN SPORTS HD 1	20:30
Villarreal v Atletico de Madrid	beIN SPORTS HD 3	20:30
Real Madrid v Girona	beIN SPORTS	22:45
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE		
Sampdoria v Internazionale Milano	beIN SPORTS	14:30
Milan v Chievo Verona	beIN SPORTS HD 4	17:00
Hellas Verona v Atalanta	beIN SPORTS HD 9	17:00
Torino v Fiorentina	beIN SPORTS HD 7	17:00
Crotone v Roma	beIN SPORTS HD 1	17:00
Benevento v Cagliari Calcio	beIN SPORTS	17:00
Napoli v Genoa	beIN SPORTS HD 4	22:45
Lazio v Bologna	beIN SPORTS HD 1	22:45
GERMAN BUNDESLIGA		
Borussia Dortmund v Hannover 96	beIN SPORTS HD 5	15:30
Koln v Bayer 04 Leverkusen	beIN SPORTS HD 5	17:30
Leipzig v Bayern Munich	beIN SPORTS HD 5	20:00
FRENCH LEAGUE		
OGC Nice v Paris Saint-Germain	beIN SPORTS HD 6	15:00
Metz v Nantes	beIN SPORTS	17:00
Saint Etienne v Guingamp	beIN SPORTS HD 6	19:00
Olympique Marseille v Olympique Lyonnais	beIN SPORTS HD 6	23:00

Lin stuns old rival Lee Chong Wei at All England

BIRMINGHAM: Lin Dan, the former two-time Olympic champion, turned the clock back for one magical hour on Friday as he ended the title defence of his career-long rival Lee Chong Wei in the quarter-finals of the All-England

Open. The 34-year-old Chinese player beat the 35-year-old Malaysian 21-16, 21-17, though their light-footed movements and brilliantly varied stroke-play would have made it impossible for outsiders to guess their ages.

Lee attacked more than usual to try to nullify the attacking threat of a freshly motivated Lin, and managed to squeeze in front at 16-15 in the first game and 13-10 in the second. But Lin showed just why he has made himself many people's unofficial favourite for his seventh All-England title, making brilliant surges during the most crucial phases of both games and finishing them off quickly.

"I played quite well," said Lin understatedly. "It's a great tournament, and he is one of the great competitors, so this is superb." Lee did not appear too downcast. "I will

move forward now," he said. "There are a lot of competitions to come this year."

But there will surely be fears that this may have been his last appearance at the tournament he says he loves best. Earlier there was an upset when Olympic champion Chen Long lost for the first time to his fellow Chinese player Shi Yuqi, and after his 21-10, 21-17 defeat he appeared to be suggesting that the result was to be expected.

"I am happy that whoever wins this match will go to the semi-finals for Team China," he said. "I often train with him and we are friends," responded the seventh-seeded Shi. "But every time we played before he won. I will try to do better than last year," he added, referring to his loss to Lee

Chong Wei in the 2017 final.

He next has a semi-final with Son Wan Ho, the fifth-seeded Korean. The other Olympic singles champion also lost. Carolina Marin's 21-15, 21-18 defeat against Akane Yamaguchi, the World Super Series title-winner from Japan, was however much more in line with current form.

Yamaguchi was fast, tenacious, and clever at getting the match played where it suited her, in the mid-court and forecourt. She now plays Pusarla Sindhu, the fourth-seeded Indian, who reversed the outcome of the women's singles final at the World Championships in Glasgow in August by recovering from a four-point final game deficit against Nozomi Okuhara, the seventh seeded Japanese, to win 20-22, 21-18, 21-18.—AFP

13 Osaka stuns Halep as rising stars reach Indian Wells final



13 Shiffrin crushes field in season-ending slalom



15 Eriksen double sends Spurs into FA Cup semi-finals



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's Egyptian midfielder Mohamed Salah (L) vies with Watford's Austrian defender Sebastian Prodl during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Watford at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England yesterday. — AFP

Salah's four-goal blitz fires Liverpool

Palace improve survival hopes

LONDON: Mohamed Salah's stunning debut season with Liverpool hit a new high as the Egypt winger's four-goal spree set a club record in a 5-0 demolition of Watford, while Crystal Palace boosted their bid for Premier League survival with a 2-0 victory at Huddersfield yesterday. After a 2-1 defeat at arch rivals Manchester United in their last game, Salah's latest masterclass helped Liverpool get back on track with a fourth win in their last five league games. Salah has scored 36 goals for Liverpool in all competitions since joining from Roma last year—the most by any player in a debut season with the Reds.

Spain striker Fernando Torres netted 33 times for Liverpool in 2007-08. Salah took just four minutes to shred the Watford defence as his clever turn left Miguel Britos sprawled on the turf and opened space to drill

past Orestis Karnezis. The 25-year-old's struggles with Chelsea four years ago are a distant memory and Salah etched his name in the Liverpool history books in the 43rd minute with a close-range finish from Andrew Robertson's cross.

Salah turned provider for Roberto Firmino's goal in the 49th minute with a pin-point cross that the Brazilian guided into the net with an audacious mid-air back-flick. Salah wasn't finished yet as he twisted past a group of bewildered defenders to complete his treble in the 77th minute. He is the first Egyptian player to score a Premier League hat-trick and capping a memorable evening, Salah was on hand to slam in his fourth in the 85th minute after Karnezis spilled Danny Ings' shot.

Liverpool move two points above Tottenham into third place as they aim to qualify for next season's

Champions League via a top four finish. After four successive defeats, Palace climbed out of the relegation zone with a victory that dragged Huddersfield back into trouble. Palace took the lead in the 23rd minute at the John Smith's Stadium when James Tomkins struck from close range after his first effort was blocked by Jonas Lossi. Roy Hodgson's team wrapped up the points in the 68th minute when Luka Milivojevic stroked home a penalty after Andros Townsend was fouled by Mathias Jorgensen.

Palace's first win in eight league games leaves them two points above the bottom three. Huddersfield are three points clear of Southampton, who drop into the relegation zone. "It is vitally important. We have had a difficult run of games and not got any points," Hodgson said. While Palace remain hopeful of retaining their

lucrative top-flight berth, bottom-of-the-table West Bromwich Albion seem destined for relegation after an agonising 2-1 defeat at Bournemouth.

'HURTFUL BLOW'

Albion went in front in the 49th minute at Dean Court when Salomon Rondon's header was met by Jay Rodriguez with a fierce finish for his first goal since January. But Jordon Ibe levelled for Bournemouth in the 77th minute and Junior Stanislas gave the Cherries their first win in five league games with an 89th-minute free-kick. West Brom's seventh successive defeat equals their longest losing streak in the Premier League. They have won just one of their 17 league matches under Alan Pardew and lie nine points from safety with only seven matches left. — AFP

Ireland seal grand slam in style at Twickenham

LONDON: Ireland secured their third Six Nations grand slam in emphatic style yesterday when, on a St Patrick's Day to remember, they overwhelmed defending champions England 24-15 to join the men of 1948 and 2009 in the country's rugby hall of fame.

The Irish made light of sleet and biting wind and an England team desperate to avoid a third successive defeat as they deservedly led 21-5 at halftime with tries by Garry Ringrose, CJ Stander and the prolific Jacob Stockdale.

England, unbeaten at home in the Six Nations since 2012, managed tries by Elliot Daly in each half and another in stoppage time by Jonny May but always looked second-best. Ireland, who have now won 12 games in a row, top the stand-

ings on 26 points ahead of Scotland on 13, Wales 11, France and England on 10 and Italy with one.

Following Scotland's win in Rome earlier on Saturday and with just the Wales versus France game left in the championship, England will finish outside the top three for the first time in 12 years and could end as low as fifth – their worst performance in 35 years.

"Words can't describe how delighted we are," said Ireland captain Rory Best. "We knew it would be a tough task to come here and win. It was a ferocious test match. We had to make every moment count and we knew the reward would be worth the massive effort required."

A year ago in Dublin Ireland ended English grand slam hopes by handing Eddie Jones his first defeat as England coach and on Saturday they rubbed it in by giving him his first at Twickenham. The Australian's oft-stated aim has been to build England into a team capable of challenging New Zealand as the best in the world but at the moment they have dropped so far off the pace that they are not even close to being the best in Europe.

That honour goes to Ireland, deserved champions – though the grand slam looked a long way away when they began the 41-phase move that ended with a Jonny Sexton drop goal to snatch

victory in their first match away to France. They had no need for such heroics on Saturday, however, as they were rarely troubled at a ground where they had lost on three of their last four visits. It was all Ireland in the opening 20 minutes as they built a 14-0 lead that England could hardly complain about.

First the TMO ruled that Ringrose had fairly reached the ball after Anthony Watson spilled a Sexton up and under before Stander skidded into the base of a post after Bundee Aki had blasted through the English midfield.

England finally roused themselves with a series of driving mauls that created space for Owen Farrell to find with a deft kick for Daly to reach on the left wing. But just as the crowd were getting ready for halftime with the game delicately poised at 14-5, the visitors struck in stoppage time with a knockout blow: The TMO again ruled in their favour as Stockdale knocked on legally – with his knee before diving on the ball for his 11th try in his nine internationals to send Ireland in 21-5 ahead. England, seeking to avoid a third successive defeat in the competition for the first time since 2006, came out full of fire in the second half but came up against the disciplined, organised and hugely motivated defence that has been a key aspect in Ireland's march to the title.— Reuters



LONDON: England's number 8 Sam Simmonds (C) is tackled during the Six Nations international rugby union match between England and Ireland at the Twickenham, west London, yesterday. — AFP

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21 Avaya commends Kuwaiti customers for driving knowledge economy



KUWAIT: ABK management addresses the regular general assembly meeting at the ABK's headquarters. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

ABK reports KD 35.7m in net profit for 2017

Operating profit grew by 9.4% in bank's 50th year of operations in Kuwait

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Building on its strong business performance from last year, Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced its financial results for the fiscal year ending Dec 31, 2017 during a regular general assembly meeting held yesterday at the ABK's headquarters, which was attended by 95.31 percent of shareholders.

ABK grew its operating income by 6.4 percent, from KD 147 million to KD 157 million, and its operating profit by 9.4 percent, from KD 89.4 million to KD 97.8 million. ABK reported a net profit of KD 35.7 million for the year, a growth of 10 percent, against KD 32.5 million in 2016. Earnings per share stood at 22 fils, compared to 20 fils in 2016. The bank continued to aggressively add to its total provisions, which reached KD 58 million in 2017 against KD 52.4 million in 2016. This was supported by impressive performances in Kuwait and Egypt.

Asset quality remained strong with the NPL ratio falling to 1.67 percent with an NPL coverage of 400 percent. Capital adequacy ratio was robust at 17.23 percent. In Egypt, the bank continued to expand its presence, with assets increasing 40 percent, loan and credit facilities growing by 52 percent and deposits up 46 percent. The ABK Board of Directors have proposed a distribution of 12 fils per share cash dividend compared to 11 fils in 2016, subject to the approval of ABK's General Assembly Meeting.

Furthermore, ABK's credit ratings remained constant with a rating of A2 from Moody's and A+ from Fitch. This reflects the Bank's healthy capital position and excellent liquidity, which is

fully compliant with the Central Bank of Kuwait's conservative and robust regulatory system.

Recognized by Global Finance Magazine as one of the top ten safest banks in the region and ranking No. 29th in Emerging Markets, ABK also received prestigious awards from Banker Middle East, Asian Banker, NASEBA, International Finance Magazine (IFM), Arabian Business Magazine, and The European, a Thomson Reuters Affiliate. This is attributed to the bank's outstanding performance throughout the year including its successful implementation of the new Finacle core banking system in the UAE and Kuwait, as well as its investment in digital bank-



Operating income rose 6.4%, from KD 147 million

ing to maximize ABK's reach across the region.

Earlier in the year, ABK further diversified its funding sources when it launched a successful debut senior bond issue of \$500 million. This issue was enthusiastically received by the international financial markets and drew strong interest from investors in SE Asia, the Middle East and Europe.

Talal Mohammed Reza Behbehani, Chairman of ABK said: "Over the year we maintained our cautious approach, consolidating our financial

position while embracing new opportunities for expanding our business across our markets, especially in Egypt. I am particularly proud that this success has been achieved through the close working relationships developed across the business at all levels. This year will go down as one of our most memorable years as we mark our 50th year of operations in the region. We will continue to demonstrate a cautious approach, consolidating our financial position while embracing new opportunities for expanding our business across our markets."

Michel Accad, Chief Executive Officer at ABK commented, "Today, it is crucial to focus our attention on preparing the Bank to meet the growing needs of our customers. We are substantially simplifying our processes to ensure greater efficiency and drive revenue growth, and we are investing in new products, channels, customer service and information technology to improve the overall customer experience. At the same time ABK is at the forefront of the implementation and roll-out of the new International Financial Reporting Standard IFRS9 from the beginning of 2018, as well as for the forthcoming introduction of Value Added Tax (VAT) in Kuwait."

This year, ABK's commitment to 'Simpler Banking' was further strengthened through numerous enhancements including the launch of the new core banking system in its UAE and Kuwait operations. This new system, which will also be introduced in ABK - Egypt, will ensure customers receive consistent service, regardless of where their ABK account is held, through greater interaction within the bank's systems,



KUWAIT: ABK management team poses for a photo.

and increased efficiency in responding to customer needs and requests.

Fawzy Al-Thunayan, General Manager, Board Affairs, said that ABK doesn't have expansion plans currently. "We are present in Kuwait, UAE and Egypt, and these three markets are enough for this moment, unless a new attractive opportunity arises. Egypt has the highest growth - it started smaller but it's growing faster," he pointed out during a press conference held after the general meeting.

ABK is ready to apply the International Finance Reporting System (IFRS9). "The bank is very well prepared for implementing the IFRS9. It depends on the implementation, and if we implement it fully, then we won't need any precautionary provisions. We are waiting for the

guidelines of the Central Bank, which we may receive next week. Anyway, the impact will be positive or neutral on the bank, as the requirements will be equal or less than the precautionary provisions," stressed Accad.

Abdullah Al-Sumait, Deputy Chief General Manager, noted that the bank has big potential in Egypt. "Egypt accounts for almost 20 percent of total profits. In the past the bank was very small and had no activities, so it was easy to grow from scratch very fast. Also, the economic environment in Egypt has improved a lot. We have chosen the Egypt market for expansion due to the various governmental projects taking place now. The growth outside the GCC tends to be faster, as there are more opportunities," he stated.

UK plc readies plans for post-Brexit world

LONDON: Britain's top businesses are cranking their Brexit plans into gear, shifting operations abroad to ensure a smooth transition when the nation quits the European Union in one year's time. A string of airlines, banks and other corporate household names have activated their contingency plans to move jobs or restructure amid ongoing uncertainty, as British Prime Minister Theresa May battles Brussels for a post-Brexit trade deal. Britain intends to seek free trade deals with its major trading partners once it leaves the EU, as planned, in March 2019.

Many large companies want to retain their

London presence however despite jitters over the economic outlook.

Household goods

Anglo-Dutch giant Unilever on Thursday named Rotterdam over London to host its headquarters, dealing an early blow to Britain's efforts to keep multinational companies onside after Brexit. Unilever, whose brands include yeast extract Marmite, PG Tips tea and Persil washing powder, intends to "simplify" from two legal entities into a single one incorporated in the Netherlands, but its 7,300 workers in Britain are safe. While analysts see the decision as a consequence of Britain's plans to leave the EU in March 2019, the government and the company argue that Brexit has nothing to do with it.

Financial services

But a swathe of big-hitting financial institutions, including British bank HSBC, Swiss peer

UBS and US giants JPMorgan and Morgan Stanley, have confirmed plans to move some activities to Paris, as well as to Amsterdam, Dublin and Frankfurt. US asset manager Northern Trust has chosen Luxembourg for its base, and US bank giant Citigroup says it will move some operations from London to Frankfurt.

Japanese megabank MUFG has picked Amsterdam as a base for its EU securities operation. Other Japanese firms including Nomura Holdings, Daiwa Securities and Sumitomo Mitsui Financial Group have said they are planning to move EU bases from London to Frankfurt.

The Bank of England estimates that 10,000 UK financial services jobs could move abroad on the first day of Brexit, after warnings of up to 75,000 relocations in total.

London has already accepted that under Brexit, the capital's financial firms will lose so-called passporting rights that allow them to trade freely with other EU countries.

Finance minister Philip Hammond says that a Brexit trade deal will happen only if it includes the financial services industry, but Brussels insists there will be no "cherry picking" for any sector. Earlier this month, French Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire suggested that thousands of jobs will move from London to France after Brexit.

Automakers

Britain's largely foreign-owned and key car sector is also bracing for Brexit. Nissan boss Carlos Ghosn approved new investments at Sunderland plant in northeast England, after the Japanese giant received private guarantees from London over Brexit. The chief executive of French carmaker PSA Peugeot Citroen has however warned that Brexit threatens the future of a key car plant run by its UK-based Vauxhall division. Carlos Tavares said that uncertainty over Britain's eventual exit from the European Union

has placed in doubt the future of PSA's Ellesmere Port factory in northwest England.

Airlines

Britain's EasyJet, Europe's second biggest carrier by passenger numbers, has applied for a British operating license to ensure it can continue flying. Other airlines, like low-cost rivals Ryanair and Wizz Air, have made similar moves amid concerns that Brexit could severely disrupt air traffic between Britain and continental Europe. Back in July 2017, EasyJet applied for a new air operator's certificate in Austria and established a Vienna-based division to allow it to continue flying across Europe regardless of the final Brexit deal between Brussels and London. Airlines face uncertainty on the Brexit horizon, having soared under the EU's Single European Sky system over the last two decades. Among the mass of agreements that Britain will now have to renegotiate are those governing flights between Britain and the rest of the EU. — AFP



YUSUF A. ALGHANIM & SONS AND GENERAL MOTORS

Celebrate 70 Years Partnership

Omar Alghanim, CEO of Alghanim Industries and Mario Spangenberg, President and MD of GM Africa & Middle East, among top management of both companies.



Omar Alghanim and Mario Spangenberg laying the foundation bricks of the new Cadillac and Chevrolet facilities.

