

6 Psychometrics: How Facebook data helped Trump find his voters



10 American mother in Ghouta urges Trump to 'do something'



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Kuwait plans \$6.6 billion Al-Nayeem industrial city

State to launch IPO of Al-Zour water and power project

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Industry (PAI) plans to set up a multipurpose industrial city in the state with total expected investments of \$6.6 billion, an official said yesterday during a session of the Kuwait Investment Forum. PAI Acting General Manager Abdulkareem Taqi said that the government would put in place the infrastructure for the city at an estimated cost of \$600 million and would target around \$6 billion in investments from the private sector to develop the bulk of the project.

The Al-Nayeem industrial city, to be located 70 km west of the capital Kuwait City,

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higher value-addition. It will be an innovative, green city development powered by solar energy, and with smart buildings," Taqi added.

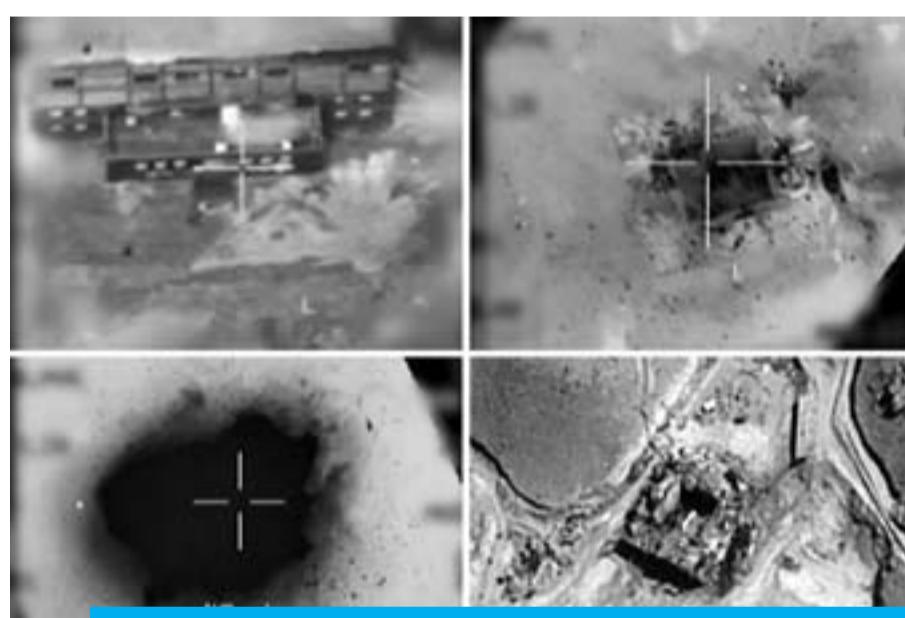
Meanwhile, Kuwait plans to begin selling shares in its Al-Zour North Independent Water and Power Project to the public in three months' time, an official told Reuters on the sidelines of the forum. "We are waiting for the regulators' approval of the prospectus (in a month). Two months after the approval, the subscription will start according to the law," said Mutlaq Al-Sane,

who heads the Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects.

The government plans to offer 50 percent of Al-Zour North One, which has a capacity of at least 1,500 MW, to Kuwaiti citizens. Those shares will come out of the 60 percent stake currently owned by sovereign wealth fund, the Kuwait Investment Authority, the Public Institution for Social Security, and the Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects. The remaining 40 percent is owned by France's Engie, Japan's Sumitomo Corp and Kuwaiti firm AH Al Sagar & Brothers. Kuwait and other Gulf states are promoting independent power projects, in which companies other than public utilities invest in and operate power plants, to reduce the burden on state budgets.—Agencies



KUWAIT: (From left) Cabinet Affairs Minister Anas Al-Saleh, Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah and KDIPA Director General Sheikh Meshaa Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah attend the closing session of the Kuwait Investment Forum yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Pictures provided by the Israeli army reportedly show an aerial view of a suspected Syrian nuclear reactor during its bombardment in 2007. — AFP

Israel admits 2007 Syrian 'nuclear reactor' bombing

JERUSALEM: Israel admitted for the first time yesterday it was responsible for a top-secret 2007 air raid against a suspected Syrian nuclear reactor, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pledging to prevent enemies from obtaining atomic weapons. Israel has long been assumed to have carried out the raid and had been named by other countries as being behind it, but it had never formally acknowledged the strike or divulged details. The admission along with the release of newly declassified material related to the raid comes as Israel intensifies its warnings over the presence of its main enemy Iran in neighboring Syria.

Netanyahu has also repeatedly called for a landmark 2015 nuclear deal between world

powers and Iran to be changed or eliminated. US President Donald Trump, who met Netanyahu at the White House this month, has said that the nuclear deal must be "fixed" by May 12 or the United States will walk away. After yesterday's acknowledgement, Netanyahu said "the Israeli government, the (Israeli military), and the Mossad (intelligence agency) have prevented Syria from developing nuclear capability, and they deserve every credit for this". "Israel's policy has been and remains consistent - to prevent our enemies from acquiring nuclear weapons."

Intelligence Minister Yisrael Katz was more explicit, saying it showed Israel would never allow nuclear weapons to be obtained by "countries like Iran who threaten its existence". The declassified material includes footage of the strike and pictures of secret army intelligence communiques about the site. A military statement lays out the case for why Israel carried out the strike at the desert site in the Deir Ezzor region of eastern Syria on what it says was a nuclear reactor under construction. Syria has denied it was building a nuclear reactor.

"On the night between September 5th-6th, 2007, Israeli Air Force fighter jets successfully struck and destroyed a Syrian nuclear reactor in development," the Israeli statement says.

"The reactor was close to being completed. The operation successfully removed an emerging existential threat to Israel and to the entire region - Syrian nuclear capabilities."

In 2008, less than a year after the strike, US officials accused Syria of having sought to build a secret nuclear reactor and acknowledged Israel destroyed it in the raid. The UN atomic watchdog declared in 2011 that the Syrian site was "very likely" to have been a nuclear reactor, adding that information provided to it suggested that it was being built with North Korean assistance. Israel said in its new disclosures that secrecy surrounding the strike was necessary due to the sensitive security situation, noting there was the possibility of it provoking war.

Continued on Page 11

Nod to citizenship for 4,000 bedouins, rights commission

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly yesterday passed two key legislations: The first to grant citizenship for up to 4,000 stateless people known as bedouins during 2018, and the second to establish a human rights commission. The first law was overwhelmingly passed in the first and final readings and was sent to the government amid calls by lawmakers for the government to speed up the naturalization of bedouins, especially the 34,000 people whom the government has said qualify for Kuwaiti citizenship.

Head of the Assembly's interior and defense committee MP Askar Al-Enezi said the interior minister has pledged to grant citizenship to bedouins who, or their forefathers, were counted in the 1965 census and others who have contributed excellent services to the country. MP Riyadh Al-Adasani said the government should grant citizenship to all those who deserve it without a law and rejected that the legislation should be applied for political reasons.

MP Safa Al-Hashem said citizenship should be granted only to those who were part of the 1965 census. MP Saadoun Hammad said a number of bedouins

Continued on Page 11



ROUND ROCK, Texas: Law enforcement officials search for evidence at the location where a suspected package bomber was killed in suburban Austin yesterday. — AFP

Saudis revamping school curriculum

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia is seeking to purge its school curriculum of any influence of the Muslim Brotherhood and dismiss employees who sympathize with the banned group, the education minister said. The government will "fight extremist ideologies by reviewing school curricula and books to ensure they are free of the banned Muslim Brotherhood's agenda",

Ahmed bin Mohammed Al-Issa said in a statement yesterday. It also seeks to "ban books attributed to the Muslim Brotherhood from all schools and universities and remove all those who sympathize with the group", he added.

The statement comes after Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman told CBS television in an interview Sunday that elements of the Muslim Brotherhood, designated as a "terror group" by the kingdom, had infiltrated Saudi schools. The prince, who has vowed to return the country to "moderate Islam", has cut back the political role of hardline clerics in a historic reordering of the Saudi state.

Many members of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood - who advocate toppling rulers deemed unjust - sought refuge in Saudi Arabia after being persecuted in the 1960s by then Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser. The Islamists were widely employed in the education and public sectors, putting aside their proselytism and submitting to Saudi Arabia's official Wahhabi ideology that requires obedience to the ruler. Some of them helped to establish the Sahwa or "Awakening" movement which agitated in the 1990s for democracy. The Sahwa mostly fizzled, with some activists arrested and others coaxed into conformity, though admirers and its appeal lingered. — Agencies

Amir, Crown Prince meet state officials at Bayan Palace

Defense Minister, French envoy hold discussions



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — KUNA



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness also received National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem. His Highness also received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received Ghaneem, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak, as well as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrar Al-Sabah. His Highness Sheikh Nawaf also met with Kuwait Oil Tanker Company (KOTC) CEO Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Director of Environment Public Authority (EPA) Sheikh Abdullah Ahmad Al-Humoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and Engineer Abdulaziz Abdulatif Al-Ibrahim. Separately,

Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah received Ambassador of the United Kingdom to the country Michael Davenport.

In other news, First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah met with the President of France's Special Envoy Ambassador Bertrand Besancenot and his accompanying delegation. During the meeting, the two sides discussed a number of key issues and subjects of mutual interest, in addition to ways of boosting the Kuwaiti-French relationship, the Defense Ministry's directorate of moral guidance and public relations said in a press statement. Besancenot is currently visiting the country to represent French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs at Kuwait Investment Forum 2018. The meeting was attended by French Ambassador to Kuwait Marie Masdupuy. — KUNA

Diwan Minister receives UK ambassador



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Kuwaiti, Maldivian auditors eye closer ties

KUWAIT: Deputy Chairman of Kuwait's State Audit Bureau (SAB) Adel Al-Saraawi held talks yesterday with the Auditor General of the Maldives Hassan Ziyath, focusing on strategies to develop bilateral relations. The Kuwaiti state audit acquainted the Maldivian delega-

tion with its most recent activities and current strategies. Khaled Al-Abdulghafour, the director of SAB's pre-supervision of economic affairs, was cited as saying in a statement by the audit body.

Meanwhile, he noted that the Maldivian auditors, during the course of their two-day visit, would attend presentations over supervision and operations management. The Kuwaiti auditor went on to explain that such visits provide an opportunity for the state audit to share its knowledge with international partners. Earlier yesterday, the visiting Maldivian official met with National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Hamad Al-Sabah. — KUNA



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem meets with Acting Chairman for Kuwait's State Audit Bureau (SAB) Adel Al-Saraawi, accompanied by chief of the Auditor General's Office in the Republic of Maldives Hassan Ziyath. — KUNA



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Hamad Al-Sabah meets with Auditor General of the Maldives Hassan Ziyath.

Plan to increase government spending for science, technology and innovation

Interactive session held on second day of Kuwait Investment Forum

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: An interactive session on the second day of the Kuwait Investment Forum (KIF 2018) was held at the Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center (JACC) highlighting the focus of the country to drive digital transformation. Speakers presented investment opportunities in diverse sectors, ranging from information and communications technology (ICT) projects, new city developments, modern oil industries, road and transport projects, industrial development, tourism and sports facilities.

Addressing delegates, Dr Adnan Shihab-Eldin - Director-General, Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), said: "There is an approved plan to increase government spending for science, technology and innovation to over one percent of the total GDP from 0.3 percent - closer to the global average, and set up a national research and development council, which will also strengthen the role of the private sector to improve their products, processes and services."

The human potential and support of the government continue to promote these initiatives to building a stronger innovation ecosystem for the welfare of the country and its people."

During a session on 'Investment Opportunities: Lustrous Options in Dynamic Sectors,' Dr Khaled Mahdi, Secretary-General of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development said: "The New Kuwait plan will address all concerns regarding our growth strategy. We have tech-savvy young human capital with 82 percent mobile penetration, strong ratings and the fundamentals for a prosperous future. We had a very structured development plan starting with legislative reforms from 2010 to 2015, infrastructure building, increased private sector engagement, building a knowledge-based economy and building a 'New Kuwait'. One of our key priorities must be to address the gaps relating to human capital development to prepare our nation for the Fourth Industrial

Revolution. We are also focused on strengthening our SME sector, with the national fund not serving now as a funding agency but as an incubator. We offer several incentives for youth to drive their entrepreneurship, including commercial sabbaticals."

Kuwait Airport

Ebru Ozdemir, Chairwoman of Limak in Turkey, said work on the Kuwait International Airport Terminal Phase 2, which the Turkish company is building, is progressing as per schedule, with several construction milestones already achieved. She said the forward-looking and open-development approach of Kuwait is a driver for inward investments, adding her company will work with Kuwaiti entities and investors to explore opportunities in new markets.

In the fourth session entitled 'Financing for Sustainable Development', Timothy Keating, Executive Vice President of Government Operations of Boeing, said: "For more than 50 years, Boeing has partnered with Kuwait, providing aircraft to meet both the commercial and military needs of the country. We have strong relationships with Kuwait Airways and the Aviation Lease and Finance Company (ALACCO), as well as Kuwait's armed forces. Human capital development is a key focus for Kuwait, as it is for many countries around the world, and frankly every organization including Boeing. This is why we believe the private sector has a responsibility to contribute by working with the community to ensure a qualified workforce. I am proud to say that Boeing has supported educational programs in Kuwait since 2010."

He revealed Boeing's plans to open its first official office in Kuwait this year. "The Middle East will require 3,350 new airplanes worth about \$730 billion by 2035. This means the region will need approximately 63,000 pilots and 66,000 technicians, some of whom could be trained here in Kuwait in the near future. We believe Kuwait with its Vision 2035 and the creation of KDIPA

(Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority) is targeting all the critical areas that make a place attractive to foreign investment."

Achievements

In the closing session on "Kuwait Development Path: The Vision and the Determination", Sheikh Meshal Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Director General of KDIPA, provided an overview of the achievements made by Kuwait in the past year. He said the country has achieved significant milestones in global rankings, improving from a rank of 90 to 59 in wastefulness in government spending, from 75 to 62 in quality of market regulation and from 108 to 90 in burden of government regulation, as per the Global Competitiveness Report 2017/18.