And inaugurate the first flagship Cadillac and Chevrolet showrooms in Kuwait.

Yusuf A. Alghanim & Sons, the exclusive distributor of Cadillac and Chevrolet cars in Kuwait, celebrated their 70-year partnership with General Motors Middle East at a press event hosted by CEO of Alghanim Industries, Omar K. Alghanim, held at the construction site of the new Cadillac and Chevrolet showrooms.

The event was attended by President and Managing Director of General Motors Middle East and Africa, Mario A. Spangenberg, and executives from Alghanim Industries.

To mark the 70-year partnership, Vice President of General Motors Kuwait, Rajesh Krishnan presented the renderings of the new Cadillac and Chevrolet facilities to be built. Following the presentation, the attendees inaugurated the

construction site of the first flagship Cadillac and Chevrolet showrooms by laying the first brick and cement foundation stone.

Speaking at the event, Omar K. Alghanim said: "This is an exciting year for Yusuf A. Alghanim & Sons, as we celebrate the groundbreaking of our newest facilities. This year, we're also celebrating a huge milestone for our company – 70 years of partnership with General Motors. 70 years ago my grandfather, Yusuf Ahmed Alghanim, became partners with General Motors, laying the foundation to what is now the longest standing dealership in our region. My father and our Chairman, Kutayba Yusuf Alghanim, propelled this partnership to new heights and grew our business to the household name it is today. I am proud to be the third generation of the Alghanim family to partner with this global automotive leader."

He went on to say, "These facilities will be exceptional. We've taken our extensive knowledge in the automotive sector to create a state-of-the-art experience for our customers. We continue to deliver on our promise to serve, support and place our customers at the heart of everything we do."

President and Managing Director of General Motors Middle East and Africa, Mario A. Spangenberg, said: "Alghanim's customer-focused approach has served as an example in the industry, helping to strengthen the presence of GM's Chevrolet and Cadillac brands in Kuwait."

He continued saying, "Celebrating the 70-year anniversary together with committing to new facilities are a clear indication of the success of our partnership. We look forward to working with Alghanim to ensure that we continue to deliver a quality ownership experience for our customers, and to reaffirm our mutual legacy of excellence."



Mario Spangenberg giving his speech

Since 1948, Yusuf A. Alghanim & Sons and General Motors have provided quality automobiles and automobile services. Alghanim has been the recipient of the GM Grandmasters award 13 times, presented to outstanding dealers of Chevrolet and Cadillac vehicles who raise the overall levels of customer care. The partnership continues to grow, with ongoing investment in the customer experience starting from the point of sale and beyond. The Cadillac and Chevrolet service center is the biggest and most advanced in the world, providing customers with the comfort and convenience of full-scale automotive services.



Omar Alghanim giving his speech.



Photo of the attendees

BAYAN weekly market report

Boursa Kuwait remains mixed amid speculative operations

Average daily trading volume reaches 52.45 million shares

KUWAIT: Boursa Kuwait ended last week with mixed closings, whereas the Price Index closed at 6,760.23 points, down by 0.26 percent from the week before closing, however, the Weighted Index increased by 0.39 percent after closing at 412.10 points, and the KSX-15 Index closed at 957.99 points up by 0.84 percent. Furthermore, last week's average daily turnover decreased by 1.45 percent, compared to the preceding week, reaching KD 10.08 million, whereas trading volume average reached 52.45 million shares, recording a decrease of 17.91 percent.

The market ended last week's trading with mixed closings for its three indices, as the Price Index was subject to the profit collection operations executed on the stocks of previous increases, in addition to the speculative operations that the small-cap stocks were subject to the most, while the Weighted and KSX-15 indices were able to record limited weekly gains, as a result of the collection operations that targeted some leading companies' stocks, especially the ones that declared positive financial results and dividends for 2017. The Market witnessed such performance in light of a dropped trading indicators reaching low levels, especially the trading volume, which reached its lowest level in the year, in one of the week's sessions.

Also, last week witnessed a trading activity on about 152 stock out of 176 listed stock in the Market, where 58 stock grew against 78 stock declined, and 40 stock remained at no change.

On the other hand, Boursa Kuwait was able to record market gains of around KD 108 million last week, compared to the previous week, whereas its market capitalization reached by the end of last week around KD 27.40 billion against KD 27.29 billion in the previous week, and up by 0.39 percent. The Market gains for Boursa Kuwait reached since the beginning of the year around KD 458 million, up by 1.70 percent compared to its value at end of year 2017, where it reached then KD 26.94 billion. (Note: The Market capitalization for the listed companies in the Primary Market is calculated based on the average number of outstanding shares as per the latest available financial statements).

As far as the daily trading activity during last week: the three Market indices fluctuated during the first session in light of a weak performance and refrain from purchasing, as the Price and Weighted indices decreased affected by the selling pressures executed on some stocks, especially in the Technology and the Oil & Gas sectors, the most declining sectors by the end of the session. On the contrary, the KSX-15 Index was able to end the first session of the week with limited growth, affected by the active trading that concentrated on a number of heavy stocks. The Market witnessed such fluctuation in light of the low cash liquidity that reached about KD 8.7 million, where most of the liquidity concentrated on the Banks sector in particular, as this sector received 55 percent of the total cash liquid-

INDICES PERFORMANCE				
		Price Index	Weighted Index	KSX 15 Index
Weekly	Last week	6,760.23	412.10	957.99
	Previous week	6,778.18	410.49	950.04
	Change (Point)	-17.95	1.61	7.95
	Change (%)	-0.26%	0.39%	0.84%
Annual	Last year	6,408.01	401.42	914.87
	Change (Point)	352.22	10.68	43.12
	Change (%)	5.50%	2.66%	4.71%

ity during the session.

The Market witnessed in the second session a negative performance that pushed its three indices to close in the red zone, in light of the continuous refrain of the traders from investment purchasing in the Boursa, amid a noticeable activity of the quick speculative operations that targeted mainly some small-cap stocks, especially the ones that did not disclose its annual results for 2017, where the Market decline came as a result to the profit collection operations that were present during the session and included many small-cap



Consumer goods sector headed the losers' list

and leading stocks, which came amid a noticeable growth to the cash liquidity that reached by the end of the session approximately KD 13 million. On the mid-week session however, the green color returned once again on the Market indices, which were able to record limited gains in light of the random purchasing operations that included some stocks, especially the small-cap ones that have been traded below 100 fils, however the leading stocks witnessed some stabilization.

Moreover, the Market continued recording grouped gains in the last two sessions of the week, as its three indices succeeded to remain in the green zone, as a result to

the success of purchasing operations over the selling pressures that were present, and amid concentration of the traders on the leading stocks that witnessed some gains and pushed the three Market indices to record increases, especially the Weighted and KSX-15 indices, which were able to compensate its losses on the weekly level and were able to end the week's trading in the green zone, while the Price Index was able to compensate part of such losses only, to end the week's trading with a relatively limited decline.

For the annual performance, the Price Index ended last week recording 5.50 percent annual gain compared to its closing in 2017, while the Weighted Index increased by 2.66 percent, and the KSX-15 recorded a 4.71 percent growth.

Sectors' indices

Five of Boursa Kuwait's sectors ended last week in the green zone, and seven recorded declines compared to its closings in the previous week. Last week's highest gainer was the Basic Materials sector, achieving 1.89 percent growth rate as its index closed at 1,328.06 points. Whereas, in the second place, the Consumer Services sector's index closed at 876.01 points recording 1.82 percent increase. The Industrial sector came in third, as its index achieved 0.96 percent growth, ending the week at 1,915.89 points.

On the other hand, the Consumer Goods sector headed the losers list as its index declined by 4.01 percent to end the week's activity at 784.81 points. The Oil & Gas sector was second on the losers' list, which index declined by 3.26 percent, closing at 942.89 points, followed by the Real Estate sector, as its index closed at



1,159.22 points at a loss of 1.53 percent.

Sectors' activity

The Financial Services sector dominated a total trade volume of around 74.48 million shares changing hands during last week, representing 28.40 percent of the total market trading volume. The Real Estate sector was second in terms of trading volume as the sector's traded shares were 23.64 percent of last week's total trading volume, with a total of around 62

million shares.

On the other hand, the Banks sector's stocks were the highest traded in terms of value; with a turnover of around KD 25.41 million or 50.43 percent of last week's total market trading value. The Industrial sector took the second place as the sector's last week turnover was approx. KD 8.46 million representing 16.80 percent of the total market trading value. —Prepared by: Studies & Research Department - Bayan Investment Co.

SECTORS TRADING ACTIVITY				
Sector	Volume	To Market %	Value	To Market %
OIL & GAS	1,992,573	0.76%	172,164	0.34%
BASIC MATERIALS	1,752,715	0.67%	740,423	1.47%
INDUSTRIALS	29,060,148	11.08%	8,464,467	16.80%
CONSUMER GOODS	1,335,422	0.51%	514,275	1.02%
HEALTH CARE	1,000	0.00%	130	0.00%
CONSUMER SERVICES	21,442,936	8.18%	2,728,506	5.41%
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	12,419,979	4.74%	3,833,895	7.61%
BANKS	57,324,614	21.86%	25,414,911	50.43%
INSURANCE	87,984	0.03%	6,780	0.01%
REAL ESTATE	61,996,519	23.64%	4,193,769	8.32%
FINANCIAL SERVICES	74,478,045	28.40%	4,281,651	8.50%
TECHNOLOGY	367,835	0.14%	42,266	0.08%

SECTORS INDICES PERFORMANCE				
Sector	Last Week Closing	Previous Week Closing	Weekly Ch. %	Annual Ch. %
OIL & GAS	942.89	974.68	-3.26%	-2.15%
BASIC MATERIALS	1,328.06	1,303.37	1.89%	5.87%
INDUSTRIALS	1,915.89	1,897.60	0.96%	4.16%
CONSUMER GOODS	784.81	817.58	-4.01%	-4.57%
HEALTH CARE	1,403.66	1,391.79	0.85%	-7.07%
CONSUMER SERVICES	876.01	860.38	1.82%	-2.79%
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	526.50	529.30	-0.53%	-5.71%
BANKS	937.36	932.19	0.55%	2.71%
INSURANCE	1,019.39	1,030.19	-1.05%	-7.83%
REAL ESTATE	1,159.22	1,177.19	-1.53%	24.23%
FINANCIAL SERVICES	616.26	617.27	-0.16%	-0.42%
TECHNOLOGY	525.11	525.64	-0.10%	9.73%

Wall Street Weekly Report

Oil rallies for weekly gain as S&P ends losing streak

NEW YORK: Oil prices finished the week at a gain after a big Friday rally, and US stock indices ended flat-to-higher, to close a bumpy week on a high note. Crude prices had been on track for a weekly loss, but spiked on Friday as energy investors looked to cover short bets ahead of a televised interview Sunday by the US news program "60 Minutes" with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

US crude rose 1.72 percent to \$62.24 per barrel and Brent was last at \$66.12, up 1.54 percent on the day. During the session, Brent hit \$66.42, its highest since Feb 28. Gains on Wall Street also supported crude futures, which have recently been moving in tandem with US stock indices.

The S&P 500, which was down 1.5 percent on the week through Thursday, avoided its first five-day losing streak of 2018, gaining 4.68 points, or 0.17 percent, to 2,752.01. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 72.85 points, or 0.29 percent, to 24,946.51, while the Nasdaq Composite added 0.25 points, or 0 percent, to 7,481.99.

Wall Street nevertheless posted losses for the week, as shares struggled to weather a growing sense of turmoil in US

President Donald Trump's administration and signs that protectionist policies could spur a trade war. Those fears took a back seat on Friday to economic data showing US factory output jumped 1.1 percent in February.

"Today, there are not a lot of headlines out of Washington, so the focus is more on the economy," said Keith Lerner, chief market strategist at SunTrust Advisory Services in Atlanta.

Energy led the S&P with a 0.9 percent gain amid the spike in oil prices. Retailer Walmart Inc added 1.9 percent, and Home Depot Inc half a percent, after the University of Michigan's preliminary reading of consumer sentiment index rose more than expected to 102.0.

Both of those gains were down, however, from higher climbs earlier in the day. European shares lost ground for the week, despite a modest gain on Friday, driven by exchange operator NEX Group Plc's 30-percent jump after a takeover offer from US-based peer CME Group Inc.

The pan-European FTSEurofirst 300 index rose 0.29 percent and MSCI's gauge of stocks across the globe was about flat. US Treasury yields rose on the industrial data, and in anticipation of next

week's Federal Open Market Committee meeting, at which the US central bank is expected to raise interest rates for the first time this year. Benchmark 10-year notes last fell 6/32 in price to yield 2.8445 percent, from 2.824 percent late on Thursday.

The 30-year bond last fell 10/32 in price to yield 3.077 percent, from 3.061 percent Thursday. The economic data, which bolstered the consensus expectation of a rate hike, also pushed the dollar up slightly against a basket of six currencies, with the dollar index rising 0.08 percent. The euro fell 0.15 percent to \$1.2286.

But fears of political tensions did not disappear entirely, boosting the safe-haven Japanese yen, which strengthened 0.29 percent versus the greenback at 106.05 per dollar. The dollar had earlier fallen as low as 105.61 against the yen, the lowest since March 7.

Sterling was last trading at \$1.3944, up 0.06 percent on the day.1.3944 rising 0.08 percent. Eurozone bond yields kept falling after another European Central Bank policymaker warned that inflation in the bloc remained sluggish, a potential hurdle to the withdrawal of monetary stimulus. — Reuters



NEW YORK: The closing numbers are displayed after the closing bell of the Dow Industrial Average at the New York Stock Exchange in New York. — AFP

Business

Avaya commends Kuwaiti customers for driving knowledge economy

Avaya recognizes innovation and development of leading Kuwaiti customers

KUWAIT: Avaya, a leading global business communications company, commended the commitment of organizations in Kuwait to driving development of the nation's knowledge-based economy by leveraging technology. Avaya honored leading customers for their innovative deployments of its next-generation communications solutions in key industry sectors, including banking, retail, aviation, oil and gas, financial services, and healthcare.

The customer awards were the highlight of the Experience Avaya Kuwait event, which took place on March 12-13 in Kuwait City. The awards recognized outstanding organizations in their sectors that have used Avaya's customer experience and unified communications solutions to increase operational efficiency, enhance team engagement and deliver superior customer experiences.

During Experience Avaya Kuwait, the following companies were recognized: Kuwait Finance House: Contact Center Customer of the Year - Financial Services, Kuwait Oil Company: Unified Communications Customer of the Year - Oil and Gas, Kuwait Airways: Contact Center Customer of the Year - Aviation, M.H. Alshaya Co. Unified Communications Customer of the Year - Retail, Al-Jahra Hospital: Unified Communications Customer of the Year - Healthcare, Gulf Bank: Avaya Loyalty and Commitment.

Kuwait has announced its commitment to building a sustainable, knowledge-based economy in its "New Kuwait Vision 2035," which focuses on the contribution of the private sector. Avaya has active partnerships with many of the leading systems integrators in the country, working with enterprises of all sizes - from SMBs to the largest oil and gas providers - to develop the latest communications solutions. At Experience Avaya Kuwait, senior Avaya executives explained how emerging technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence and the Internet of Things, are shaping economies.

The session on March 12 was held in association with Middle East Telecommunications Company (METCO). Alghanim Industries and other Avaya partners supported

the March 13 session of Experience Avaya Kuwait.

"With organizations globally facing ever-more challenging competitive markets, Kuwait is embracing so-called disruptive technologies to enhance the nation's regional and global presence. Investment in ICT infrastructure and human capital is the responsibility of both the public and private sector, to ensure emerging technologies such as AI are harnessed for the benefit of the Kuwaiti people. The companies that we recognized at Experience Avaya Kuwait are all playing an important role in developing Kuwait's economy" said Fadi Hani, VP of Avaya MEA & Turkey.

"We are keen to present the latest technologies of Customer Experience from leading partners such as Avaya to our customers in Kuwait, to contribute in building their communications capabilities and growing the State's knowledge economy. This week's event reinforced the commitment of our collaborative ecosystem towards reinstating Kuwait as a trade and financial hub" said Krikor Tutunjan, Group General Manager of METCO.



Ahli United Bank delivers Audi R8 keys to the winner

KUWAIT: Muneera Suwayed AlAjmi, the winner of Ahli United Bank's (AUB) Salary Transfer campaign draw, has received the keys to her brand new Audi R8. The prize is part of the Bank's salary transfer campaign that encourages customers to transfer their monthly salaries to the Bank.

The winner arrived at Audi's new showroom in Al-Shuwaikh to receive the keys of her new car in the presence of a number of executives from AUB including, CEO Richard Groves and the Head of Branches Amer Najem, who were there to welcome Al-Ajmi.

Al-Ajmi expressed her delight and appreciation to the Bank for giving her the chance and opportunity to win this valuable prize. She commented she had never won such a prize before, and further commended the Bank's products and services.

AUB announced earlier the roll out of its special Salary Transfer Campaign, which offered new customers who had transferred their salaries to the Bank to choose from an extensive number of instant cash gifts valued at KD 300 for salaries of KD 1,000 and above, and KD 200 for salaries less than KD 1,000. Moreover, customers can receive Qard Hasan of a maximum value of KD 8,000 with a flexible repayment period of up to five years, in an effort to provide more room for reduced monthly installments. The campaign also offered customers the chance to enter into its grand draw to win an Audi R8 V10.

The benefits of this campaign also included providing customers who transferred their salaries to AUB's Al-Hassad Islamic Account, free Takaful life insurance against natural death worth 36 monthly salaries up to KD 50,000 maximum, in addition to free Takaful insurance against accidental death worth 72 monthly salaries up to KD 100,000 maximum. The minimum salary transferred must be KD 700. Customers were also given the chance to enter the draw for Al-Hassad Islamic Account prize draws,

which offers the largest prize draw value to the largest number of winners, while also being the first draw program in Kuwait that is sharia-compliant.

Furthermore, customers who transferred their salaries during the campaign period received free credit cards during the first year of the card issuance. Ahli United Bank continues to develop its offerings, products and innovative services to ensure that its customers always have the best banking experience locally and regionally.