He said Kuwait also improved its ranking in the World

Bank's Ease of Doing Business report from 102 to 96, while Moody's has rated the country's credit rating at AA2 stable, "guaranteeing investors their rights and giving the private sector a stronger role in operations and project implementation".

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, praised the effort of KDIPA, and the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI), adding that this forum will boost Kuwait's economy and improve its business environment. Meanwhile, Anas Khaled Al-Saleh, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, said the government is not only interested in the economy and investments but also in investing in human assets. "There will be a workshop in the ministry of education to discuss a new creative curriculum and this is our priority," he said.



Kuwait achieved significant milestones in global rankings

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Kuwait to host meeting to discuss situation in Syria: Foreign Minister

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah announced during the closing session of Kuwait Investment Forum that there will be a meeting at the end of April to discuss the situation in Syria. "It is unfortunate that we are attending the Kuwait Investment Forum while violence and suffering in Syria continue. We must cooperate to make Syria return and participate with us," he said.

"After Kuwait assumed the role as an Arab mem-

ber of the UN Security Council, we highlighted Arab issues, especially the Syrian situation in Eastern Ghouta. Sweden and Kuwait presented a resolution at the UN Security Council to bring about a ceasefire and end the sieges and attacks against civilians, guarantee humanitarian access and medical evacuation of those most in need in Syria," he said. "In the political sphere, we do not see any glimmer of hope to resolve the situation in Syria and save the Syrians anytime soon. On the issue of the reconstruction of Syria, we will meet in late April to discuss the Syrian situation and we must take into account the reconstruction of the country."

Regarding the relationship between Kuwait and Iraq, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled stressed that Kuwait has made great progress in the bilateral relationship with Iraq and achieved many developments. About Kuwait's relationship with Iran, he said Iran must respect laws and general principles to improve relations. "We seek to have a proper environment for a lasting relationship between Iran, Kuwait and the Gulf states in all fields," he added.

100 Kuwaiti engineers to be trained for private jobs

By Meshal Al-Enezi and A Saleh

KUWAIT: Under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MSAL), the first forum to qualify newly graduated engineers to work for the private sector will be launched on Sunday at the Kuwait National Library, said the head of the forum Hanouf Al-Humaidi, noting that registration for the three-day forum is available on the forum's website: www.kuwaitengineer.com.

Humaidi said that 80 engineers have so far registered to take part in the forum, which targets training and qualifying 100 newly-graduated Kuwaiti engineers through special lectures, workshops and seminars to work for the private sector. She added that a number of Kuwaiti figures with ample experience will take part as trainers, such as the manager of the contracting sector Mohammed Al-Thuwaini, Manpower and Government Restructuring Program's (MGRP) legal affairs manager Sami Al-Ruwaisi, engineer Badra Al-Mutairi, Sara Aman and a number of engineers and experts. Humaidi said that the forum will brief the young engineers on the benefits of working for the private sector as well as provide them with training and skills.

Separately, acting director of the Public Authority for Manpower Mubarak Al-Azmi said the process to complete the merger between MGRP and the authority is still ongoing. He added that the Civil Service Commission (CSC) has already approved the new body's organizational structure, while other financial concerns are still being discussed.

Meanwhile, the Public Authority for Manpower's professional skills department completed the job description and professional standards for nearly 100 specialized and technical professionals the market needs, so that those wanting to come to the country can be tested before they enter the country, Al-Rai reported yesterday. An official source at the authority said the "job description will allow bringing in trained workers who will play an effective role in advancing Kuwait and contribute to move the wheels of development in the country forward".

The source said the issuance of work permits will be linked to passing the

skills tests which will be conducted online by specialized institutions that are accredited in their countries. The sources said there will be no exemptions in implementing the latest administrative circular which links the renewal of expat engineers' work permits with passing the necessary professional exams and receiving a "no objection certificate" from the Engineers Society.

Summer season

Ministry of Electricity and Water's (MEW) assistant undersecretary for water operation and maintenance Khalifa Al-Feraij said the ministry is ready for the summer season and the expected high consumption of electricity. Speaking on the sidelines of the 'GCC Successful Water and Power Conservation Experiences Conference', Feraj said MEW is keen on maintaining both grids before the summer, adding that water consumption is expected to increase in the summer by 20-30 million gallons compared to last summer.

Feraj said the first phase of the Doha water plant is expected to produce 60 million gallons and thus become one of the most important projects ever executed by MEW. He added that the project is expected to be concluded by the end of the year. Commenting on the conference, Feraj said it is vital to spread public awareness concerning conserving water and electricity, and stressed that the conference is a great opportunity to exchange ideas, papers and studies. MEW's technical control department manager Iqbal Al-Tayyar highlighted the significance of cooperation and exchanging expertise with other GCC states to stop wasting electricity and water.

Final exams

After rescheduling this year's final exams for all classes except grade 12, well-informed educational sources stressed that the start of the summer vacation will remain the same for all teachers. The sources explained that the summer vacation will start on June 7 for teachers working in kindergartens, those working in primary and intermediate schools will start their summer vacation on June 14, and those working in secondary schools will start theirs on July 8. "This includes private schools," stressed the sources. The sources said the decision to reschedule the final exams was made following enough studies to avoid negative effects on students. Notably, Education Minister Hamed Al-Azmi recently announced that the final exams for all grades except grade 12 will start on May 6 and end on May 17, while those of grade 12 will be held in the period of May 20-31.

KCCI pins hopes for development on active private sector

KUWAIT: Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) is examining ways to allow the private sector the chance to contribute to national development, its chairman said yesterday, stressing the need to have an open and competitive economy.

KCCI is steadfast in its efforts to regulate the national economy in a way where the country's oil wealth is used as a stepping

stone to sustained development, Ghanem said in a meeting of the business body. "The Kuwaiti economy faces a worsening dilemma given how capricious the global economy has gotten," Ghanem pointed out.

He went on to reveal that KCCI's net income in 2017 stood at around KD 5.5 million (\$18.15 million), as compared to KD 5.3 million (\$17.49 million) the previous year, while total expenditure is at KD 3.9 million (\$12.8 million). The non-government institution, which was comprised of 49,000 members last year, has also certified around 369,000 transactions in 2017, Ghanem noted. He cited a raft of economic reforms the chamber has introduced to keep the economy afloat, which deal with labor, trade, tax and real estate. As a public utility, KCCI seeks to provide the private sector the leeway it needs to be able to contribute to economic growth. — KUNA



KCCI Chairman Ali Al-Ghanem

EQUATE sponsors online education initiative

KUWAIT: Continuing its support for social initiatives aimed at developing the capabilities and knowledge of the youth to arm them with the ability to face global challenges, EQUATE Petrochemical Company, a global producer of petrochemicals, announced its sponsorship of the national initiative for the development of online education (Taaleb).

During a press conference held by Taaleb, EQUATE Sustainability Committee Member Asrar Mohammad said: "EQUATE invests in supporting the professional development of the human capital, whether as human resources working at our company or as members of the society at large. We are focused on supporting the development of the youth who represent a key pillar in EQUATE's Sustainability Strategy. Taaleb has gained tangible success since its inception due to its innovative solutions, enabling students to focus on studying and achieving excellence. For that, EQUATE is extending its support and contributing to the development of our local human capital." Established in 2010, Taaleb has become the internet-based portal for the Ministry of Education, serving over half a million students and promoting online communication between students and teachers.



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- 2 years total minimum work experience in related designation/specialty

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Six development projects to complete by Q1 2019: Ministers

Premier patronizes campaign on Kuwait development plan

KUWAIT: Six of the projects listed in the State Development Plan would complete by the first quarter of 2019, ministers revealed. This came during the third session of the Kuwait Investment Forum 2018 which kicked off Tuesday at the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center in the presence of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. The ministers said that the government is committed to transparency with the society about the pace of execution of the state development plan projects to implement the vision of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to raise the efficiency of state institutions, achieve sustainable development and have developed infrastructure.

They identified the six projects as the Kuwait International Airport's Passengers Support Terminal (T4); Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Bridge; the project of revamping air navigation systems; the first stage of the Shagaya renewable energy complex; the last phase of clean fuel project; and the establishment of a company for entertainment services.

Minister of Oil and Minister of Electricity and Water Bakheet Al-Rashidi said that 84.8 percent of clean fuel project was finished and the whole project would complete in 2019. The project aims to increase Kuwait's oil production and meet growing demand for oil products on local and global markets, he said.

He unveiled that 80 percent of the Shagaya renewable energy complex have been done. The nascent project would help materialize His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's vision to produce 15 percent of electricity through renewable energy by 2030, he clarified. He disclosed that that shares of Zour North Power Plant, which produces 10 percent of Kuwait's power production and 20 percent of the desalinated water, would be put up for public subscription before the end of this year.

Meanwhile, Minister of Finance Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf said that the Finance Ministry has set a major goal to stop the squandering of government funds without affecting invest-

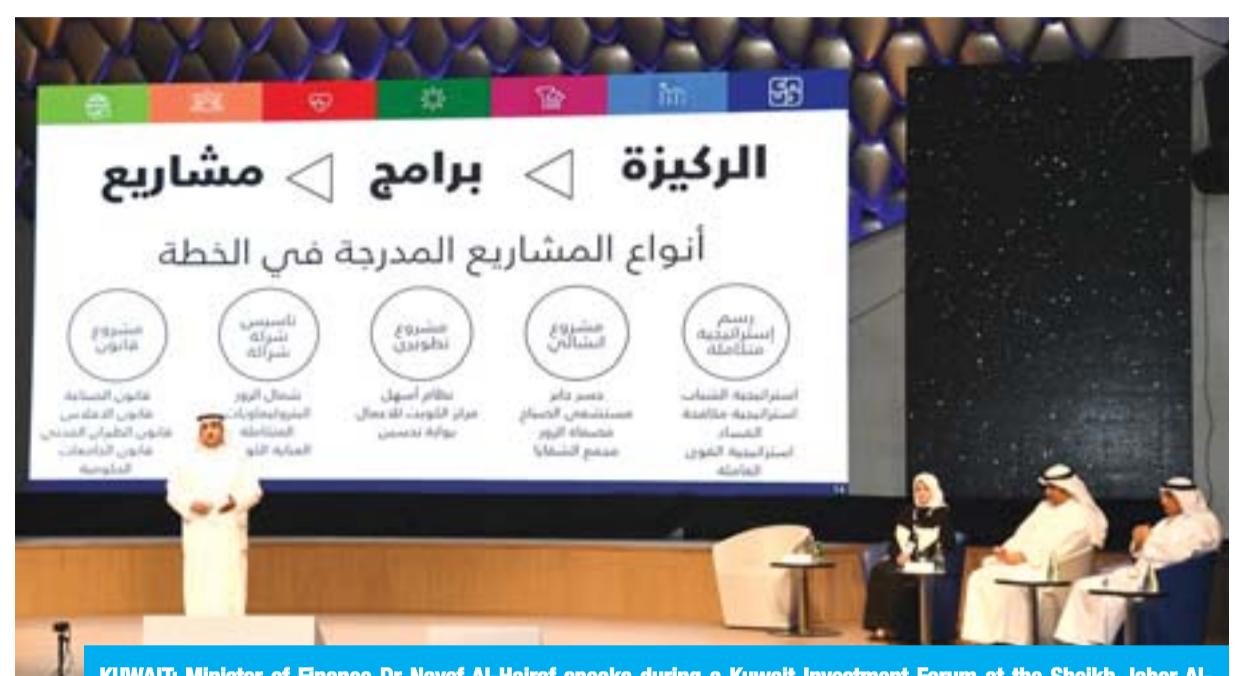
ment spending, which increased in this year's budget from 17 to 18 percent. He pointed out that the studies conducted by the General Secretariat of the Supreme Planning Council revealed squandering of up to 40 percent of the government spending. He estimated capital expenditure since the launch of the state development plan in 2010 until today at KD 23.6 billion (about \$78 billion). Kuwait rankings on various international indexes improved last year, including in the World Bank Group's ease of doing business list, he said.

Minister of Industry and Commerce, and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Khaled Al-Roudhan stated that a package of legislative reforms is on the pipeline to woo foreign investments. This package includes new commercial registration law; reorganization of the insurance sector; a law for information exchange; a law for bankruptcy and restructuring; a new competition protection law, he said.

He added that the Direct Investment Promotion Authority attracted more than KD 725 million (about \$2.4 billion) in foreign investments in the last three years which generated more 1,000 job openings. He noted that the number of new limited liability companies increased from 5261 companies in 2016 to 9682 companies in 2017.

New Kuwait

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah on Tuesday sponsored a ceremony on the 'New Kuwait' initiative to review the national development plan. The plan is based on the 'Kuwait 2035' vision of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on transforming Kuwait into an international commercial and financial hub by this period. In his speech during a dialogue session, Hajraf reviewed pillars, on which the vision is based, that include some programs of projects. He referred to the improvement witnessed by the State of Kuwait in several financial aspects in accordance with specialized global institutions. Roudhan touched upon steps taken by the



KUWAIT: Minister of Finance Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf speaks during a Kuwait Investment Forum at the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center on Tuesday. —KUNA

government to achieve sustainable and diversified economy through the encouragement of foreign investments and an integrated vision to improve business environment.

Rashidi talked about development and infrastructure projects under construction. He revealed phases of projects that have been finalized, the deadline of their completion, as well as other schemes to be operated by the end of the first quarter of next year. Minister of Social Affairs and Labor and Minister of State for Economic Affairs Hind Al-Sabeh explained the role of government's effective management as a pillar of its development plan.

She referred to a strategy for combating corruption and enhancing transparency through the implementation of the integrated strategic plan of e-government. In a press statement following the session, His Highness the Prime Minister affirmed keenness of the government on materializing the vision of His Highness the Amir on the transformation of Kuwait into an international commercial

and financial hub so as to highlight its status and to be among the developed countries. He said this was clearly manifested in accomplishments made on ground over the last period.