Lufthansa Group achieves best result in its history

KUWAIT: "Our endeavors of the past few years are paying off. Our modernization has a sustainable impact. We have achieved the best result in the history of our company. 2017 was a very good year for our customers, our employees and our shareholders," says Carsten Spohr, Chairman of the Executive Board & CEO of Deutsche Lufthansa AG. "Last year we were able to reduce costs again, while at the same time becoming the first - and the only - airline in Europe to be awarded a five-star rating. We are lowering our costs where this does not affect the customer, and are simultaneously further investing in our product and service quality."

Total revenues for the Lufthansa Group in 2017 amounted to EUR 35.6 billion, a 12.4 percent increase on the previous year. The Adjusted EBIT of EUR 2.97 billion was a significant 69.7 percent year-on-year improvement. And the 8.4 percent Adjusted EBIT margin was up 2.9 percentage points compared to previous year. EBIT for the year increased more than EUR 1 billion to EUR 3.3 billion. The strong increase of EBIT includes the positive EUR 582 million one-off effect from agreeing on the collective labor agreement with the Vereinigung Cockpit union for the pilots of Lufthansa, Lufthansa Cargo and Germanwings, which was recognized in the income statement in December.

"We are particularly pleased that we were again able to lower our passenger airlines' unit costs excluding fuel and currency factors last year. This is in particular as passenger related costs were actually up due to higher load factors, the variable remuneration was higher in light of strong result development, and additional

costs because of compensation paid for the flight cancellations at Air Berlin burdened our cost as well," adds Ulrik Svensson, Chief Financial Officer of Deutsche Lufthansa AG. "Excluding these one-off effects, we reduced our unit costs by 1.8 percent."

The Lufthansa Group invested some EUR 3 billion in 2017, around a third more than in the previous year. This is partly due to investments of some EUR 900 million into aircraft from the Air Berlin flight operations. "These higher investments also reflect the increased size of our Group. But investments relative to revenue remain on one level with the world's most successful airlines'," comments Ulrik Svensson. "Important is that the return on capital continues to increase. In 2017, our AdjustedROCE (after tax) improved by 4.6 percentage points to 11.6 percent." Despite the higher capital expenditure, free cash flow almost doubled in 2017 to EUR 2.3 billion. Net financial debt rose 6.8 percent to EUR 2.9 billion. This figure includes an initial EUR 1.7 billion funding for the new defined contributions model of the flight attendants' pension fund.

Total pension provisions decreased by EUR 3.2 billion in 2017. The year-end equity ratio stood at 26.5 percent, an increase of 5.9 percentage points.

"On the basis of these very good results, we propose a dividend of EUR 0.80 per share to the Annual General Meeting," says Ulrik Svensson. "This is a 60 percent increase of the pay-out compared to last year. This is the minimum level of dividend payment that we aim to maintain in the coming years."

Network Airlines

The Group's Network Airlines - Lufthansa, SWISS and Austrian Airlines - increased their Adjusted EBIT by nearly 50 percent to some EUR 2.3 billion. With strong demand and a positive pricing environment, the Network Airlines raised their EBIT margin 2.6 percentage points to almost ten percent.

Point-to-Point Airlines

Despite the significant expenses in the context of

acquiring capacities from Air Berlin, Eurowings reduced its unit costs excluding fuel and currency factors by 6.5 percent. On the back of this and strong market demand, Adjusted EBIT increased by some EUR 200 million. Despite adverse one-off factors related to market consolidation, the Group's Point-to-Point Airlines improved their Adjusted EBIT margin by 7.3 percentage points and achieved a positive Adjusted EBIT of around

EUR 100 million. The inorganic growth after the insolvency of Air Berlin will make a positive contribution to the Point-to-Point Airlines' from 2019 onwards.

Aviation Services

The Group's Aviation Services in total achieved a very good result, though the development among the business segments was quite different. A combination of cost reductions and strong demand helped Lufthansa Cargo to improve its Adjusted EBIT by almost EUR 300 million to EUR 242 million. The EUR 415 million earnings of Lufthansa Technik were broadly in line with prior-year levels. Against the background of the continuing transformation of its European operations, the LSG Group sustained a EUR 38 million decline in its earnings for the year to EUR 66 million.

Outlook

EUR 700 million higher fuel costs can be largely offset by an improved operating performance, so that for 2018 in total an Adjusted EBIT only slightly below previous year is expected. Organic capacity is expected to increase by some seven percent, as unit revenues excluding currency factors should remain broadly stable. Unit costs excluding fuel and currency factors should be further reduced by 1 to 2 percent. "We will continue to consistently pursue our modernization," concludes Carsten Spohr. "And in doing so, we will retain our clear focus on reducing our costs and at the same time raising our quality. This is the only way to sustainably increase our profitability. From a position of strength, we will continue to drive consolidation in Europe."

KFH: 46% growth in value of LC for financing of trade in 2017

KUWAIT: Executive Manager Trade Finance at Kuwait Finance House (KFH) Abdelaziz Alhaqan said that the growth in the value of Letter of Credit LC for the financing of internal and external trade amounted to nearly 46 percent as of end 2017 compared to the same period of the prior year, while the value of export credits grew by about 31 percent for the same period.

Alhaqan added in a press release "This growth is due to the success of the bank's efforts in developing the letter of credit LC opening service and the bank's strong track record of experience in playing the role of intermediary between the seller and buyer while providing financing channels suitable to the requirements of customers in several sharia-compliant forms." He emphasized that KFH is keen on developing financing channels for balance of trade.

Moreover, he illustrated that the volume of letter of guarantees LG transactions offered by the bank surged by 14 percent in 2017 over the same period prior year. The growth is attributed to high end systems, streamlined procedures and high caliber manpower at KFH that work tirelessly to cover customers' trade need with the highest quality.

Alhaqan indicated that encountering the increasing volume of documentary credit and letter of guarantees transactions, KFH adopts best practices and highest standards at the level of its human resources and systems in an attempt to ensure outstanding performance whilst safeguarding customers' commercial needs and safety of their goods, ensuring speedy commercial exchange at most convenient time.

He explained that KFH offers services and products that support import and export operation with high standard with accuracy and speed through a wide range of superior correspondent banking services.

He continued: "The products that KFH offers in Trade Finance are Letter of Credit by Sight which creates security for merchants for importing goods or supplies it in the local market, letter of credit on acceptance basis: It is a kind of LC, which gives importer to settle the draft to the beneficiary after receiving the goods or documents in Kuwait against acceptance present range from 60, 90 or as usage period agreed. KFH also offers Murabaha where KFH imports goods in its name and in its own risk in which the customer willing to import goods such when goods arrived KFH enables customer to buy it with an agreed profit to be settled in in installments suitable with customer cash flow. Moreover KFH offers export L/C, which helps in activities of the foreign export and support local products as KFH can advise this L/C to exporter and added their confirmation in case it is needed.



Abdelaziz Alhaqan

Technology

Thousands attend Galaxy S9 launch event with Ooredoo and Al Babtain

Exclusive offers at KD 22.5 for all customers on the day of the launch

KUWAIT CITY, KUWAIT: Committing to its position as the leader of telecommunication in Kuwait, and continuing its promise to deliver products and services that enrich the lives of its customers, Ooredoo Kuwait collaborated with Samsung Al Babtain to launch the new Samsung flagship smartphone devices, the Galaxy S9 and the Galaxy S9+. Thousands of customers and technology enthusiasts attended the event last Wednesday at Ooredoo's head office, which was launched with exclusive Shamel plans for the attendees of the event.

Ooredoo's head office received thousands of customers over the span of 7 hours from 5 p.m. until well after midnight, who attended to benefit from an exclusive one-day offer. The exclusive offer includes free unlimited minutes, free unlimited SMS, and 500 GB of high-speed mobile internet, with either the Samsung Galaxy S9 or the Galaxy S9+, starting at KD 22.5. The event was attended by several social media influencers such as Dana Tuwairish, Noura Al Ameer, Asma Almulla, Abdullah Boushehri, Aboka and Mohammed Merza, among others. Some of the influencers launched a social media campaign ahead of the event.



Mijbil Alayoub with a Samsung representative.

New flagship devices

The event was also attended by representatives of Samsung Al Babtain, the official distributor of Samsung in Kuwait, and representatives of the international brand Samsung, who lauded Ooredoo's efforts in organizing a big event to launch the new flagship devices. The representatives commended the organization and collaboration between different volunteer groups from across Ooredoo's different departments, who participated in organizing the event and helping customers with their queries.

The new devices boast a number of key specifications, such as the Snapdragon 845/Exynos 9810 processor, the RAM that ranges between 4 and 6 GB, a front camera of 8 megapixels, and a rear camera of 12 megapixels. The Galaxy S9 comes with a screen of 5.8" while the Galaxy S9+ comes with a 6.2" screen. A number of restaurants and coffee shops were present at



(From left to right) Ooredoo's senior director of B to B Abdul Aziz Al-Babtain, senior manager of PR and internal communications Fatima Dashti and corporate communications senior director Mijbil Alayoub pose with the new Samsung S9.

the event to serve refreshments, food and snacks to the attendees of the event while they wait for their devices. They include Costa Coffee, Scoop a Cone, Wendy's, Kush by Lokal, Burger Line, Johnny Rockets, Farah, Hambooba, and Caribou Coffee.

Commenting on the launch event, Ooredoo Kuwait's Corporate Communications Senior Director Mijbil Alayoub said that the event reiterates Ooredoo's commitment to providing customers with the best services and the latest devices to enrich their experiences and fulfill their needs. He added: "Ooredoo extends its deepest gratitude to Al Babtain for their contribution to this event, launching the latest Samsung flagship devices which are prominent among all smartphones worldwide. We look forward to delivering more products for our esteemed customers."

Alayoub also expressed his gratitude towards the team of volunteers from across the company's different departments who participated in organizing the events and controlling the flow of customers in and out of the head office, to ensure that everything works smoothly during the event. Samsung's latest Galaxy S9 and Galaxy S9+ devices are available to customers in Ooredoo's branches around Kuwait and its official distributors, in addition to its online shop. The devices are available with a plan starting at KD 31.5, and include free unlimited minutes and SMS, with 100 GB of high-speed mobile internet.



The first customer to receive the Samsung S9.



Head of the Corporate Affairs Department Dr Hamad Al-Nuaim poses with Ooredoo officials.



Mr Mohammed Al-Babtain, President of Al Babtain Group poses with the Samsung representative and Ooredoo officials.



Photos from the event .



Health

French isle hospital groans under African baby influx

Home to the busiest maternity ward in France

MAMOUZOU: Protests over illegal immigration gripping the French island of Mayotte off Africa's coast have an unexpected epicenter: a maternity ward packed to bursting point. The main hospital in Mayotte, wedged between Madagascar and the southeast African mainland, is now home to the busiest maternity ward in France—mostly serving migrant mothers.

So great is the influx of mothers from the neighboring Comoros islands—which are much poorer and not part of France—that the government is now considering the drastic step of declaring the hospital as non-French territory. Hadidja, one of the few Comoran mothers willing to speak to journalists, admitted with some embarrassment that she is here because she wants her children “to be French”.

Like thousands of others, she arrived on the island of 250,000 people last year after enduring a 17-hour crossing in a traditional kwassa-kwassa fishing boat from the Comoros island of Anjouan, 70 kilometers away. She has just given birth to a boy, Hassan, in the bulging maternity ward in Mayotte's main town of Mamoudzou after a difficult birth for her first child.

“It went badly, I suffered a lot of pain,” she said in hesitant French, sitting up in bed. “I came here because it's a good hospital.” The flow of migration from the Comoros—which unlike its neighbor voted for independence from France in 1974 — has been going on for years and is difficult to measure. But the 19,000 deportations from Mayotte in 2015 — barely less than the 20,000 from all of mainland France—give an indication of the scale of the influx.

Some 9,600 babies were delivered in the Mayotte maternity wing last year, a record for any hospital in France. In a phenomenon echoing complaints of foreign mothers travelling to the US to give birth to children with US citizenship, some 70 percent of the mothers were undocumented immigrants, according to French national statistics agency INSEE.

“There are too many births, too many babies, too much work,” said trainee nurse Moina Baco. “I've got a baby that doesn't even have a crib anymore. There aren't any left.” Chief midwife

Moendandze Zadibo said the hospital was so short on space that women are being transferred to other facilities just hours after giving birth if they are doing well, to free up their beds for more arrivals. And the thinly-stretched staff are having to deal with more complex births due to the poverty of the women arriving. “We have more emergency caesareans, more women who arrive without ever having seen a doctor during their pregnancy,” she said.

Resentment boils over

The dire situation at the maternity ward, along with growing lawlessness that locals blame on the migrants, has fed the roadblocks, strikes and protests that have paralyzed Mayotte for a month. Local mother Mariama, 33, gave birth the day before to a little girl. She is set to be kicked out of the hospital because she has social security, which means she has access to a private-sector midwife.

“We'll have to sort ourselves out, while those who don't have social security will stay,” she said. “I feel like I'm second class—when I pay my contributions, I pay my taxes.” The issue comes up frequently among the protesters who have been manning the street barricades in a bid to get the government 8,000 kilometers away in Paris to do something.

Midwives have a difficult time getting past the barricades “because we are treated like traitors for helping foreign children give birth here,” one of them told AFP. But medical professionals say they have a duty of care to anyone who turns up. “We are a public hospital and we look after mums. We don't ask where they're from,” said the hospital's director Catherine Barbezieux.

Medics oppose the idea of declaring the hospital to be a no man's land, saying it would not stop mothers from coming to Mayotte. “The medical community can only express the strongest reservations” about the idea, said Philippe Durasnel, vice-president of the hospital's medical commission. “Given that women are coming so that their children can have French nationality, they will simply give birth at home or in the bush. We'd be opening the door to potential tragedies.” —AFP



MAMOUZOU: Mariama, a Mahorais woman from Mayotte, sits by her newborn baby in maternity ward of the Mayotte Maternity Hospital. —AFP

World water problems flow at Brazil conference

BRASÓLIA: Brazil—the country with the world's greatest fresh water reserves—hosts an international conference next week on growing fears over the fragility of drinking water supplies in a heating planet. Under the slogan “sharing water,” the 8th World Water Forum will bring together 15 heads of state and government, 300 mayors and dozens of experts in the Brazilian capital Brasilia from Sunday to March 23.

An estimated 40,000 people are expected to attend, organizers say. Participants will meet against the backdrop of the drama in Cape Town, which until earlier this month was projected to run out of water as early as July, forcing the closing of household taps and extreme rationing. That crisis has now eased, with the local govern-

ment saying that a campaign to bring 60 percent reduction in consumption has done enough to avert the shut-off. But the drama is a reminder that many of the world's biggest fresh water systems are under pressure from pollution, overuse, dams and climate change.

“There are more reservoirs, more cars, more industry and more people. Counter measures to protect supplies remain very slim compared to the impacts we're seeing,” Ney Maranhao, head of Brazil's National Water Agency, told AFP. Ricardo Medeiros, director of the forum, which is put out by the World Water Council every three years, said the issue must be seen as more than a purely environmental problem.

“Water has always been seen as something important for all activities, but it has not been the first priority. The important thing not to talk about water just as something vital to life, but as something which creates economic development,” he said. “The traditional narratives clearly are not working,” agreed Colin Strong, from the World Resources Institute and co-author of a study mapping public water management around the world. —AFP

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The opening of 'Degrees 21' restaurant in Al Salam Mall



Aiming to provide everyone the opportunity to enjoy scrumptious international recipes, the "Degrees 21" Restaurant opens its doors to Kuwait food lovers in Al Salam Mall, Salmiya. The launch event was attended by a number of dignitaries,

VIP guests, media delegates and influencers. The restaurant's owners and crew welcomed guests who enjoyed the delicious Arabic and international dishes that are prepared from fresh ingredients.

"Degrees 21" Restaurant provides customers with an

exceptional experience from the moment they enter the restaurant until they leave, where they can choose from the generous menu that includes different platter choices to suit everyone's taste; like: pasta, steak, salad, starters, desserts, fresh juices and European cock-

tails. Not forgetting the amazing, joyful atmosphere and friendly service along with the astonishing view overlooking one of the most vibrant streets in Salmiya, so that visitors can enjoy a memorable experience and cherish the time they spend with family and friends.

Arab Youth Festival begins



On the first evening of the first Arab Youth Festival organized by LOAYC's Academy for Performance Arts (LAPA), the young magician, Abdul Wahab Al-Failkawi and LAPA's dancing teams presented a brilliant performance at Al-Shaheed Park. The event was

organized jointly with NBK, Ghenwa and EVENTAT. The performance included several shows and tricks presented by Al-Failkawi including The Smoke, Escape, Snow, Origami, Appearance and The Lift, which were all highly appreciated by the audience.

LAPA holds art exhibition in Al Shaheed Park



Within the activities of the Francophonie celebrations, LOYAC Academy of Performing Arts (LAPA), the French Institute in Kuwait and Al-Shaheed Park recently organized an art exhibition and workshop for the French artist Pascal Heranval at Al-Shaheed Park's Multipurpose Hall. The exhibition was attended by the French ambassador to Kuwait Marie Masdupuy, LOYAC's chairperson Fare'a Al-Saqqaf, formative artist Amira Behbahani and a number of art lovers.

The exhibition concluded a number of workshops for kids and adults held in the period between March 8-13. Speaking at the sidelines of the exhibition, Al-Saqqaf stressed that it was not the first time to cooperate with French Institute In Kuwait. She also thanked Amina Al-Mutawa' for volunteering in many of the events LOYAC organizes. On her part, the French cultural attache, Zilda Wahbeh said that the project is part of the Francophonie celebrations that call for cultural exchange.



NBK welcomes students from Saleh Shehab School

National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) recently hosted students from Saleh Shehab Secondary School, who toured the bank's head office to learn about the banking industry and the day-to-day work of the bank's various departments. The students had the chance to learn about the broad range of NBK financial and banking products and

services. As part of the tour, the students visited NBK museum where they had the chance to learn about Kuwait's history, key national historical events in addition to NBK's establishment story.

NBK Communications team accompanied the students on their tour to the bank's various departments including the banking hall, and different banking departments. The students also were introduced to NBK's Public Relation's responsibilities. The tour is part of NBK's ongoing commitment to its corporate social responsibility program and to promoting the education and development of the country's youth. NBK regularly hosts students on field trips from both public and private schools in Kuwait and provides them with information about the banking industry and career opportunities.



CBK takes part in Job Fair

The Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) recently took part in the 23rd Job Fair organized by Kuwait University's college of Business Administration. The fair was

attended by college dean, Professor Meshari Al-Hajri and a number of college professors. Speaking on the occasion, CBK's human resources manager, Mona Al-Abdel Razzaq stressed that CBK strongly believes in taking part in various vocational exhibitions and forums to attract more graduates to join the banking sector and the bank's various departments.



TV



00:05 Code Of Honor
02:05 X-Men: Apocalypse
04:35 Captain America: Civil War
07:40 The Core
09:25 X-Men: Apocalypse
11:55 I Am Wrath
13:35 Captain America: Civil War
16:05 Boering II
17:50 Inception
20:20 Savage Dog
22:00 S.W.A.T.: Under Siege
23:35 Delta Force II: The Colombian Connection



00:50 Untamed & Uncut
01:45 Night
02:13 Night
02:40 Night
03:08 Night
03:35 Night
04:00 Night
04:25 Night
04:50 Night
05:15 Night
06:02 Biggest And Baddest
06:49 Biggest And Baddest
07:36 Escape To Chimp Eden
08:00 Escape To Chimp Eden
08:25 North Woods Law
09:15 The Jeff Corwin Experience
10:10 The Jeff Corwin Experience
11:05 The Jeff Corwin Experience
12:00 The Jeff Corwin Experience
12:55 The Jeff Corwin Experience
13:50 Cat vs Dog
14:45 The Bronx Zoo
15:40 Missouri Mountain Family
16:35 Night
17:03 Night
17:30 Night
17:58 Night
18:25 Night
18:53 Night
19:20 Shark Feeding Frenzy
20:15 Saving Africa's Giants With Yao Ming
21:10 Wild Africa: Rivers Of Life
22:05 Tigress Blood
23:00 Killer Whales
23:55 Untamed & Uncut



00:05 EastEnders
00:35 Father Brown
01:25 Hold The Sunset
01:55 The Child In Time
03:35 Death In Paradise
04:40 Doctors
05:10 Doctor Who
06:00 Doctors
06:30 EastEnders
07:00 Doctor Who
07:50 Doctor Who
08:40 Call The Midwife
09:40 Doctors
10:10 EastEnders
10:40 Death In Paradise
11:40 Doctor Who
12:30 Father Brown
13:20 Doctors
13:50 EastEnders
14:20 Death In Paradise
15:20 Doctor Who
16:10 Father Brown
17:00 Call The Midwife
18:00 Doctors
18:30 EastEnders
19:00 Death In Paradise
20:00 Trust Me
21:00 Line Of Duty
22:00 Death In Paradise
22:55 Doctors
23:25 EastEnders
23:55 Spies Of Warsaw



00:00 Homicide Hunter
01:00 Homicide Hunter
02:00 Psychic Kids
03:00 The Haunting Of...
04:00 Homicide Hunter
05:00 Homicide Hunter
06:00 Psychic Kids
07:00 Cold Case Files
08:00 Cold Case Files
09:00 Crimes That Shook Australia
10:00 Crimes That Shook Australia
11:00 It Takes A Killer
11:30 It Takes A Killer
12:00 Homicide: Hours To Kill
13:00 Homicide: Hours To Kill
14:00 Homicide: Hours To Kill
15:00 Homicide Hunter
16:00 Homicide Hunter
17:00 Escaping Polygamy
18:00 Escaping Polygamy
19:00 Cold Case Files
20:00 Crimes That Shook Australia
21:00 Crimes That Shook Australia
22:00 Robbie Coltrane's Critical Evidence
23:00 Robbie Coltrane's Critical Evidence



00:05 Nightcap
00:30 DI Huggleby: The Endangered List
01:20 Another Period
01:45 Nathan For You
02:10 Tosh.O
02:35 Tosh.O
03:00 The Daily Show - Global Edition
03:25 Tosh.O
03:50 South Park
04:15 Idiotstiter
04:40 Key And Peele
05:05 Detroiters
05:30 Disaster Date
05:55 Ridiculousness Arabia
06:25 Comedy Central Presents
Comedy Salvagew
06:50 Lip Sync Battle
07:15 Lip Sync Battle
07:40 I Live With Models
08:05 Key And Peele
08:30 Disaster Date
08:55 Workaholics
09:20 Idiotstiter
09:45 I Live With Models
10:10 Detroiters
10:35 Friends
11:00 Key And Peele
11:25 Disaster Date
11:50 Ridiculousness Arabia
12:15 Friendszone
12:40 Key And Peele
13:05 Friends
13:30 Friends
13:55 Disaster Date
14:20 Workaholics
14:45 Detroiters
15:10 Friends
15:35 Key And Peele
16:00 Idiotstiter
16:30 Friendszone
16:55 Friends
17:20 Friends
17:45 Disaster Date
18:10 Lip Sync Battle

18:35 Lip Sync Battle
19:00 Friends
19:25 Friendszone
19:50 Real Husbands Of Hollywood
20:12 Friends
20:35 Friends
21:00 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
21:30 Comedy Central Presents
Comedy Salvagew
22:00 Chris Ramsey Stand Up Central
22:25 Why? With Hannibal Buress
22:50 Martha And Snoop Potluck Dinner Party
23:15 Real Husbands Of Hollywood
23:40 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah



00:30 Ultimate Survival
01:20 Nextworld
02:10 Nextworld
03:00 Nextworld
03:50 Destroyed In Seconds
04:15 Destroyed In Seconds
04:40 Destroyed In Seconds
05:05 Destroyed In Seconds
05:30 Destroyed In Seconds
05:55 Destroyed In Seconds
06:20 How It's Made
06:40 How It's Made
07:00 Serious Desert
07:25 Serious Desert
07:50 Serious Amazon
08:15 Serious Amazon
08:40 How It's Made
09:05 How It's Made
09:30 How It's Made
09:55 How It's Made
10:20 How It's Made
10:45 How It's Made
11:10 How It's Made
11:35 How It's Made
12:00 How It's Made
12:25 How It's Made
12:50 Tanked
13:40 Tanked
14:30 Tanked
15:20 Tanked
16:10 Tanked
17:00 Guinness World Records
Smashed UK
17:50 How It's Made
18:15 How It's Made
18:40 The Next Great Magician
19:30 Keeping Up With The Kruger
20:20 Into The Pride
21:10 Biggest And Baddest
22:00 Running Wild
22:50 Ultimate Survival
23:40 Ultimate Survival



00:50 Ghosts Of Shepherdstown
01:45 A Haunting
02:40 Horror At The Cecil Hotel
03:35 True Conviction
04:30 My Father, The Serial Killer: People Magazine...
05:25 Married With Secrets
06:20 Kiss Of Death
07:10 Evil Stepmothers
08:00 California Investigator
08:25 Deadline: Crime With Tamron Hall
09:15 Deadline: Crime With Tamron Hall
10:10 Deadline: Crime With Tamron Hall
10:40 Deadline: Crime With Tamron Hall
11:30 I Almost Got Away With It
12:15 I Almost Got Away With It
13:50 I Almost Got Away With It
14:45 I Almost Got Away With It
15:40 I Almost Got Away With It
16:35 I Almost Got Away With It
17:30 Suspicion
18:25 Suspicion
19:20 Suspicion
20:15 Suspicion
21:10 Lauryn Is Lost: A Disappeared Special
22:05 Disappeared
23:00 Murder In The Heartland
23:55 True Conviction



00:10 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
00:35 Binny And The Ghost
01:00 Hank Zipzer
01:25 Alex & Co.
01:45 Disney Mickey Mouse
01:50 Evermoor Chronicles
02:15 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
02:40 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
03:05 Binny And The Ghost
03:30 Binny And The Ghost
03:55 Hank Zipzer
04:15 Disney Mickey Mouse
04:20 Hank Zipzer
04:45 Alex & Co.
05:10 Alex & Co.
05:35 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
06:00 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
06:25 Binny And The Ghost
06:45 Disney Mickey Mouse
06:50 Rolling With The Ronks
07:00 Jessie
07:25 Elena Of Avalor
07:50 Descendants Wicked World
07:55 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
08:20 Hotel Transylvania: The Series
08:45 Tangled: The Series
09:10 K.C. Undercover
09:35 Raven's Home
10:00 Bunk'd
10:25 Bizaardvark
10:50 Liv And Maddie
11:15 Stuck In The Middle
11:40 Geek Charming
11:50 Descendants Wicked World
13:20 Liv And Maddie
13:45 Liv And Maddie
14:10 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
14:35 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
15:00 Raven's Home
15:25 Tangled: The Series
15:50 Elena Of Avalor
16:15 Sofia The First
16:40 Tangled: Short Cuts
16:45 Sofia The First: The Curse Of Princess Ivy
17:35 K.C. Undercover
18:00 K.C. Undercover
18:25 Bizaardvark
18:50 Bizaardvark
19:15 Elena Of Avalor
19:40 Elena Of Avalor
20:05 Bunk'd
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21:20 Stuck In The Middle
21:45 K.C. Undercover
22:10 K.C. Undercover
22:35 Liv And Maddie
23:00 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
23:25 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
23:50 Lolorock



00:00 PJ Masks
00:30 Vampirina
01:00 Vampirina
01:30 Art Attack
01:55 Henry Hugglemonster
02:05 Loopdidoo
02:20 Henry Hugglemonster
02:35 Calimero
02:50 Henry Hugglemonster
03:05 Art Attack
03:30 The Hive
03:40 Loopdidoo
03:55 Henry Hugglemonster
04:10 Art Attack
04:35 Loopdidoo
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06:45 Loopdidoo
07:00 Henry Hugglemonster
07:15 Calimero
07:30 PJ Masks
08:00 Trulli Tales
08:30 Puppy Dog Pals
09:00 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
09:30 Doc McStuffins
10:00 PJ Masks
10:30 Sofia The First
11:00 Vampirina
11:30 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
12:00 The Lion Guard
12:30 Doc McStuffins
13:00 Doc McStuffins
13:30 Doc McStuffins
14:00 PJ Masks
14:30 PJ Masks
15:00 PJ Masks
15:30 Mission Force One
16:00 Goldie & Bear
16:30 Doc McStuffins
17:00 Vampirina
17:30 Puppy Dog Pals
18:00 The Lion Guard
18:30 Sofia The First
19:00 Sofia The First
19:30 Vampirina
20:00 PJ Masks
20:30 P-King Duckling
21:00 The Lion Guard
21:30 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
22:00 Trulli Tales
22:30 Doc McStuffins
23:00 Mission Force One
23:30 PJ Masks



00:15 Railroad Australia
01:05 Outback Truckers
01:50 Alaskan Bush People
02:40 Dirty Jobs
03:20 Extreme Engineering
04:05 Flying Wild Alaska
04:50 Dirty Jobs
05:35 How Do They Do It?
06:00 The Caravan Show
06:23 Chaos Caught On Camera
06:45 How Do They Do It?
07:10 How Do They Do It?
07:35 Flying Wild Alaska
08:20 The Caravan Show
08:45 Chaos Caught On Camera
09:40 Dirty Jobs
09:55 How Do They Do It?
10:20 How Do They Do It?
10:45 Bear Grylls: Breaking Point
11:30 Man v Expert
12:20 The Caravan Show
12:43 Chaos Caught On Camera
13:05 How Do They Do It?
13:30 How Do They Do It?
13:55 Dirty Jobs
14:40 Alaskan Bush People
15:30 How Do They Do It?
15:53 How Do They Do It?
16:15 Bear Grylls: Breaking Point
17:05 Man v Expert
17:50 Flying Wild Alaska
18:40 Dirty Jobs
19:25 Alaskan Bush People
20:15 Extreme Engineering
21:00 Street Justice: The Bronx
21:50 Goblin Works Garage
22:40 Cuban Chrome
23:30 Flying Wild Alaska



06:00 Milo Murphy's Law
06:10 Phineas & Ferb
06:25 Milo Murphy's Law
06:35 Phineas & Ferb
06:50 Marvel's Avengers: Secret Wars
07:15 Star Wars Rebels
07:40 Disney Mickey Mouse
07:45 Phineas And Ferb Save Summer
08:35 Mech-X4
09:00 Mech-X4
09:25 Marvel's Spider-Man
09:50 Marvel's Spider-Man
10:20 Lab Rats
10:45 Lab Rats
11:10 Gravity Falls
11:35 Gravity Falls
12:00 Walk The Prank
12:30 Walk The Prank
12:55 Gamer's Guide To Pretty Much Everything
13:20 Gamer's Guide To Pretty Much Everything
13:45 Penn Zero: Part Time Hero
14:10 Disney Mickey Mouse
14:15 Penn Zero: Part Time Hero
14:40 Right Now Kapow
15:05 Right Now Kapow
15:30 Lab Rats
15:55 Lab Rats
16:25 Kickin' It
16:50 Kickin' It
17:15 Supa Strikas
17:40 Supa Strikas
18:05 Gravity Falls
18:30 Marvel's Ant-Man
18:35 Gravity Falls
19:00 Right Now Kapow
19:25 Milo Murphy's Law
19:50 Marvel's Rocket And Groot
19:55 Mech-X4
20:20 Penn Zero: Part Time Hero
20:45 Gamer's Guide To Pretty Much Everything
21:10 Kid vs. Kat
21:35 Marvel's Rocket And Groot
21:40 Disney Mickey Mouse
21:45 Lab Rats
22:10 Lab Rats
22:35 Phineas And Ferb
23:00 Programmes Start At 6:00am



00:00 Botched
00:55 Botched
01:50 El News
02:50 #RichKids Of Beverly Hills
03:40 #RichKids Of Beverly Hills
04:35 #RichKids Of Beverly Hills
05:30 Celebrity Style Story
06:00 WAGs Atlanta

06:55 WAGs Atlanta
07:50 WAGs Atlanta
08:45 WAGs Atlanta
09:40 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
10:35 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
11:30 Revenge Body With Khloe Kardashian
12:25 Revenge Body With Khloe Kardashian
13:20 Revenge Body With Khloe Kardashian
14:15 Revenge Body With Khloe Kardashian
15:15 Revenge Body With Khloe Kardashian
16:15 Revenge Body With Khloe Kardashian
17:10 Revenge Body With Khloe Kardashian
18:05 Revenge Body With Khloe Kardashian
19:00 El News
20:00 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry
21:00 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry
22:00 Botched
23:00 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry



00:05 Coronation Street
00:30 Coronation Street
01:00 Don't Tell The Bride
02:00 Coronation Street
02:30 Coronation Street
03:00 Coronation Street
03:25 Coronation Street
03:50 Couples Come Dine With Me
04:40 Couples Come Dine With Me
05:30 Cannonball
06:25 The Voice UK 2018
07:25 Dancing On Ice
09:05 Endeavour
10:45 Victoria
11:45 Gino's Hidden Italy
12:05 Cannonball
13:00 The Voice UK 2018
14:00 The Voice UK 2018
15:55 Endeavour
17:00 Dancing On Ice
19:00 The Voice UK 2018
20:55 Victoria
21:50 It's Not Rocket Science
22:45 Couples Come Dine With Me
23:40 Coronation Street



00:00 Engineering Disasters
01:00 The Colour Of War
02:00 The Colour Of War
03:00 The Colour Of War
03:50 The Greeks
04:40 Engineering Disasters
05:30 Engineering Disasters
06:20 The Colour Of War
07:10 The Universe
08:00 The Colour Of War
09:00 The Colour Of War
10:00 The Colour Of War
11:00 The Greeks
12:00 Engineering Disasters
13:00 Engineering Disasters
14:00 The Colour Of War
15:00 The Colour Of War
16:00 The Colour Of War
17:00 The Greeks
18:00 Engineering Disasters
19:00 Missing In Alaska
20:00 Missing In Alaska
21:00 In Search Of Aliens
22:00 In Search Of Aliens
23:00 United Stuff Of America



00:20 Pirate Treasure Of The Knights Templar
01:10 Ultimate Wheels
02:00 How The World Made America
03:40 Hunting Hitler
04:30 American Pickers
05:15 The Zodiac Killer: Case Closed?
06:00 Mountain Men
06:50 Forged In Fire
07:40 The Curse Of Oak Island
08:30 Hunting Hitler
09:20 Mountain Men
10:10 Ax Men
11:40 Forged In Fire
12:50 The Curse Of Oak Island
14:00 Hunting Hitler
15:30 Mountain Men
16:12 American Pickers
15:10 Mountain Men
16:00 Forged In Fire
16:50 The Curse Of Oak Island
17:40 Hunting Hitler
18:30 Mountain Men
19:20 Forged In Fire
20:10 American Pickers
21:00 Pawn Stars
21:25 Storage Wars
21:50 American Pickers
22:40 Forged In Fire
23:30 Mountain Men



00:15 Miguel's Tropical Kitchen
00:45 John Torode's Asia
01:10 Miguel's Tropical Kitchen
01:40 Around The World In 80 Dishes
02:35 What's For Sale?
03:00 What's For Sale?
03:30 Confucius Was A Foodie
04:25 George Clarke's Amazing Spaces
05:20 Restoration Man
06:15 Access 360 World Heritage
07:10 Gok's Chinese Takeaway
08:05 Restoration Man
09:00 Miguel's Feasts
09:25 David Rocco's Dolce India
09:55 Around The World In 80 Dishes
10:50 Confucius Was A Foodie
11:45 Building Wild
12:40 Mega Food
13:35 What's For Sale?
14:00 What's For Sale?
14:30 Tom's Istanbul Delight
14:55 Food School
15:25 George Clarke's Amazing Spaces
16:20 Restoration Man
17:15 Access 360 World Heritage
18:10 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
18:35 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
19:05 What's For Sale?
19:30 What's For Sale?
20:00 Tom's Istanbul Delight
20:30 Food School
21:00 George Clarke's Amazing Spaces
22:00 Restoration Man
22:55 Access 360 World Heritage
23:50 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia



00:10 Rebuilding Titanic
01:00 Yukon Gold
02:00 Wicked Tuna
03:00 Fish Tank Kings
04:00 India's Mega Kitchens
05:00 Secrets Of The Tang Treasure Ship
06:00 Hitler's Death Squad
07:00 Apocalypse: The Second World War
08:00 Chain Of Command
09:00 Locked Up Abroad
10:00 Sea Of Hope: America's Underwater Treasures
11:00 A Brave Heart: The Lizzie Velasquez Story
12:00 Miracle Hospital
13:00 Dog Whisperer
14:00 Dog Whisperer
15:00 Genius By Stephen Hawking
16:00 Brave New World
17:00 Locked Up Abroad
18:00 India's Mega Kitchens
19:00 Genius By Stephen Hawking
20:00 Brave New World
20:50 Locked Up Abroad
21:40 India's Mega Kitchens
22:30 Yukon Gold
23:20 The Happenings



00:20 Saving Paradise Islands
01:10 America The Beautiful
02:00 Born Wild
02:50 The Invaders
03:45 Predator Fails
04:40 Wild Untamed Brazil
05:35 Wild Botswana: Lion Brotherhood
06:30 Monster Fish
07:25 Monster Fish
08:20 Wild 24
09:15 Snakes In The City
10:10 Natural Born Monsters
11:05 Philly Undercover
12:00 World's Weirdest: Animal Taboo
12:55 Building Penguin Paradise
13:50 Dr. K's Exotic Animal ER
14:45 Predator Fails
15:40 Wild Untamed Brazil
16:35 World's Deadliest Killer Three
17:30 Monster Fish
18:25 Where Oceans Collide
19:20 Predator Fails
20:10 Wild Untamed Brazil
21:00 World's Deadliest Killer Three
21:50 Monster Fish
22:40 Where Oceans Collide
23:30 World's Weirdest: Animal Taboo



00:12 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
00:36 Rabbids Invasion
01:00 Rabbids Invasion
01:24 Sanjay And Craig
01:48 Sanjay And Craig
02:12 Winx Club
02:36 Winx Club
03:00 Harvey Beaks
03:24 Harvey Beaks
03:48 The Loud House
04:12 The Loud House
04:36 Breadwinners
05:00 Breadwinners
05:24 Get Blake
05:48 SpongeBob SquarePants
06:12 SpongeBob SquarePants
06:36 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
07:00 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
07:24 Rabbids Invasion
07:48 Get Blake
08:12 Harvey Beaks
08:36 Sanjay And Craig
09:00 SpongeBob SquarePants
09:24 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
09:48 Henry Danger
10:12 Game Shakers
10:36 Regal Academy
11:00 Winx Club
11:24 SpongeBob SquarePants
11:48 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
12:12 The Loud House
12:36 Rabbids Invasion
13:00 Breadwinners
13:24 Massive Monster Mayhem
13:48 I Am Frankie
14:12 The Thundermans
14:36 Sanjay And Craig
15:00 Rabbids Invasion
15:24 Harvey Beaks
15:48 SpongeBob SquarePants
16:12 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
16:36 The Loud House
17:00 Massive Monster Mayhem
17:24 I Am Frankie
17:48 Hunter Street
18:12 Henry Danger
18:36 Nicky, Ricky, Dicky And Dawn
19:00 School Of Rock
19:24 Game Shakers
19:48 The Thundermans
20:12 Harvey Beaks
20:36 SpongeBob SquarePants
21:00 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
21:24 Sanjay And Craig
21:48 Rabbids Invasion
22:12 Breadwinners
22:36 Harvey Beaks
23:00 SpongeBob SquarePants
23:24 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
23:48 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

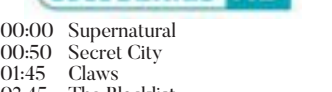


00:17 Kid-E-Cats
00:23 Shimmer And Shine
00:46 Sunny Day
01:08 Max & Ruby
01:31 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom
01:42 Kiva Can Do!
01:53 The Day Henry Met
01:57 The Day Henry Met
02:04 Blaze And The Monster Machines
02:26 Blaze And The Monster Machines
02:48 Team Umizoomi
03:11 Team Umizoomi
03:35 Paw Patrol
03:58 Paw Patrol
04:21 Shimmer And Shine
04:44 Shimmer And Shine
05:08 Nella The Princess Knight
05:30 Nella The Princess Knight
05:54 Rusty Rivets
06:18 Rusty Rivets
06:41 Blaze And The Monster Machines
07:03 Blaze And The Monster Machines
07:24 Paw Patrol
07:37 Dora The Explorer
08:00 Nella The Princess Knight
08:21 Kiva Can Do!
08:33 Kiva Can Do!
08:44 Blaze And The Monster Machines
09:07 Dora The Explorer
09:53 Nella The Princess Knight
10:15 The Day Henry Met
10:21 Paw Patrol
10:44 Rusty Rivets

11:07 Wallykazam!
11:30 Bubble Guppies
11:54 Team Umizoomi
12:17 Kid-E-Cats
12:22 Shimmer And Shine
12:44 Sunny Day
13:07 Max & Ruby
13:30 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom
13:40 Kiva Can Do!
13:52 The Day Henry Met
13:57 The Day Henry Met
14:03 Blaze And The Monster Machines
14:27 Blaze And The Monster Machines
14:49 Team Umizoomi
15:13 Team Umizoomi
15:36 Paw Patrol
15:58 Paw Patrol
16:21 Shimmer And Shine
16:44 Shimmer And Shine
17:08 Nella The Princess Knight
17:30 Nella The Princess Knight
17:53 Rusty Rivets
18:17 Rusty Rivets
18:40 Blaze And The Monster Machines
19:03 Blaze And The Monster Machines
19:24 Paw Patrol
19:37 Dora The Explorer
20:00 Nella The Princess Knight
20:21 Kiva Can Do!
20:33 Kiva Can Do!
20:44 Blaze And The Monster Machines
21:07 Paw Patrol
21:30 Shimmer And Shine
21:53 Nella The Princess Knight
22:15 The Day Henry Met
22:21 Paw Patrol
22:44 Rusty Rivets
23:07 Wallykazam!
23:30 Bubble Guppies
23:54 Team Umizoomi



00:45 Confessions Of A Teenage Queen
02:45 High School Musical 3: Senior Year
04:45 Ola's Frozen Adventure
05:15 101 Dalmatians 2
06:45 Brave
08:45 Ola's Frozen Adventure
09:15 Confessions Of A Teenage Queen
11:15 High School Musical 3: Senior Year
13:15 Ola's Frozen Adventure
13:45 Cars
15:45 Cars 2
17:45 Cars 3
19:45 The Jungle Book
21:45 Cars
23:45 Cars 2



00:00 Supernatural
00:50 Secret City
01:45 Claws
02:45 The Blacklist
03:35 Blindspot
04:25 Supernatural
05:20 The Unit
06:10 Emerald City
07:00 Training Day
08:00 Good Morning America - The Weekend
09:00 The View
10:00 Blindspot
11:00 The Unit
12:00 Emerald City
13:00 Chicago Fire
14:00 The Blacklist
15:00 The View
16:00 Training Day
17:00 Good Morning America - The Weekend
18:00 Emerald City
19:00 The Unit
20:00 Chicago Fire
21:00 Criminal Minds
22:00 Grey's Anatomy
23:00 Scandal



01:25 Quitters
03:05 Office Space
04:40 Daddy's Home
06:20 Life Or Something Like It
08:05 Boris And Natasha: The Movie
09:40 Daddy's Home
11:20 Six Dance Lessons In Six Weeks
13:15 Life Or Something Like It
15:05 Boris And Natasha: The Movie
16:40 Dad's Army
18:30 Who Gets The Dog?
20:15 No Stranger Than Love
22:00 Bowfinger
23:50 Flock Of Dudes



00:50 Saturday Night Fever
02:50 XV: Beyond The Tryline
04:30 Me Before You
06:25 To Kill A Mockingbird
08:35 Akeelah And The Bee
10:25 Pawn Sacrifice
12:20 Days Of Heaven
13:55 Pele: Birth Of A Legend
15:40 The New Adventures Of Aladin
17:25 One True Thing
19:30 Powder
21:25 Big Night
23:25 Chattahoochee



00:45 DinoFroz The Origin
02:20 Shopkins - Chef Club
03:20 Rh+ The Vampire Of Seville
04:45 Freddy Frogface
06:15 The Wish Fish
07:40 Mia And The Migoo
09:20 The Happy Cricket And The Giant Bugs
10:50 Azur & Asmar: The Prince's Quest
12:35 DinoFroz The Origin
14:10 Shopkins - Chef Club
15:10 Louis & Luca And The Snow Machine
16:35 The Happy Cricket And The Giant Bugs
18:05 Simba The King Lion
20:15 Funny Little Cars
21:25 Louis & Luca And The Snow Machine
22:50 Mia And The Migoo



00:30 Sisters
02:35 Miss Peregrine's Home For Peculiar Children
04:50 The Fountain
06:40 Madagascar 2

08:25 Miss Peregrine's Home For Peculiar Children
10:40 Oleanna
12:15 Suicide Squad
14:25 Batman: Return Of The Caped Crusaders
15:50 Cops And Robbersons
17:30 Rocky III
19:15 My Super Ex-Girlfriend
20:55 Prometheus
23:05 Love And Other Drugs



00:40 The Big Brain Theory
01:30 The Big Brain Theory
02:20 The Big Brain Theory
03:10 The Big Brain Theory
04:00 The Big Brain Theory
04:48 How Do They Do It?
05:12 How Do They Do It?
05:36 How Do They Do It?
06:00 How Do They Do It?
06:24 Food Factory
06:48 Food Factory
07:12 Food Factory
07:36 Food Factory
08:00 How Do They Do It?
08:26 The Big Brain Theory
09:14 The Big Brain Theory
10:02 The Big Brain Theory
10:50 The Big Brain Theory
11:38 The Big Brain Theory
12:26 Mythbusters
13:14 Mythbusters
14:02 Stephen Hawking's Grand Design
14:50 Stephen Hawking's Grand Design
15:38 Stephen Hawking's Grand Design
16:26 Stephen Hawking's Universe
17:14 Stephen Hawking's Universe
18:02 Stem Cell Universe With Stephen Hawking
18:50 How Do They Do It?
19:15 How Do They Do It?
19:40 How Do They Do It?
20:05 How Do They Do It?
20:30 Space Pioneer
21:20 Space Pioneer
22:10 Space Pioneer
23:00 Race To Escape
23:50 Race To Escape



01:05 Housefull 3
03:00 Housefull 3
03:35 The Front ROW
04:00 Koffee With Karan
05:00 The Front ROW
05:25 Koffee With Karan
06:20 Little Krishna : The Legendary Warrior
08:00 Chain Kulii Ki Main Kulii
09:45 Hungama
12:30 Anamika
14:40 Tees Maar Khan
17:00 Mughal-E-Azam
20:00 Bajrang Bhajjaan
22:50 Humshakals

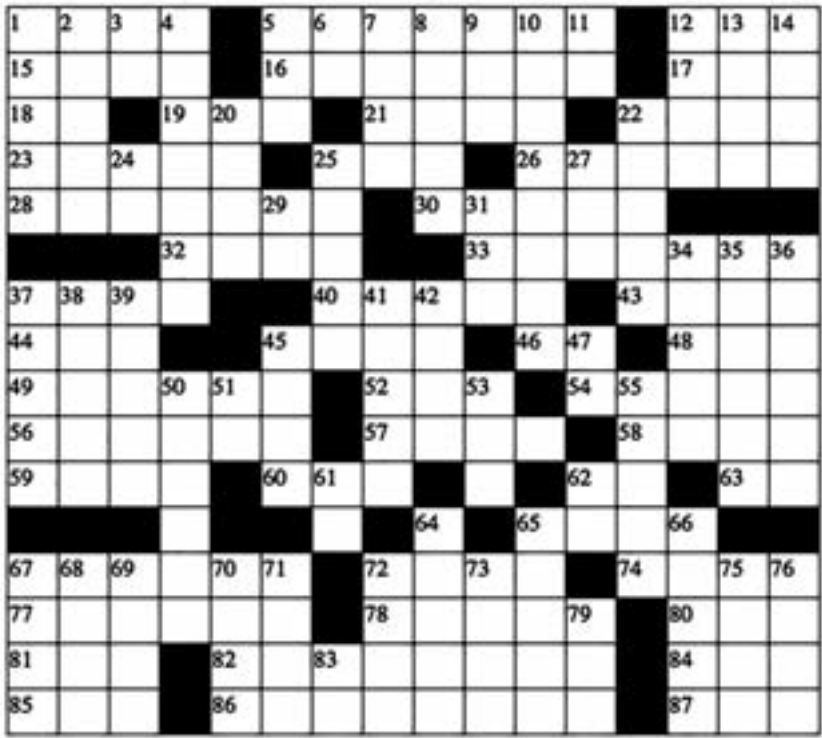


00:30 Drowning Mona
02:15 Queen Of Earth
03:45 Gangs Of New York
06:30 Feast Of Love
08:05 Christmas Truce
09:45 Valkyrie
11:40 Side Effects
13:10 Teaching Mrs Tingle
14:45 Queen Of Earth
16:15 The Hundred-Foot Journey
18:15 Drowning Mona
20:00 The Conspirator
22:00 Head In The Clouds



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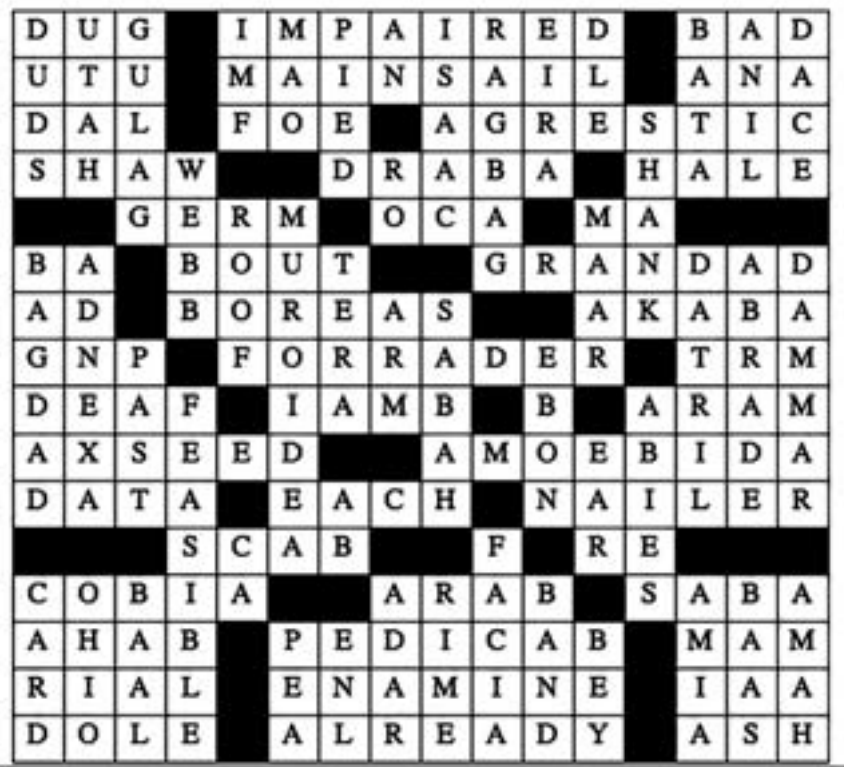
- 1. The capital of Western Samoa.
- 5. The great hall in ancient Persian palaces.
- 12. A vacuum tube in which a hot cathode emits a beam of electrons that pass through a high voltage anode and are focused or deflected before hitting a phosphorescent screen.
- 15. The inner surface of the hand from the wrist to the base of the fingers.
- 16. Arranged in or consisting of laminae.
- 17. A column of light (as from a beacon).
- 18. A state in the Rocky Mountains.
- 19. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
- 21. (informal) Exceptionally good.
- 23. A city in southern Turkey on the Seyhan River.
- 26. (of tempo) Leisurely n.
- 28. A republic in southwestern Africa on the south Atlantic coast (formerly called South West Africa).
- 30. Ratio of the hypotenuse to the opposite side.
- 32. A member of the Pueblo people living in northern New Mexico.
- 33. Tall feather palm of northern Brazil with hard-shelled nuts yielding valuable oil and a kind of vegetable ivory.
- 37. Long green edible beaked pods of the okra plant.
- 40. A landlocked mountainous republic in southeast central Asia north of Afghanistan.
- 43. Affording unobstructed entrance and exit.
- 44. The 22nd letter of the Greek alphabet.
- 46. Being nine more than ninety.
- 48. (sports) The chief official (as in boxing or American football) who is expected to ensure fair play.
- 49. West Indian tree having racemes of fragrant white flowers and yielding a durable timber and resinous juice.
- 52. A sudden loss of consciousness resulting when the rupture or occlusion of a blood vessel leads to oxygen lack in the brain.
- 54. Small terrestrial lizard of warm regions of the Old World.
- 56. Pertaining to or resembling amoebae.
- 57. (used of count nouns) Every one considered individually.
- 58. Large sweet juicy hybrid between tangerine and grapefruit having a thick wrinkled skin.
- 59. Produced by a manufacturing process.
- 60. A nucleic acid consisting of large molecules shaped like a double helix.
- 63. A period of time containing 365 (or 366) days.
- 67. The wife of a sheik.
- 74. A short labored intake of breath with the mouth open.
- 77. A proteolytic enzyme obtained from the unripe papaya.
- 78. Jordan's port.
- 80. Aircraft landing in bad weather in which the pilot is talked down by ground control using precision approach radar.
- 81. Antibacterial drug (trade name Nydrazid) used to treat tuberculosis.
- 82. An entrance to an amphitheater or stadium.
- 84. A light touch or stroke.
- 85. Brief episode in which the brain gets insufficient blood supply.
- 86. Having or using only one filament.
- 87. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.