Holding the campaign reiterates eagerness by the government to brief the Kuwaiti people transparently on the latest developments of the ambitious plan and its goals achieved in this period, mainly building a national staunch economy which provides a dignified life and bright future for the next generations, the premier said. Kuwait has managed to chalk up several development achievements and projects that contribute to promoting an investment environment and an integrated economic climate, and to enact many legislations and laws to benefit investment in Kuwait, he stated. Finally, the premier commended the event's organizers that aims to support national economy, expressing his pride for efforts by the Kuwaiti people to serve their dear homeland. —KUNA

Projects to be completed by the first quarter of 2019

- Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah Causeway - expected to be the fourth longest bridge in the world, the \$3 billion JAS Causeway will link Kuwait City with Doha and Subbiyah in the north and a major transit way for the new Silk City project (Madinat Al-Harree). The main part of the causeway will travel across Kuwait Bay, linking the Shuaiba Port area on the south side to the Subbiyah New Town area to the north. The length of the main causeway is 36 km of which 27 km is a marine bridge structure. The Doha Link crosses the south of Kuwait Bay and links Shuaiba Port with the Doha motorway. The Doha link is 13km in length and is predominantly a marine bridge structure.



Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah Causeway

- Kuwait International Airport's Passengers Support Terminal (T4) - T4 will accommodate about 4.5 million passengers annually. The project will ease congestion at the existing terminal, and is expected to create 2,000 job openings and additional revenues for the State amounts to \$60 million.



Kuwait International Airport's Passengers Support Terminal (T4)

- Shagaya Renewable Energy: Phase 1 - The first commercial Concentrated Solar Park (CSP) in Kuwait. Shagaya phase one will include a 50MW solar CSP plant, a 10MW Solar PV plant and a 10 MW wind plant. The expected total capacity of CSP will be 1150 MW (750 MW Parabolic Trough, 400 MW Solar Tower), PV 700MW, and wind 150MW. Developed by Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), the project signed EPC contract (\$385 million) with a consortium consisting of Spanish EPC company TSK and Kuwait's Kharafi National in 2015.



Al-Shaqaya Renewable Energy Complex

- Clean Fuels Project - The \$16 billion upgrade of Mina Abdullah and Mina Al-Ahmadi Refineries to a combined capacity of 801,000 b/d with the construction of several new refinery units and the refurbishing of existing ones (29 units at Mina Al Ahmadi and 30 at Mina Abdullah).

- Services and Entertainment Center - The project involves the development of a top-notch services and entertainment center in the Al-Egaila Area.

The primary objective of the project is to meet the existing demand for commercial and entertainment outlets in the area surrounding the project site, to minimize residents' need to seek required services in nearby districts/governorates. The scope of the project is to design, build, finance, operate, maintain, and transfer (I) a multi-floor recreational, cultural, commercial, and sports center with an allowable build-up area of 112,400 sqm (spread over four floors: basement, ground, first and second floors), including adjourned parking for each level with an overall capacity to accommodate not less than 3,600 parking spaces, (2) and a Fresh Food Market with a total area of 20,000 sqm, in the Al-Egaila area. The term of the contract with the Kuwait Municipality is expected to be 27 years in addition to and added 3 years for the design, construction and finance of all the infrastructure assets.

- The project of revamping air navigation systems - Kuwait plans to develop the air navigation systems around the country.

Kuwait plans new airport in the north: DGCA chief

KUWAIT: Kuwait is considering building a new world-class mega airport to meet the rapid growth in air traffic. Directorate General of the Civil Aviation chief Sheikh Salman Sabah Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah has revealed. "The State of Kuwait is studying putting up a tender for setting up a new airport with capacity of 25 million passengers a year," Sheikh Salman said in a speech at the Kuwait Investment Forum 2018 (KIF 2018). "Taking into consideration the basic requirements for airport building, security and safety standards and weather, the new airport will be located in northern Kuwait." He argued that this site would facilitate the establishment of an integrated airport that would provide all transport and logistics services.

Sheikh Salman stated that the government would allocate the land and the private sector would build, operate and manage the project.

"Assigning such a mega project to specialized international companies would be an optimal way for achieving partnership between public and private sectors," he noted. He forecasted up to \$12 billion would be invested in the new airport which would generate over 15,000 job openings and offer great platform for high-quality training for national cadres by specialized international experts. He underlined that the new project would meet the steady growth in air traffic. "Kuwait will witness a rapid growth in passenger and cargo movement in the coming 20 years, so we study such projects," he clarified.

He pointed out that the air traffic at Kuwait International Airport has witnessed remarkable growth in recent years. He stated that the Kuwait International Airport has accommodated 13.7 million passengers in 2017, an increase of 17 percent compared to 2016 and the volume of its air cargo hit 241,000 tons in 2017 compared with 195.5 tons in 2016, he disclosed. "To keep pace with this growth, the DGCA has also revamped the existing airport through a number of projects such as the construction of the new passenger terminal (T2) with a capacity of 25 million passengers annually, scheduled to complete by 2022," he said.

He indicated that the project created about 12,000 jobs opportunities, especially for young Kuwaitis and would generate additional annual revenues for the state estimated at \$300 million. Sheikh Salman added that the DGCA had also started the building new Passengers Support Terminal (T4).

"Work in this project is proceeding according to schedule," he said, noting that it aims to ease congestion at the existing terminal at the Kuwait International Airport. He noted that T4 would accommodate about 4.5 million passengers annually and provide diverse services for travelers, he said.

The project is expected to create 2,000 job openings and additional revenues for the State amounts to \$60 million annually, he said. The DGCA is also setting up two new runways and a new control tower at the Kuwait International Airport to enhance its traffic efficiency and safety, he stated. He described the construction of the new cargo city at the Kuwait International Airport (currently in the first stage) as one of the most promising projects of the State development plan. The mega city would be built on an area of three million square meters and is expected to be the largest in the Middle East, he said.

Sheikh Salman affirmed that DGCA vision had three main pillars: Kuwait's strategic location in the region which gives the Kuwait International Airport a privilege that allows it to a regional hub for the traffic linking the West and East; Kuwait's trade history; and the State's vision to become a regional financial and commercial hub to diversify its income resources. He pointed out that the State is interested in revamping air transport sector to achieve His Highness the Amir's vision of transforming Kuwait into a financial and commercial hub. This requires a qualitative leap in the infrastructure of the air transport sector and the relevant laws to keep abreast of developments in this industry, he said. He disclosed that Kuwait is finalizing a new civil aviation law to open the way for the establishment of new aviation companies to be future incubators and platforms for the international ones. —KUNA

Local

Man arrested with 125 liquor bottles in Subhan

Reckless driver detained at friend's wedding

By Hanan Al-Saadoun and Agencies

KUWAIT: An Asian man was arrested in Subhan with possession of 112 homebrewed liquor bottles and 13 imported ones. He was sent to concerned authorities.

Reckless driver

Police arrested a reckless driver who was celebrating his friend's wedding, and his car was impounded. Police responded to several calls about the suspect's behavior, and when they arrived, the man refused to obey their orders and attempted to escape. He was put under arrest after showing fierce resistance. He faces several charges.

Swindling

A Kuwaiti woman accused a Lebanese man of swindling her out of KD 4,500 by promising to remodel her restaurant in Salhiya. The woman said that she met the man and agreed with him to decorate her Italian

restaurant and paid him the deposit. The woman could not reach him four days later and his phone was switched off.

Under the influence

A citizen and a Saudi were found under the influence of drugs when stopped in Oyoun in Jahra. The two resisted arrest and hurled insults at police. They were taken to Taima police station, where it was discovered the citizen is wanted over a KD 36,000 debt. Both were sent to the Drugs Control General Department.

Fight

Hawally police broke up a fight between three citizens in Nugra, and one of them was injured in the arm. Police responded to a call and were able to control the fighters. The injured man was taken to hospital and the other two to the police station. The two said they had financial dispute with the injured man and did not want to settle it.

Inmates fight

A security source said a bedoon serving a 10-year jail sentence was involved in a fight with a Nepalese inmate. The bedoon suffered a swollen face and a broken left index finger. The case was referred to the prosecution.

Maid's torture

Ahmad prosecution charged a citizen at Hadiya police station with 'detaining and torturing' a person in a case in which he is accused of mistreating his domestic helper. Meanwhile, his sister denied any links with the case. An Indian man had told Hadiya police that his mother is being detained and tortured by her employer. Police went to the house, where they were met with a woman who identified herself as the sponsor's sister. She allowed police to take the victim, who was rushed to Adan Hospital where doctors said her condition was stable. Police discovered that the victim worked for the suspect despite him not being her official sponsor.



KUWAIT: This photo released by the interior Ministry shows liquor bottles found with a bootlegger who was arrested yesterday.

Car fire

A car caught fire on Sixth Ring Road near Farwaniya, causing a huge traffic jam. Police and firemen dealt with the incident and no injuries were reported.

Legalese

Contracts

By Attorney Fajer Ahmed

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I know that I write about employment law more than any other law, primarily because I have more experience dealing with commercial laws, but also because I believe that there is a lot of ground for improvement. The law itself is written with many benefits for the employee, making sure that employees cannot be taken advantage of, but there are other issues that go alongside the law. The law has to be accessible - people need to know what they are getting into when they take a bold step of leaving their hometowns to come and work in Kuwait. I hope that one day, the law will be more accessible to all employees working in Kuwait and employers as well.

Probation period

Question: My understanding is that the first 100 working days are a probation period, which means I can leave my work at any time. Yet if I can leave within the first 100 days, then how come I cannot transfer my visa in Kuwait? I have been brought in from my country for this job and I believe I deserve 100 days to try the job out, as well as to see if life in Kuwait will suit my needs.

Fajer: The visa laws/bylaws in Kuwait are separate from the Kuwait labor law, and unfortunately the visa law does not allow transfers during the probation period, which is something I think the officials should consider. I understand that the reason transfers are not allowed unless a certain period has passed is because many employers lose money bringing non-Kuwaitis into Kuwait and training them. But I also know that the law has placed a three-month notice period for contracts without a period, and for those with a period, there are consequences as well. So for now, unfortunately, you cannot transfer within your probation period if you are coming to Kuwait to work for a certain employer.

Also, there is a huge misconception in the public that the probation period is three months or that it is even 100 days - it is actually 100 working days. If you work 22 days a month, your proportion period is then a little under five months.

Common mistakes

Question: Since you are a lawyer with experience in commercial and employment law, what are the most common mistakes that people make, or that your clients make, which can be avoided in the future?

Fajer: This is a very broad question. Instead of focusing on the mistakes one can make (there are too many to enumerate), let us think about what actions an employee can do to protect themselves in the future. Some of the most common are:

1. If you are going to resign, do it in writing.
2. If your boss agrees to your resignation, get it in writing.
3. If your boss makes any statement that can affect you in the future legally, get it in writing.
4. Read your contract carefully.
5. Ask for a copy of your contract.
6. Check your work permit.
7. Always try to figure things out amicably.
8. Research.

I have plenty of articles available on the Legalese section of the Kuwait Times website www.KuwaitTimes.com - please read them.

I hope the above helped. If you have a concern, please email us at info@ftl-legal.com

Kuwaitis in US urged to be cautious of hurricanes

WASHINGTON: Kuwait's Embassy to the US warned their nationals enrolled in universities across southern states and other hurricane and thunderstorm-prone areas to be alert and take precautions. In a statement, the embassy said it hoped Kuwaitis would stay safe and secure during the expected extreme weather conditions, urging them to abide by the instructions and directions of US authorities in these circumstances. Kuwaitis were also urged to maintain contact with the embassy in Washington and provide it with any developments that might affect their status as a result of the storms. Contact can be made through these following emergency hotlines, Kuwait Embassy: +1 (202) 262-0758, Kuwait Cultural Office: +1 (202) 364-2104, Kuwait Health Office: +1 (202) 320-2415, Military Affairs Office: +1 (202) 818-0666. —KUNA



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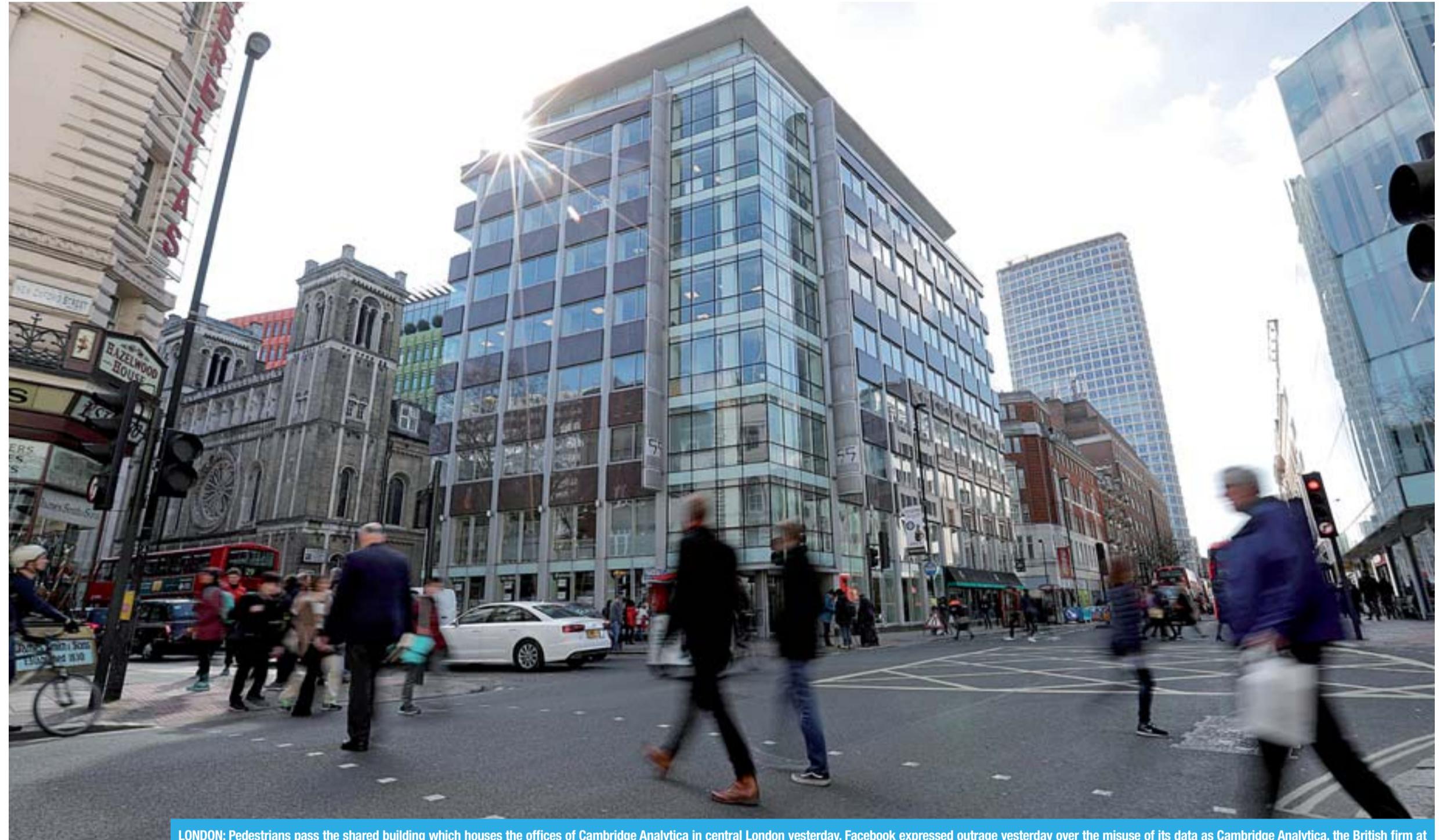
Executions, torture, slave markets persist in Libya