DOWN

- 1. Relating to or having the characteristics of bees.
- 2. A genus of Ploceidae.
- 3. Being nine more than forty.
- 4. Genus of widely distributed agarics that have white spores and are poisonous with few exceptions.

- 5. A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organism.
- 6. An informal term for a father.
- 7. A platform raised above the surrounding level to give prominence to the person on it.
- 8. English theoretical physicist who applied relativity theory to quantum mechanics and predicted the existence of antimatter and the positron (1902-1984).
- 9. (Irish) Mother of the ancient Irish gods.
- 10. A city in southern Japan on Kyushu.
- 11. A silvery ductile metallic element found primarily in bauxite.
- 12. A steep rugged rock or cliff.
- 13. (the feminine of raja) A Hindu princess or the wife of a raja.
- 14. Type and only genus of the family Tytonidae.
- 20. An amino acid that is found in the central nervous system.
- 22. Tropical American tree producing cacao beans.
- 24. Before noon.
- 25. Loose temporary stitches.
- 27. A young woman making her debut into society.
- 29. (Greek mythology) A maiden seduced by Zeus.
- 31. A religious belief of African origin involving witchcraft and sorcery.
- 34. A chock or bar wedged under a wheel or between the spokes to prevent a vehicle from rolling down an incline.
- 35. According with custom or propriety.
- 36. Showing favoritism.
- 38. Botswana statesman who was the first president of Botswana (1921-1980).
- 39. Aroused to impatience or anger.
- 41. Genus of erect herbs of the Middle East having showy flowers.
- 42. An island in Indonesia south of Borneo.
- 45. The (prehensile) extremity of the superior limb.
- 47. A white metallic element that burns with a brilliant light.
- 50. Any of various deciduous or evergreen ornamental shrubs of the genus Abelia having opposite simple leaves and cymes of small white or pink or purplish flowers.
- 51. A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali earth group.
- 53. (informal) Of the highest quality.
- 55. A Russian prison camp for political prisoners.
- 61. A soft gray ductile metallic element used in alloys.
- 62. Being ten more than one hundred ninety.
- 64. The female or generative principle.
- 65. A native-born Israeli.
- 66. (Irish) Chief god of the Tuatha De Danann.
- 68. A Loloish language.
- 69. An ancient Hebrew unit of dry measure equal to about a bushel.
- 70. A lake in the mountains of central Africa between Congo and Rwanda.
- 71. Sweet pulpy tropical fruit with thick scaly rind and shiny black seeds.
- 72. Marked by or showing unaffected simplicity and lack of guile or worldly experience.
- 73. A correctional institution used to detain persons who are in the lawful custody of the government (either accused persons awaiting trial or convicted persons serving a sentence).
- 75. Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
- 76. A metabolic acid found in yeast and liver cells.
- 79. A port in southwestern Scotland.
- 83. Destruction of heart tissue resulting from obstruction of the blood supply to the heart muscle.

Friday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Aries, you could be knocked off kilter by problems with associates; be careful, this could negatively affect your progress. Even so, you have entered a cycle that supports taking chances. Abundance will be yours by following new plans and designs you have never tried before. Treasures could be uncovered by using very unconventional methods. You will consider working with new people or you could return to a former company. You will stand against another and have to decide to unite or separate. You are able to formulate and eloquently relay your new concepts and documentation. You hold the keys to the future; your manner and wit coupled with your high level of intellect make the path clear, Aries.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Taurus, it is important to deal with situations from long ago. Someone will contact you for input on something that needs your common sense approach; you will be appreciated more than you know. You could be overwhelmed with gratitude for where you are in your own journey. If you are in public relations or advertising you will hit the target as you understand exactly what audiences need to hear and see. You could discover a new trick to help with a struggle you can't seem to conquer. Helping others seems easy compare to helping yourself. An admirer will speak of your excellent refinement and winning personality. You will feel sorry for someone who has less than you. Relax and enjoy your time with a good book or movie, Taurus!



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Gemini, you could feel excluded and overlooked; this could be due to your high standards others do not agree with. This is a perfect time to look at your life and yourself. You will connect with the vibrations of those around you; you know where you stand. You might experience flares in temper and want to lash out; you might have difficulty controlling this. You could receive praise from a supervisor or coworker for a job well done. You could appear to be having a wonderful, easy time and others will seek you out for input on a very important project; you will be able to get your messages across with ease. Tonight make plans for getting something new around the house; you could enjoy the late night hours watching an old movie, Gemini.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Cancer, your home life could come to mean even more to you as you think back on treasured times with family and friends. You have created a wonderful legacy that supports your family's sense of being taken care of. You may want to keep your thoughts to yourself on some of your plans until the right time comes to share. You may find that cleaning up will reveal something long lost. You may feel that you want to separate yourself from others for some clarity. Someone will express gratitude for your helping them with a serious situation that has turned out well; you are known for turning negatives into positives. You could find an outlet for frustrations today and this could become a place you return to over and over, Cancer.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Leo, you are comfortable with yourself and the distance you have come emotionally. You will receive thanks from someone you helped with a sensitive problem; you make a habit of helping and are well known for it. A confidant listens and agrees with your viewpoint and will add comments that help. You will feel disconnected and helpless regarding a very delicate issue that is very personal in nature; these will be worked through in a way that is best for all. If someone rudely interrupts you as you try to speak, pull back and let them rant; you know this person and this will blow over as usual. You will enjoy a gathering of relatives or friends where you will joyfully interact with children and perhaps animals. Warm feelings and respect tonight, Leo.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

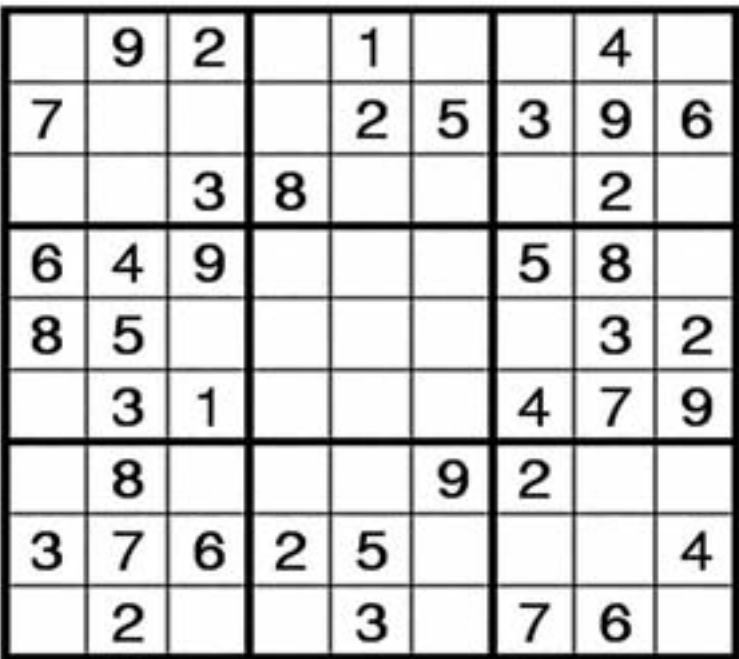
Virgo, you could feel bogged down and helpless a bit later today. Everywhere you look is turmoil or chaos and people are expecting you to be the fixer of the team; see what happens when you do such a good job throughout the day you meet one complication after another with seemingly no end in sight. An unhappy client could inadvertently show you how to handle a rather sensitive aspect of the contract. You will find yourself tending to tasks you haven't dealt with in quite some time. Someone will lend a hand where a certain financial complication threatens to accelerate and drastically worsen. By day's end you have put out more than one fire, now take care of yourself with a long soak in a warm tub and perhaps a nice cocktail, Virgo.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Real Estate 2
Find and circle all of the words that are hidden in the grid.
The remaining 22 letters spell a common Real Estate phrase.

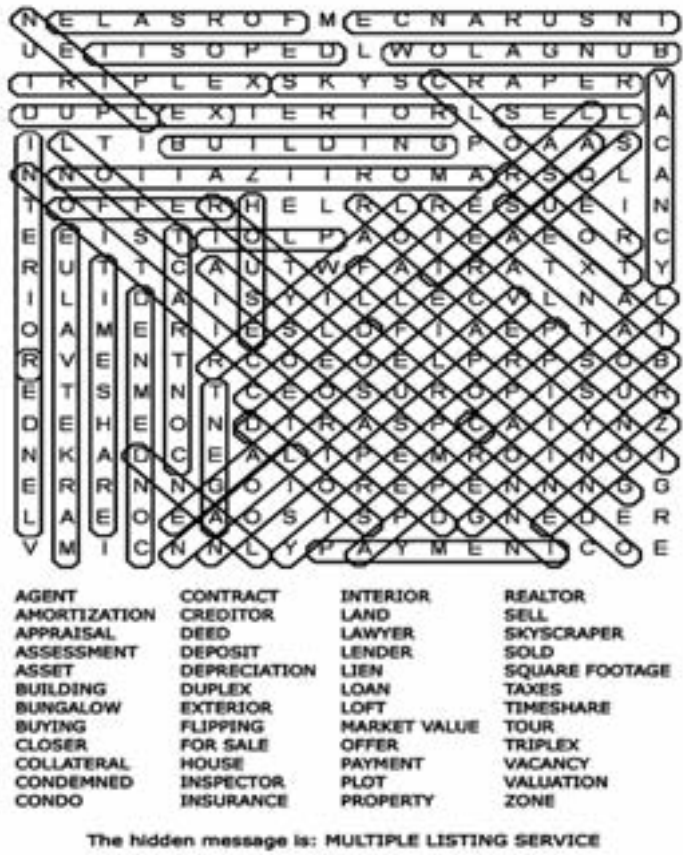


Daily SuDoku

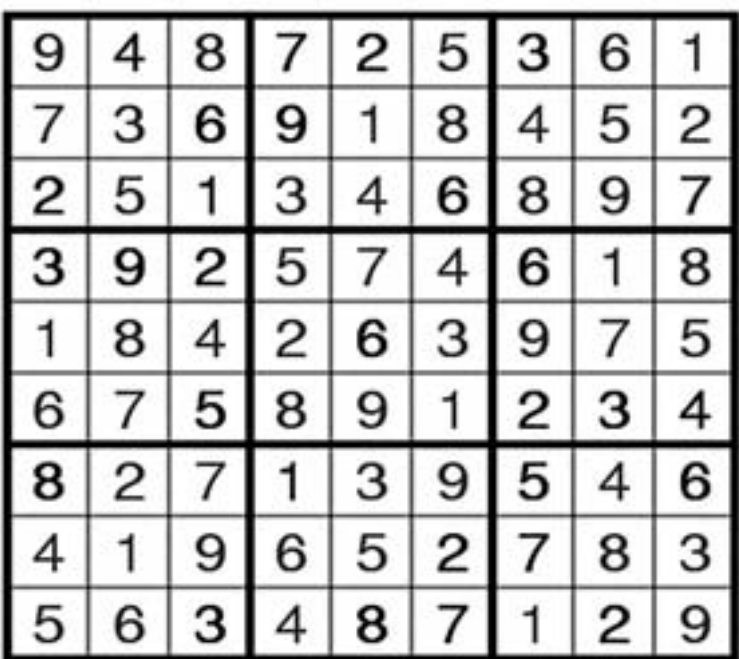


Friday's Solution

Real Estate 1



Friday's Solution



Sunday, March 18, 2018



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



Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Warm with light to moderate freshening gradually north westerly wind, with speed of 15 - 50 km/h causing rising dust especially over open areas.

BY NIGHT: Fair with light to moderate north westerly wind, with speed of 12 - 35 km/h .

WEATHER WATCH	Fresh wind		
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	<div style="text-align: right; padding-right: 10px;">17/03/2018 0000 UTC</div>
KUWAIT CITY	28 °C	21 °C	
KUWAIT AIRPORT	29 °C	19 °C	
ABDALY	28 °C	18 °C	
BUBYAN	----- °C	----- °C	
JAHRA	30 °C	20 °C	
FAILAKA ISLAND	27 °C	19 °C	
SALMIYAH	25 °C	21 °C	
AHMADI	----- °C	---- °C	
NUWAISIB	31 °C	20 °C	
WAFRA	31 °C	19 °C	
SALMY	31 °C	15 °C	

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Sunday	03/18	Sunny	28 °C	16 °C	NW	08 - 30 km/h
Monday	03/19	Relatively hot and some scattered clouds will appear	30 °C	17 °C	VRB	06 - 22 km/h
Tuesday	03/20	Relatively hot	31 °C	18 °C	VRB-SE	06 - 28 km/h
Wednesday	03/21	Relatively hot	32 °C	19 °C	VRB-NW	08 - 30 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	04:36
Sunrise	05:55
Zuhr	11:57
Asr	15:22
Sunset	17:57
Isha	19:14

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	30 °C
MIN. Temp.	20 °C
MAX. RH	75 %
MIN. RH	24 %
MAX. Wind	SE 60 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	1.08mm



Directorate General of Civil Aviation Home Page (www.kuwait-airport.com.kw)

Arrival Flights on Sunday 18/3/2018				Departure Flights on Sunday 18/3/2018				MEAs							
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	KAC	774	Riyadh	13:40	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	SAW	405	Beirut	12:55
JAI	572	Mumbai	00:05	PAL	668	Manila	14:00	AIC	988	Hyderabad/Chennai	00:05	JZR	702	Damascus	13:30
JZR	125	Bahrain	00:10	FDB	618	Doha	14:15	AIC	988	Ahmedabad	00:05	MSR	176	Dubai	13:40
KNE	533	Jeddah	00:25	QTR	1078	Dubai	14:20	JZR	604	Mumbai	00:30	AXB	611	Cairo	14:00
KAC	504	Beirut	00:30	KAC	672	Dubai	14:25	MSC	406	Sohag	00:30	JZR	124	Kozhikode	14:15
JZR	267	Beirut	00:30	GFA	221	Bahrain	14:40	FDB	072	Dubai	00:35	KAC	67	Bahrain	14:30
KAC	102	London	00:50	SVA	500	Jeddah	14:45	KAC	677	Dubai	01:00	FDB	060	Dubai	15:05
JZR	539	Cairo	00:50	KAC	662	Abu Dhabi	14:55	JAI	571	Mumbai	01:00	KAC	785	Dubai	15:10
PGT	858	Istanbul	00:55	KNE	529	Jeddah	14:55	KNE	534	Jeddah	01:10	GFA	222	Jeddah	15:25
THY	772	Istanbul	00:55	KAC	788	Jeddah	15:10	BBC	044	Dhaka	01:30	QTR	1079	Bahrain	15:25
RJA	642	Amman	01:05	KAC	304	Mumbai	15:10	JZR	142	Doha	01:45	SVA	501	Doha	15:30
DLH	625	Bahrain	01:45	ETD	303	Abu Dhabi	15:15	KAC	417	Manila	02:00	KNE	530	Jeddah	15:45
JZR	764	Istanbul	01:50	JZR	787	Riyadh	15:30	THY	773	Istanbul	02:30	KAC	283	Dhaka	15:50
TRQ	230	KRT	02:00	KAC	562	Amman	15:30	PGT	859	Istanbul	02:30	KAC	775	Riyadh	15:50
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	KAC	502	Beirut	15:30	DLH	625	Frankfurt	02:45	KAC	743	Dammam	16:05
JZR	555	Alexandria	02:15	OMA	645	Muscat	15:35	TRQ	231	KRT	02:55	KAC	563	Amman	16:10
QTR	1086	Doha	02:20	FEG	937	Sohag	15:45	ETH	621	Addis Ababa	03:05	PAL	669	Manila	16:10
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	UAE	857	Dubai	15:45	QTR	1087	Doha	03:40	KAC	619	Doha	16:10
KLM	446	Bahrain	02:30	QTR	1072	Doha	15:55	KLM	446	Amsterdam	03:55	ETD	304	Abu Dhabi	16:20
WAN	548	KTM	02:40	JZR	535	Cairo	16:00	KKK	1269	Istanbul	03:55	OMA	646	Muscat	16:35
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	ABY	127	Sharjah	16:00	OMA	644	Muscat	03:55	ABY	128	Sharjah	16:40
KKK	1268	Istanbul	02:55	KAC	118	New York	16:00	THY	765	Istanbul	04:00	KAC	615	Bahrain	16:40
PGT	860	Istanbul	03:05	FDB	051	Dubai	16:40	PGT	861	Istanbul	04:00	FEG	932	Alexandria	16:45
KAC	414	Bangkok	03:05	RJA	640	Amman	16:55	ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:05	KAC	675	Dubai	17:00
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:10	KAC	542	Cairo	17:05	MSR	613	Cairo	04:15	QTR	1073	Doha	17:15
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15	SVA	510	Riyadh	17:15	KAC	103	London	05:00	JZR	240	Amman	17:15
QTR	1076	Doha	03:50	GFA	215	Bahrain	17:30	LMU	511	Cairo	05:00	JZR	266	Beirut	17:15
LMU	510	Cairo	04:00	JZR	777	Jeddah	17:40	KAC	303	Mumbai	05:30	KAC	503	Beirut	17:15
KAC	382	Delhi	04:15	WAN	984	Tbilisi	17:50	QTR	1077	Doha	05:30	FDB	052	Dubai	17:40
UAE	873	Dubai	04:25	UAE	875	Dubai	18:00	FDB	070	Dubai	05:45	KAC	361	Colombo	17:45
KAC	1544	Cairo	04:25	FDB	063	Dubai	18:10	UAE	874	Dubai	06:15	UAE	858	Dubai	17:45
KAC	418	Manila	04:25	JZR	483	Istanbul	18:15								



KIMBERLY WYATT CONFIRMS PUSSYCAT DOLLS REUNION

Kimberly Wyatt has said “everybody’s on board” with a Pussycat Dolls reunion. The 36-year-old singer has revealed that the ‘Don’t Cha’ hitmakers - which was also comprised of Nicole Scherzinger, Jessica Sutta, Ashley Roberts and Melody Thornton - are planning on getting together for a reunion for the first time since they parted ways in 2010, although she insists that she doesn’t yet know what the girl group will do together. She said: “We’ve been talking but everybody has their own lives and own agendas and things. Most of everybody’s on board. There’s still a few steps to be taken to make it happen. “We are all just in a place in our lives where we’ve been off on our own adventures and now we’d like to get on stage and have fun.” It could be a tour, it could be a TV show, it could be new music, it could be a lot of things. It could be big work shops.