Page 7



Syrian Kurds bitter over West turning a blind eye to Afrin

Page 8



LONDON: Pedestrians pass the shared building which houses the offices of Cambridge Analytica in central London yesterday. Facebook expressed outrage yesterday over the misuse of its data as Cambridge Analytica, the British firm at the centre of a major scandal rocking the social media giant, suspended its chief executive. —AFP

Data firm suspends CEO over Facebook scandal

App developer says he is scapegoat in Facebook data row

LONDON: The academic behind an app that harvested data from millions of Facebook users said yesterday he was being scapegoated in an online privacy row that has rocked the social media giant. British data firm Cambridge Analytica (CA) and Facebook are accused of improperly using the data for US President Donald Trump's election 2016 campaign. The scandal, which has seen the suspension of CA's chief executive, wiped out \$60 billion of Facebook's market value since the start of the week, Bloomberg news reported yesterday.

However, both firms have denied any wrongdoing and instead blamed the app's inventor, Aleksandr Kogan, for misusing the information. But Kogan hit back yesterday, saying that CA had assured him his activities were "perfectly legal and within the terms of service" of Facebook. "I'm being basically used as a scapegoat by both Facebook and Cambridge Analytica," he said. "We thought we were acting perfectly appropriately. We thought we were doing something that was really normal. We were assured by Cambridge Analytica that everything was perfectly legal and within the terms of service."

The University of Cambridge psychologist behind the personality survey This Is Your Digital Life told the BBC that around 200,000 people used his app and around 30 million US Facebook users' details were harvested. The app's vast reach beyond its users happened by scooping up data from their friends on Facebook, which says the data was taken without-

out its knowledge. Kogan said CA approached him to do the work, but did not know how the firm would use the personal data collected, leaving him "stunned" by the allegations against him.

Pressure on Facebook, CA

Kogan said he strongly regretted not asking more questions about the work he did for CA. "One of the great mistakes I did here was I just didn't ask enough questions," he said. "I had never done a commercial project, I didn't really have any reason to doubt their sincerity. He added: "My motivation was to get a dataset I could do research on; I have never profited from this in any way personally."

The scandal erupted over the weekend, after a CA whistleblower said the CA was able to create psychological profiles on 50 million Facebook users via a personality prediction app developed by Kogan and downloaded by 270,000 people.

Lawmakers on both sides of the Atlantic have demanded answers in the scandal, which has ratcheted up the pressure on Facebook-already under fire for allowing fake news to proliferate on its platform during the US presidential election.

Kogan said he would be

prepared to appear before

British or US lawmakers if

requested. CA suspended its

chief executive Alexander

Nix on Tuesday over the

row as recordings emerged

of him boasting that the firm

played an expansive role in

Trump's 2016 election

campaign, doing all of its

research, analytics as well as

digital and television cam-

paigns. In undercover film-

ing captured by Channel 4

television, he is also seen

boasting about entrapping politicians and secretly operating in

elections around the world through shadowy front companies.

In the footage, Nix slighted US representatives on the House

Intelligence Committee to whom he gave evidence last year,

claiming its Democrats are motivated by "sour grapes" and

Republicans asked few questions. "They're politicians, they're not technical. They don't understand how it works," he told an undercover reporter. He also outlines the use of a secret self-destructing email system. "There's no evidence, there's no paper trail, there's nothing," he said of the tool, which deletes emails two hours after they have been read.

Facebook 'outraged'

US media reported Tuesday evening that the Federal Trade Commission is investigating Facebook over the data scandal. Facebook said its top executives were "working around the clock to get all the facts". "The entire company is outraged we were deceived. We are committed to vigorously enforcing our policies to protect people's information and will take whatever steps are required to see that this happens," the firm said.

Facebook shares fell 2.6 percent on Tuesday to close at \$168.15, adding to Monday's big decline. European Union officials have called for an urgent investigation while British, US and EU lawmakers have asked Facebook boss Mark Zuckerberg to give evidence. Andrea Jelinek, chair of the EU's WP29 data protection regulator, said: "Personal data cannot be used without full transparency on how it is used and with whom it is shared." This is therefore a very serious allegation with far-reaching consequences for data protection rights of individuals and the democratic process." —AFP

Psychometrics: How Facebook data helped Trump find his voters

WASHINGTON: It was one of hundreds of cute questionnaires that were shared widely on Facebook and other social media, like "Which Pokemon Are You?" and "What Are Your Most Used Words?" This one, an app called "thisismydigitallife", was a personality quiz, asking questions about how outgoing a person is, how vengeful one can be, whether one finishes projects, worries a lot, likes art, or is talkative. About 320,000 people took the quiz, designed by a man named Aleksandr Kogan.

Kogan was contracted to do it by a company called Cambridge Analytica, founded by US Republican supporters including Steve Bannon, who would become the strategist for Donald Trump. Because Kogan's app was circulated via Facebook, it reaped far more than just the information on those who took the test. At the time, in 2015, such apps could scrape up all the personal details of not only the quiz-taker, but all their Facebook friends. That ultimately became a horde of data on some 50 million Facebook users-their personal information, their likes, their places, their pictures, and their networks.

Marketers use such information to pitch cars, clothes, and vacations with targeted ads. It was used in earlier elections by candidates to identify potential supporters. But for Kogan and Cambridge it was a much bigger goldmine. They used it for psychological profiling of US voters, creating a powerful database that helped carry Trump to victory in the 2016 presidential election. The data let the Trump campaign

know more than perhaps anyone has ever known about Facebook users, creating targeted ads and messaging that could play on their individual biases, fears and loves-effectively creating a bond between them and the candidate.