Everything and anything that would help spread the message and help make a difference. A real difference to women and boys.” Kimberly also noted that this year is the ideal time for the group to reform, as she praised 2018 as the “year of female empowerment”. She added: “I know most of the girls are 100 per cent on board and want to make it happen. But everybody’s got to be on board. “This is the year of women. This is the year of female empowerment and I feel that from the moment I stepped on stage for the first time with the Dolls and Pink was performing with us and Carmen Electra and I was next to my best friend Ashley Roberts in my stilettos and fish nets and when that curtain opened I felt the most empowered. “It was the most I’d owned my space and sexuality and my femaleness ever before. And they gave me so much confidence to know that I can own that and I

don’t have to be afraid of someone taking that away. “As long as I own my space and stand for what I stand for and I have good morals and I try and do good in the world. Pussycat Dolls really instilled a real confidence in me.” The ‘Buttons’ singer thinks that it’s “now or never” when it comes to getting the group back together, as she’s determined to spread a positive message through their music. She told The Sun newspaper: “Pussycat Dolls hasn’t always been seen as female empowerment which is a real shame which is why I say now or never. Because I think that message needs to be spread but needs to be spread in a way I fell in love with the group.”

Aretha Franklin cancels upcoming shows



Aretha Franklin has been forced to cancel two upcoming concerts on doctor’s orders. The iconic Queen of Soul’s management team confirmed in a statement on Friday that the 75-year-old legendary singer would not be able to take to the stage at her planned show at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark, New Jersey on March 25, or at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival on March 28, The statement read: “Aretha Franklin has been ordered by her doctor to stay off the road and rest completely for at least the next two months. She is extremely disappointed she cannot perform at this year’s New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival as she had expected and hoped to.” Aretha’s show in New Jersey would have taken place on her 76th birthday. According to Billboard, festival organizers for the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival have confirmed that Rod Stewart will now take the place of the ‘Respect’ hit maker at the bash. It isn’t the first time the star has had to cancel a concert recently, as in August last year she was forced to pull out her headline slot at the second annual Martha’s Vineyard Concert Series at the Tabernacle in Oak Bluffs due to an undisclosed medical condition. A statement at the time read: “The staff of MV Concert Series wishes Ms. Franklin a full recovery and holds out hope that we may someday host the Queen of Soul in concert.” The ‘Think’ singer announced last year that she would be retiring once her final album, a collaboration with Stevie Wonder, was released in September. She said: “I must tell you, I am retiring this year. I feel very, very enriched and satisfied with respect to where my career came from and where it is now.”



Laura Mvula’s new LP has hip-hop influence

Laura Mvula has teased that her next album will have a hip-hop influence. The ‘Green Garden’ singer might have been dropped by her label via email last year, but that doesn’t mean she isn’t making new music as she has confirmed her much-awaited follow-up to 2016’s ‘The Dreaming Room’ is in progress. Speaking about what’s been inspiring her, Laura exclusively told BANG Showbiz at the UK premiere of Netflix documentary series ‘The Defiant Ones’ at London’s Brixton Oval on Thursday she said: “The whole culture and history of hip hop has inspired who I am, my ancestors. “Hip-hop is so much more than just a genre, I feel like I’m an infant in that world and I’m still learning because I wasn’t allowed to listen to hip hop growing up, it wasn’t allowed in the house. Despite her leanings towards hip-hop, Laura recently revealed she wants to collaborate with The Rolling Stones after meeting Ronnie Wood. In December, the 31-year-old beauty - who released a reworked version of The Jackson 5’s hit ‘Dancing Machine’ for Naughty Boy’s project ‘Naughty Motown’ - shared a selfie with the ‘Satisfaction’ group’s multi-instrumentalist Wood on her Instagram Story, and teased her followers with the caption: “Collab? (sic)” Laura believes it’s important artists explore different genres and styles of music. She said: “I think when you’re a maker of music you need to be open to all styles of music and for me hip hop is a whole new world for me and I’m learning.” ‘The Defiant Ones’ - which debuts on Netflix in the UK on March 23 - explores the partnership between Jimmy Iovine [who also produced the series] and Dr. Dre - one the son of a Brooklyn longshoreman, the other straight out of Compton - and their leading roles in a chain of transformative events in contemporary culture.

Blossoms to support The Courteneers at Teenage Cancer Trust gig

Blossoms will support The Courteneers at their Teenage Cancer Trust gig on March 23. The Northern rockers - comprised of Tom Ogden, Charlie Salt, Josh Dewhurst, Joe Donovan and Myles Kellock - recently returned with their new single ‘I Can’t Stand It’ from their forthcoming second studio album, ‘Cool Like You’, and are “very excited” to get to join their pals at the charity event at London’s Royal Albert Hall next week. They tweeted: “Very excited to announce that we’ll be special guests for @thecourteneers at their sold out @TeenageCancer @RoyalAlbertHall show in London on Friday 23rd March! (sic)” Kasabian are performing the following night and it’s also just been announced that indie rockers Spring King will open for Tom Meighan and co. For ‘What Took You So Long?’ stars The Courteneers - fronted by Liam Fray - playing the world famous venue is a special gig for the band as they are celebrating the 10th anniversary of their seminal album ‘St. Jude’ by performing the 2008 LP in full. It follows their homecoming gig at Manchester’s Old Trafford to 50,000 fans, following the horrific terrorist attacks at

Ariana Grande’s Manchester Arena concert in May. Liam said: “It’s a great honor and privilege to perform for such a brilliant charity at such a legendary venue. “This will be the first and last time we’ll ever perform our debut album St. Jude in full in London and we’re really pleased to be doing it for a such a great cause.” Kasabian recently completed a 12-date UK arena tour, in support of chart-topping record ‘For Crying Out Loud’, and can’t wait to entertain the masses. Frontman Tom said: “We love playing the Royal Albert Hall for the Teenage Cancer Trust. It is a show we have come back to throughout our career for the special atmosphere and the amazing cause. Our fans love it and we do too, it will be a highlight of 2018 for us.” The concert series was launched by the charity’s Honorary Patron Roger Daltrey CBE, the legendary frontman of The Who, who said: “It’s great to be welcoming back Kasabian, they have been fantastic supporters of this charity since they first headlined for us back in 2007.” For information on other acts performing this month head to teenagecancertrust.co.uk



RACHEL SHENTON’S MOVIE PLAN



Rachel Shenton wants to turn ‘The Silent Child’ into a feature film. The former ‘Hollyoaks’ actress and her fiance Chris Overton picked up the Best Live Action Short Film Oscar at the Academy Awards earlier this month and now she wants to take the project - which she co-starred in with six-year-old deaf actress Maisie Sly - even further. She said: “Next I want to make the film feature-length or turn it into a drama. “I’ve got an excited feeling this is just the beginning of deafness in film. “Ours wasn’t sensationalized, it’s a reality for thousands of children living in a world of silence, they face communication barriers and lack of access to education. “So I hope this contributes to getting sign language and deaf awareness into the curriculum in schools and on to our screens more. If we’ve started something with ‘The Silent Child’, I’ll be very proud.” And with greater campaigns for equality in the movie industry, Rachel is hopeful that will also include better representation of disability on screen. She told Grazia magazine: “Being at the first post-Weinstein Oscars was amazing. You could feel the change in the air - the way women and diversity were being celebrated. “It felt more progressive and like there’s a spotlight on diversity now. “It’s really important to remember that disability, including deafness, is diversity. “Disability is hugely under-represented in film but this is the year that’s all changing.” After winning their Oscar, the 30-year-old actress and her director partner shunned glamorous parties for a quiet celebration with their loved ones. Rachel said: “As incredible as the glamour was, Chris and I weren’t interested in partying with the A-list stars afterwards. “It was being with our parents and the film crew that mattered most to us. “We popped into the Vanity Fair afterparty, grabbed a burger, had a quick chat with Allison Janney and left in under five minutes. “We rushed off to celebrate with our families and team back at our apartment. It was really important that we got back and showed them the award.” — Bangshowbiz

Angelina Jolie Tomb Raider cameo ‘wouldn’t work’

An Angelina Jolie cameo in the new ‘Tomb Raider’ movie wouldn’t have worked, according to producer Graham King. The 42-year-old actress starred as Lara Croft in two movies based on the popular video game franchise - ‘Lara Croft: Tomb Raider’ in 2001, and 2003’s ‘Lara Croft: Tomb Raider - The Cradle of Life’ - and after the franchise was rebooted with a new movie simply entitled ‘Tomb Raider’ with Alicia Vikander in the lead role, executives were keen to get Angelina back for a cameo role. However, Angelina never appeared in the production - which hit cinemas earlier this week - and producer Graham King has revealed the “tone” of the movie wasn’t right to have a moment where she could “pass the baton” 29-year-old actress Alicia. Speaking to CinemaBlend, Graham said: “It was never a story that had that moment where you could, you know what I mean? Pass the baton over. There wasn’t that kind of tone and that would’ve changed tones to have that ... the studios of course, said ‘is there a way to get Angie? Should we try and have her kind of baton over this kind of thing?’ And I understand it for marketing and studios or whatever, but that never felt organic to our film. Something like that can tip the balance.” Meanwhile, Alicia - who is married to fellow actor Michael Fassbender - recently revealed she felt “empowered” after starring as the intelligent and athletic English archeologist. She said: “I don’t know when in life I would have been exposed to try so many new things, if it weren’t for this role. I found it very empowering. “I looked at female athletes and stunt women in my industry and I thought, ‘I need to have that kind of physique for it to be plausible.”



Lifestyle | Features

Japan's isolated older 'hikikomori' shun society for years

Ikeida leaves the house once every three days to buy food, shuns deliveries to avoid human interaction and has not seen his parents or younger brother for 20 years. The 55-year-old has chosen to shut himself completely away from society—such a commonplace phenomenon in high-pressure, conformist and workaholic Japan that there is a word to describe it: “hikikomori”. Until recently it was thought to be an issue mainly afflicting those in their teens and 20s, but ageing Japan is seeing a growing number of older hikikomori cloistering themselves away for longer periods of time.

There are more than half a million hikikomori in Japan—according to the latest government survey published in 2016 — defined as people who have stayed home for more than six months without going to school or work and interacting with no one other than family members. However, this underestimates the scale of the issue as it only counts people under the age of 39 and the government has now decided to conduct the country's first survey of hikikomori aged between 40 and 59.

Ikeida (not his real name) told AFP he graduated from a prestigious Tokyo university and received several lucrative job offers from major firms during Japan's “bubble economy” period in the 1980s. But he quickly realized he could not follow his university colleagues into the massed ranks of Japanese salaried men. “I went to a good university my parents wished me to go to and tried hard to conform,” he said in a rare interview arranged through a non-profit trying to help those isolated from society and their parents. “But I realized I had to conform forever when I got those job offers. I felt hopeless. I couldn't wear a suit. I felt like my heart had broken,” he added, speaking on condition of anonymity. Feeling under unbearable pressure, he took the decision to shut himself away in his room, shunning all forms of human contact—a pattern that was to continue for the next three decades.

‘They have been hurt’

What drives people to shut themselves away is not entirely clear, but many featured in the survey said they stopped interacting with society after struggling with relationships at work or school, or failing at job hunting. “Some people who suffer from schizophrenia become



Pictures show Ikeida, a 55-year-old Japanese man who has chosen to shut himself completely away from society, posing for a picture in Tokyo. — AFP photos

hikikomori. But it's often hard to know as they don't go out to see a doctor,” said Kayo Ikeda, a clinical psychologist who heads a non-profit offering advice to elderly parents with hikikomori children. “What we know is that they have been hurt. They were bullied or experienced interpersonal trouble at work,” she said.

Ikeida describes in his blog how his mother would hit him if he did not study hard enough and also subjected him to psychological pressure. Statistics suggest they also find it harder to reintegrate into society after turning away. In the 2016 survey, more than one third of hikikomori said they had withdrawn from society for more than seven years, up from 16.9 percent of such cases in a previous survey in 2009. As the hikikomori age and shut themselves away for longer periods of time, this places more pressure on elderly parents, both financially and emotionally.

“Maybe it's common overseas that grown-up children leave their parents' home, but in Japan, parents let them stay,” said Ikeda, the clinical psychologist. Rika Ueda, who works for the non-profit that supports parents of hikikomori children, says social stigma can make the situation worse. “Families with hikikomori children are very ashamed of themselves.... They hide their situation from their community and become isolated” without being able to seek help, Ueda told AFP. “I think such circumstances contribute to the problem of prolonged cases,” she added.

‘Lonely death’

Recognizing the growing problem, the health ministry has requested 2.53 billion yen (\$24 million) to support hikikomori people from the next fiscal year starting in April. The government also aims to help such people find

employment that suits their condition. Ikeida lives mainly on social benefits but also makes a little money by writing online articles from his room. He desperately wants to recover and has asked his parents several times to accompany him to a psychiatrist but they refused. “I want society to understand that we are not crazy people,” said Ikeida. He also worries about dying alone, another common fear in ageing Japan. “I think about a lonely death. I don't want to die that way. I don't want to be found rotten. So maybe I can ask for more visits by welfare officials, but I don't want that either,” he said. “It's such a contradictory feeling.” — AFP



A woman stands by paintings on the eve of the public opening of an exhibition of the work of US artist Mary Cassatt (1844-1926), a friend and protegee of French painter Edgar Degas, at the Jacquemart Andre museum. — AFP

IMPRESSIONISM'S US ICON MARY CASSATT FINALLY GETS HER DUE

There is no known record of the American artist Mary Cassatt giving Edgar Degas a good slap. But in the half century the two were friends, there must have been times when she was tempted to take a swing at the French painter. “I don't believe that a woman can draw that well,” Degas told her in 1892, taken aback by her painting “Young Women Gathering Fruit”. On another occasion standing before one of her Japanese-style prints, he asked in disbelief, “Did you really do this?” To top it all, Degas painted a “repulsive” portrait of his young friend—a picture that left her so furious she painted a riposte.

The sparky relationship between the pair is at the center of the first major retrospective of Cassatt's work in Paris. Although Cassatt is something of a national hero and female role model in her homeland, she is little known in France, the country where she spent most of her working life as the only American member of the Impressionist movement. But the new show at the Musee Jacquemart-Andre in the French capital finally aims to put that right. Curator Nancy Mowll Mathews said Cassatt and Degas were the oddest of couples—a feminist and the misogynist who somehow became friends for life. “Degas could be awful, I mean really awful,” she told AFP. “He had no filter. “Everybody had a falling out with him eventually. He said terrible things.

He was a misanthrope, and could be really cruel.” Wanting to be Michelangelo – Yet when the young Mary Cassatt defied her rich Pennsylvanian parents to decamp to France to become a painter, Degas invited her to join him, Claude Monet, Auguste Renoir and the other Impressionists. Cassatt was fiercely ambitious, Mowll Mathews said. “She wanted to be the female Michelangelo... for her paintings to hang in museums with the great artists of the past.” Such was her confidence that she deliberately chose homely models to grandstand her talent, she added. While her women were not pretty, they were “tall and very strong and confident—this was the image that she wanted to project of women,” the curator said.

And when men patronized her, Cassatt loved proving them wrong—producing some of the best prints of the period when others claimed that Japanese woodblock prints could not be matched in the West. When Degas painted a portrait of her that she found “repugnant and repulsive”, she

took up her brush. She rebuked him with a self-portrait that Mowll Mathews said “swiftly corrected him. In his she is stooped over, in hers she is upright and feminine and most important of all, she is painting...”

Sexual tension with Degas

The curator is still unsure what went on between them. “Is hard to say if there was sexual tension. They were both flirts. “I think they were both quirky and shared a sense of humour, which was a humour of abuse in a way—particularly Degas because he would say very mean things particularly to and about women.” Luckily, Cassatt—who became so financially successful from her painting that she was able to buy a chateau near Paris—was thick-skinned. “She wasn't that sensitive,” Mowll Mathews said. “Their relationship worked because she thought he was funny, he thought he was funny and her family liked him. He was half-American after all and both his brothers married Americans.” After the last Impressionist exhibition in 1886, Cassatt went her own way and made the “mother and child painting her own”, said Mowll Mathews. It was a daring choice for a woman who had turned her back on motherhood. “People could not resist saying, ‘Well she didn't have any children, she never married... tut, tut.’ “So for her to continue when her private life was being dissolved like this, she had to have a lot of gumption.”

The competition was also fierce from Paul Gauguin, Maurice Denis and many others. “Most of the other mother and child specialists of the time, and they were many, have no great place in art history now, but she does,” Mowll Mathews said. Beyond her own work, one of Cassatt's greatest legacies was as an evangelist for Impressionism in the US, where the movement had a more lasting impact on the public and collectors thanks to her than in France, said the show's co-curator Pierre Curie.

There she was a celebrity in her own lifetime, organizing a show of work by herself, Degas and several Old Masters in New York to raise money for the suffragette movement. “The message she was sending,” said Mowll Mathews, “was that in 1915 men and women were equal and both were the heirs of the great art of the past.” — AFP

Zimbabwe holds Miss Albinism beauty pageant to fight stigma

Oozing charm and confidence, 22-year-old Sithembiso Mutukura beat 12 other contestants in Zimbabwe's first Miss Albinism beauty contest aimed at reducing stigma and increasing awareness about the condition. Friday's “Beauty Beyond the Skin” pageant was held in a Harare nightclub, making Zimbabwe the second African country after Kenya to host such an event. Many African countries have a dark relationship with albinism—a genetic disorder inherited from parents who both carry a faulty gene that prevents the skin from making melanin properly and thereby giving it color.

They are hunted down in some African countries by witch doctors for their body parts which are used in potions to bring good luck or riches. Some are even kidnapped and sold by relatives out to make a fast buck. Mutukura said she entered the pageant to raise awareness. “The people with disabilities are always looked down upon even in schools. I have gone through a lot but I want people living with albinism to be

brave and persevere in life,” the social work student at the University of Zimbabwe told AFP after winning the crown. “We must continue to advocate for our rights and I hope my win will empower the girl child. People with disabilities must not look down upon themselves.”

The contestants sashayed down the catwalk in gowns and traditional African robes and were asked an array of questions to decide the winner. Mutukura won a food hamper and \$85 (70 euros) — a fair bit of money in Zimbabwe. Pageant organiser Brenda Mudzimu said she was happy to finally host the event as it was postponed last year due to a lack of funds.

Global pageant

“The pageant aims to instill confidence in girls living with albinism in Zimbabwe as well as reduce the stigma,” Mudzimu said. “People living with albinism are talented, beautiful and intelligent just like any other normal human being. My experience living with albinism was not easy. I learnt that in life living with albinism

you have to persevere and survive in life.” Mudzimu said she hoped to organise a global contest. “This will be an annual event which will later be advanced to Miss Albinism Africa and Miss Albinism World because we want to reach all corners of the world,” she said.

The southern African country has about 39,000 people living with albinism, she said. Tapuwa Muchemwa, a government representative who was the guest of honor, said Zimbabwean authorities were committed to uphold the rights of albinos. “We as government strongly advocate that people with albinism deserve their right to life and security and to be protected as well as the right not to be subjected to torture and ill treatment,” Muchemwa said. Albinism groups say more than 90 percent of people with the condition in Africa die before they reach the age of 40. The rate of albinism in Africa is much higher than in other parts of the world. — AFP



Contestants go through their paces on stage during the inaugural Miss Albino beauty pageant.



Zimbabwe's first Miss Albino Sithembiso Mutukura (center) sits holding a bouquet of flowers after receiving her crown during the inaugural Miss Albinism beauty contest, early in Harare. — AFP photos



Zimbabwe's first Miss Albino Sithembiso Mutukura (right) receives a bouquet of flowers after receiving her crown during the inaugural Miss Albinism beauty contest.

Lifestyle | Fashion

VICTORIA BECKHAM ANNOUNCES NEW 'SCIENTIFIC' SKINCARE RANGE

Victoria Beckham is designing a "very scientific" beauty range. The 43-year-old fashion designer recently announced via a Facebook Live video that she is expanding her beauty and fashion empire by moving into the world of skincare and said she is taking the process of designing the



Victoria Beckham

range very seriously to learn how her future products can be beneficial to her customers. She said: "I am currently in the process of creating my own color, my own line of skin-care creams, and a perfume. "It's going to be very scientific. I'm working with the best. I really want to learn. I want to educate myself and learn as much as I can.

"As a woman, I want to make the things that I need in my life, the things that are missing." Victoria partnered with global beauty company Estee Lauder - who own popular luxury brands such as Bobbi Brown, Clinique, Jo Malone, La Mer and MAC - in 2016 to create a capsule make-up collection inspired by the products she would want in her own make-up bag, which was an instant sell-out with her fans. Speaking about her inspiration behind the make-up collection she said: "It was me developing what I wanted in my makeup bag."

And in January, Victoria's husband David Beckham said he would launch his own men's skin-care and grooming range in collaboration with L'Oréal which means the famous duo will be following in the footsteps of celebrities who have extended their beauty empires this year - including Kim Kardashian West with KKW Beauty, Rihanna with Fenty beauty - as well as stars such as Serena Williams and Jennifer Lopez who are expected to launch their own ranges later this year. — Bang Showbiz

KHLOE KARDASHIAN'S NEW GOOD MAMA DENIM AIMS TO MAKE PREGNANCY FEEL SEXY

Khloe Kardashian was excited to create her own maternity line after being uninspired by the "unflattering" options in the market. The 'Keeping Up with the Kardashians' star is about to welcome her first child with boyfriend Tristan Thompson and the expectant mother has launched a new line of maternity wear - appropriately named Good Mama - for her popular denim brand Good American after realising she wanted "stylish" denim to comfortably take women through every stage of their pregnancy.

She told People magazine: "Until this point, no maternity denim options spoke to me - most of what's out there lack the stylish, fun details that I want to wear, or simply isn't flattering. With this collection, we set out to create a premium denim line for women of all sizes and stages of pregnancy, and even for the months after the baby is born." And the 'Revenge Body' star said it was "amazing" to be able to experience shooting the campaign for the brand whilst pregnant and she wants other women to feel the same way when they wear the jeans.

She said: "Shooting the Good Mama campaign while expecting a child of my own was an amazing experience. I want women to feel sexy, empowered and bad ass in these jeans. Good American is also a 'baby' of mine, so celebrating both my pregnancy and the expansion of our business has been very special."

On Thursday Khloe posted a picture on



Khloe Kardashian

her Instagram page which gave her social media followers a sneak peek at the new line whilst she posed for a side-profile photo to show off her expanding bump. She captioned the image: "I'm so excited for the launch of Good Mama!!! Who says pregnancy style can't be sexy!?! I am so proud of my @goodamerican maternity denim #GoodMama!! All you new mummies and mamas-to-be are going to be so chic in your Good Mamas!! Just dropped in sizes 00-24 on goodamerican.com!! (sic)" — Bang Showbiz

GADOT BECOMES REEBOK'S NEW BRAND AMBASSADOR

Gal Gadot has become the new face of Reebok. The 'Wonder Woman' actress has been named the sportswear brand's global ambassador - landing an endorsement deal reportedly worth \$10 million - and the brunette beauty is thrilled to have partnered with Reebok because fitness has always been a huge part of her life since she was a child because her mother Irit was a PE teacher. In a statement on the Reebok website, the 32-year-old actress said:



Gal Gadot

"Especially with having a mother who was a PE teacher, I was exposed to an active lifestyle from an early age, through fitness, I have found that I gain strength, endurance and confidence, and I couldn't imagine a better partner than Reebok to join me on this journey."

Gal follows in the footsteps of strong female stars who have worked with the brand on previous campaigns including Ariana Grande, Gigi Hadid, and Victoria Beckham. In a statement confirming the company's collaboration with Gadot, Todd Krinsky - the general manager of the performance business unit at Reebok - said: "We look to partner with women who instill confidence in all generations to take risks and to keep pushing, all while making a positive difference in the world.

"Her relentless spirit and natural leadership have already captivated and inspired millions and we believe that this is just the starting point. Through fitness, we know that we have the power to change lives and we are elated to have such a powerhouse in our corner to tell this story." Gadot - who was also announced as the Global Brand Ambassador for Revlon in January - was no stranger to the spotlight even before landing the role of Wonder Woman as the screen star won the Miss Israel pageant in 2004 at the age of 18.

Reebok have also created phone wallpapers for customers to download from their website which were "inspired by some of her most powerful quotes" and Gal believes the way to improving yourself is to put others first. She said: "The things that make us better are when we're pushing ourselves, or when we're more worried about others than we are about ourselves." — Bang Showbiz



Indian designer Esha Amini (center) greets during the Amazon India Fashion Week.

Amazon India Fashion Week



Indian designer Nida Mahmood (center) greets during the Amazon India Fashion Week Autumn Winter 2018 in New Delhi on March 16, 2018.



Indian designer Anju Modi (center) greets during the Amazon India Fashion Week Autumn Winter 2018 in New Delhi. — AFP photos

Celebrated Portuguese luthiers face end of the line

Surrounded by planers and other wood-working tools, Joaquim Capela carefully sculpts a new bridge for a violin at a tiny workshop in northern Portugal as it drizzles outside. Capela, 51, is a third-generation luthier, whose family's prize-winning instruments have been sought after for nearly a century by top musicians around the world, such as the late Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich. But he is set to be the last since his 22-year-old son Tiago has no desire to continue the family business, preferring instead to become a surgeon. The musical instruments "mean a lot to us but it's nothing compared to a son doing what he loves," says Capela, as he holds up the finished bridge, which supports the strings and transmits their vibrations to the body of a violin.

"If he is happy, that is what counts for me. If I am like my father, I still have at least another 30 years to make instruments." Seated nearby, his father Antonio Capela, 85, quietly goes about changing the strings and turning the pegs of a cello at the workshop in Anta, a picturesque town that is home to around 10,000 people near Porto, Portugal's second-largest city. "Aside from the two or three days of the year when I have my usual cold, I never stop working, even on weekends," he says in a soft voice.

'Many orders'

It takes on average about two and a half months for the Capelas to make a new string instrument, which sells for at least 3,000 euros (\$3,700). "We have so many orders that it takes us generally two years to honor them," says Joaquim, who started learning the craft as a child. Their story as luthiers began in 1924, when Joaquim's carpenter grandfather, Domingos Capela, agreed to repair the violin of an Italian-Brazilian musician, who belonged to the orchestra of the neighbouring town of Espinho. The musician was thrilled with the



Joaquim Capela adjusts the strings of a cello at his workshop in Espinho.

results and recommended Domingos to other members of the orchestra. As time went by the Capelas started to count top musicians as their clients, among them Rostropovich, considered to be among the world's greatest cellists. Photos of the Russian musician, who died in 2007, are proudly displayed on a wall of the Capelas' workshop, alongside violins, violas and cellos. The Capelas in 1972 won the top four prizes in the prestigious Henryk Wieniawski international violin making competition, which is held every five years in Poland, as well as the top prize in a highly respected Japanese competition in 1989.

Balkan maple, Italian spruce

"To make a quality violin, you have to choose the wood well," says Antonio, who studied his craft in Paris and the northern Italian city of Cremona, considered to be the cradle of violin making. The Capelas use only Balkan maple for the back of their violins and Italian spruce for the sounding board. "They have great acoustic qualities," says Antonio, taking the first violin made by his father out of its storage case to show AFP. The other secret of their success is the varnish they use to coat their instruments whose smell fills the workshop in Anta. The Capelas credit the varnish with giving their violins a distinctive timbre.

"In Cremona in Italy, the village of the violin, the other luthiers often ask me for the formula of my varnish, I simply answer that it is the same as theirs," says Antonio, before breaking out into a mischievous smile.



Antonio Capela repairs a cello at the Capela workshop in Espinho, northern Portugal.



Joaquim Capela carries two cellos at his workshop in Espinho, northern Portugal. — AFP photos

'Name will last'

Ana Mula, a Spanish professional cellist, drove 550 kilometres (340 miles) from Madrid with her father to get her two cellos repaired by the Capelas. "I saw a luthier in Madrid but his work disappointed me. The Capelas have a great reputation in Spain, so I am ready to stay in Portugal as long as it takes and pay the necessary price for my cellos," she said. Antonio says he is still very moved whenever he hears a musician play one of his "children of wood" as he likes to call the instruments he makes.

"The problem is that after my son and I, there will be nobody to make violins," he says. While the Capelas could pass on their craft to someone outside the family, they prefer not to. "As the proverb says, 'It is better to die honorably than to live dishonorably'," Antonio adds, suggesting the family would rather stop with their reputation for top-notch quality intact than have someone else continue, with the quality possibly suffering. "Everything has a beginning and an end," says Joaquim. "Our violins will still be there after several generations as evidence of our craft. 'The instruments can be destroyed, but not the name, it will last.'" — AFP



Joaquim Capela measures the thickness of a wood board at his workshop in Espinho, northern Portugal.



Joaquim Capela repairs a cello at the Capela workshop in Espinho.



Joaquim Capela uses a hot iron to brand a violin at the Capela workshop.



Antonio (right) and Joaquim Capela work at the Capela workshop.



Antonio (left) and Joaquim Capela pose at their workshop in Espinho, northern Portugal.



Joaquim Capela inspects a cello at the Capela workshop in Espinho, northern Portugal.

DALI REMAINS FINALLY RE - BURIED AFTER PATERNITY TEST



The remains of Salvador Dali, exhumed last summer to test a psychic's claims she was his daughter, were finally re-buried in his museum in northeastern Spain, the foundation that manages his estate said Friday. The remains were put back in the tomb of the surrealist artist at the Dali Theatre-Museum in Figueras overnight Thursday to Friday in the presence of a solicitor and forensic pathologist, the foundation said. A court had ordered Dali's exhumation to settle a paternity suit lodged by Pilar Abel.

Abel, who long worked as a psychic in Catalonia, claimed to be the daughter of the artist known as much for his paintings as his trademark moustache, whichóbe-

cause the corpse was embalmedóthe exhumation revealed remained in its iten past teni position. But DNA samples from Dali's skin, nail and bones proved she was not his biological daughter, and she was ordered to pay for the costs of the exhumation. Abel had claimed her mother had a relationship with the artist when she worked in Cadaques, a picturesque Spanish port where the painter lived for years. Born on May 11, 1904, Dali was one of the most famous artists from the 20th century surrealist period. He had been married to his muse Gala from 1934 to her death in 1982. They had no children and after his death in 1989, aged 84, he left his estate to the Spanish state. — AFP

Lifestyle

SUNDAY, MARCH 18, 2018



The latest work by the elusive British street artist Banksy is displayed along a wall on Houston street in Manhattan on March 16, 2018 in New York City. — AFP

Banksy mural backs jailed Turkish artist Zehra Dogan

After taking a stand in support of Palestinians and migrants, British street artist Banksy is now showing solidarity with imprisoned Turkish-Kurdish artist and journalist Zehra Dogan with a giant mural in Manhattan. The famed graffiti artist's 20-meter (yard) work features a series of tally marks

such as those prisoners use to keep track of the time they have been confined, one of which doubles as the bars of Dogan's cell. "Free Zehra Dogan" appears in the bottom right corner of the mural, located at the crossroads of Houston Street and Bowery.

Dogan was jailed for a painting picturing

the Kurdish-majority town of Nusaybin in southeastern Turkey, which suffered heavy damage during a Turkish military operation. "Sentenced to nearly three years in jail for painting a single picture. #FREEzehradowan," Banksy wrote in an Instagram post accompanying the mural. The "Bowery Mural Wall" on

the edge of the East Village has hosted some of the biggest names in graffiti since the late 1970s. Banksy's work was preceded by one by artist Lakwena.

Banksy is behind another work in recent days in Manhattan: picturing a rat-one of the artist's signature motifs-running inside the

face of a clock on a building slated for demolition, at the intersection of Sixth Avenue and 14th Street. The identity of Banksy, whose politically provocative graffiti appears suddenly on walls around the world, remains a mystery despite frequent attempts to pierce the secrecy. — AFP



Camels walk on the sand during the "Gallops of Morocco" equestrian race in the desert of Merzouga in the southern Moroccan Sahara desert. — AFP photos



A rider competes during the "Gallops of Morocco" equestrian race in the desert of Merzouga.

Morocco desert stallion race pushes limits of endurance

Battling gusts of sandy wind, riders from across the world struggled to control feisty stallions as they raced in the first Gallops of Morocco, a desert endurance challenge. In a country with an ancient history of horsemanship, the event in the wilderness of Merzouga was the first of its kind-a six-day test of stamina, navigation and teamwork. Competitors spend four to seven hours a day in the saddle, covering up to 30 kilometers (18 miles) of rough terrain a day. "You need a certain physical resistance," said Deborah Amsellem, 30, who headed from Toulouse, France, with four friends to take part in the race near the oasis town of Erfoud. "It's not very technical, but you're riding stallions, real alpha males," she said.

Riders use stopwatches to pace themselves and GPS devices to find their way through the sandy plains, deep dunes, rocky hills and passes. The unforgiving terrain and fickle weather are not the only challenges: competitors must ride Barb stallions they have never met. The North African breed, originally a warhorse, is known for its toughness and stamina but also for its hot temper. Fifteen teams took part in the late February adventure, made up of 80 horse-lovers, enthusiasts of everything from trail riding to polo. Organisers say the event is designed for "rather hardy riders who should

be in good physical condition and have a feel for horses in order to cope with the distances."

'Sense of space'

Saif Ali Al-Rawahi, coach of a team from Oman, described the event as "very difficult". "There are kilometers in the mountains and in the desert," he said. "The horses have to ride on high dunes, the weather is not so good, very windy. It's difficult for horses and riders." Oman was the site of the first "Gallops" race in 2014, and Rawahi's group of five soldiers from the Gulf sultanate's cavalry are accustomed to endurance races. Even they had to make do with coming fifth. "The trek is not just a race for professionals," said Benoit Perrier, a race official.

On the first day alone, several riders fell off their horses and some gave up entirely-while others said they were exhausted but enjoying the challenge. "If we wanted to ride the same distance in the Lille region (northern France), there would be highways and barbed wire," said French businessman Gregoire Verhaeghe. "Here we have a real sense of space." Having taken part in the Paris-Dakar rally four times, he said he loves the desert and made no complaint about the bad weather.

His family's team came first. Riding unknown horses, Barb stallions specially brought in from

across the country for the occasion, is part of the experience. Omar Benazzou, an official from Morocco's equestrian governing body SOREC, said he had headed to the event "out of curiosity". The Barb, long associated with North Africa's Berber ethnic group, "is a horse with a

big heart, sturdy, docile, resilient and can cover long distances," he said.

Morocco is determined to develop equestrian tourism, benefiting from its unique breeds to attract new visitors.

The country largely escaped the chaos



A rider competes during the "Gallops of Morocco" equestrian race in the desert of Merzouga.

unleashed by the Arab Spring uprisings, remaining safe and stable enough to attract an influx of tourists. The southern desert is a favorite destination for those seeking an outdoors experience. "You have hiking, car rallies, mountain biking and discovery trips," said Sadoq Abdedaim, owner of the upscale hotel chain Xaluca.

Claire Biyache, a French rider with eight years' experience who took part in the Gallops event, praised the "beautiful" surroundings. "We've seen lots of very different scenery, sometimes very black, very mineral, sometimes dunes, sometimes oases," she said.

The adventure came at a price. For Deborah, a student, the \$5,200 (4,200 euro) fee was "a real stretch". But Dato Beh Chun Chuan, a Malaysian businessman who flew to Morocco specially for the race, said it was "very cheap".

"The most important thing is to have fun and have friends," he said. "Winning is not my main agenda in life." The 62-year-old millionaire owns a polo club with 54 horses and employs four Argentinian riders to play with him. His team at the desert race included fellow businessmen and bankers with "money to spend", he said. His only regret was that his bivouac was not comfortable enough. He was not able to rent a helicopter to return to the hotel for the night. — AFP