Psychometric profiling

The project was based on the work of a former Cambridge scientist, Michal Kosinski, who studies people based on what information they generate online. Kosinski and fellow researcher David Stillwell had for several years tapped into Facebook for psychometric profiling using their own personality test app, "myPersonality". The app accumulated six million test results, along with users' Facebook profiles, and their friends' profiles, in a powerful research database. In 2015 they published a study carrying the bold title: "Computer-based personality judgments are more accurate than those made by humans." They showed, for example, that they could divine a fairly accurate psychometric portrait of a person using only their Facebook "likes".

"Computers outpace humans in personality Judgment presents significant opportunities and challenges in the areas of psychological assessment, marketing, and privacy," they wrote. Kosinski would not share the database with Kogan and Cambridge Analytica, reportedly knowing it would be used for a political campaign. But Kogan created his own app quiz and, through that, amassed the database on 50 million people that would be the backbone of Trump's social media campaign. Facebook now says Kogan did that illegally. And it has since also restricted apps from such broad data collection on friend networks.

Powerful results

But Cambridge Analytica proved that Kosinski's methods were powerful. They started with the standard psychological profiling test known as Big Five or OCEAN, which measures five traits: openness, conscientiousness, extrover-



NANTES: Photo shows logos of US online social media and social networking service Facebook. —AFP

sion, agreeableness and neuroticism. The test-taker answers a list of statements like "I am someone who tends to be organized" or "who rarely feels excited" or "has few artistic interests," using a scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Those basic results were combined with the data raked from Facebook profiles and friend networks, associating longer lists of traits.

For example, to categorize voters, an algorithm could find links between "agreeableness" or "neuroticism" and gender, age, religion, hobbies, travel, specific political views, and a host of other variables. The data generated an incredible 4,000 or more data points on each US voter, according to Alexander Nix, Cambridge Analytica's chief executive before he was suspended on Tuesday. The power of psychographic data, experts say, is not in the granularity itself, but in combining data to make significant correlations about people-something that requires powerful computer algorithms. —AFP

62 regime fighters killed in IS attack

BEIRUT: A lightning assault by the Islamic State group that put the jihadists in control of a southern part of the Syrian capital killed 62 regime fighters, a monitor said yesterday in a new toll. IS launched the surprise attack on Monday night to seize the Qadam neighborhood of Damascus. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor gave an initial toll on Tuesday of 36 pro-government fighters dead, but said that loyalists had retrieved additional bodies since. "The toll has risen to 62, most of them local pro-regime fighters," said the Observatory, a Britain-based monitor which relies on sources inside Syria for its information. "Regime reinforcements have gathered on the outskirts of Qadam, but the operation to recapture it has not yet started," said monitor chief Rami Abdel Rahman.

IS have maintained a presence in parts of Damascus, including in the Palestinian camp of Yarmuk and the neighborhoods of Hajar al-Aswad and Tadamun. It launched its Monday night attack from Hajar Al-Aswad, taking advantage of a temporary power vacuum in Qadam after Islamist and jihadist fighters evacuated the area under a deal with the regime. That agreement saw most of them head to the northwestern province of Idlib, which is controlled by a group led by Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate. Al-Watan, a Syrian daily close to the government, also reported Wednesday that regime forces had sent reinforcements to Qadam, but said IS had only taken "a few buildings in the district's east". —AFP

In symbolic victory, Iran conquers dates market

Iran's encroachment undermined Iraqi market

BAGHDAD: It isn't hard to find signs that Iran is winning a proxy war with Saudi Arabia in Iraq. There are the Iraqi Shiite militia who have sworn allegiance to Iran and the politicians beholden to Tehran. There are the Iranian companies that make everything from Baghdad's yellow taxis to the refrigerators and air conditioners that flood street markets. And then there are the dates. Iraq was once the world's biggest producer of the sweet fruit. But decimated by years of neglect and the 1980-88 war with Iran, production has declined to such an extent that imports are now banned to protect the local industry.

That has not stopped smugglers, particularly Iranian producers who hide their dates under cartons of other fruit. Saudi Arabia is also a big producer but the Iranians have cornered the market. It's a blow to national pride which some Iraqis see as emblematic of Iran's growing hold on their country. "Haqiqat dates are now the best in Iraq," Mehdi Haqiqat, owner of Iranian firm Haqiqat Golden Dates, said by telephone. Three years ago, 20 percent of his dates were sold in Iraq, he said. Now that figure has risen to more than 90 percent.

"The government is doing nothing. Iran controls Iraqi politics and the economy," said Qusay Hamdan, a trader at a market outside Baghdad. Iraq is one of multiple proxy battlefields as Shiite Muslim Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia seek the upper hand in the Middle East. The regional powerhouses back opposing sides in conflicts in Syria and Yemen. They are also rivals in Lebanon, where Iran exerts influence through the Hezbollah political and military movement which Saudi Arabia considers an enemy. Their rivalry and the regional conflicts have deepened instability in the Middle East and stoked fears in Western capitals including Washington of a direct confrontation between Riyadh and Tehran that might draw in their international allies.

Commercial battles

Although Iran fought a war with Iraq from 1980 to 1988, it has a big head start over Saudi Arabia. Riyadh and Baghdad began taking steps towards detente only in 2015, after 25 years of troubled relations starting with late dictator Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

Iran has been increasing its influence in Iraq since the US-led invasion that toppled Saddam in 2003, and the countries are now close allies. Tehran cemented ties by helping Baghdad to defeat Islamic State, a mutual enemy, and to stifle a push for independence by its Kurdish population. The improvement in relations has enabled Iran to forge ties in many areas, including business. "It's the same ploy. Help the Iraqis, then make sure they help you set up legitimate businesses..." said a Western diplomat who has followed Iran closely for years. Iran is now Iraq's top trade partner, with annual turnover of about \$12 billion, according to an Iraqi official. Annual trade between Saudi Arabia and Iraq stands at about \$6 billion. Tehran exports foodstuff, livestock, construction material and plastic products to Iraq. Local traders say Iranian food items and inexpensive vehicles, including the yellow taxis that are everywhere in Baghdad, dominate Iraqi markets. Quality is decisive when it comes to dates, according to deputy Agriculture Minister Mahdi Al-Qaisi, as are marketing and packaging. "It's a process that we are still unable to match so far," he told Reuters.

No longer king of dates

Iraqi officials say it is impossible to tell how many foreign dates are sold in Iraq because they are brought in illegally.

But it is clear Iraq is no longer the king of dates. During its heyday, Iraq produced three quarters of the world's dates. It now accounts for about five percent of global output and is only the seventh biggest producer, according to the International Nut and Dried Fruit Council Foundation. "Iranian dates have the lion's share (of those) being marketed inside Iraq compared to the Saudi, Emirates and Kuwaiti dates because Iran has multiple border crossings with Iraq in Kurdistan and the southern provinces," said Abbas Al-Quraishi, who advises Iraq's Union of Farmers' Cooperatives.

Iraqis' liking of Iranian dates was evident at a sprawling market outside Baghdad where traders were busy arranging

colorful cartons of them in long rows. Some have given up on local dates because they make big profits selling Iranian ones. "We don't want the government to end the smuggling. We are selling," said market trader Muhammed Hamid. "Three years ago Iraqi dates sold for 3,000 dinars (\$2.5) a kilo. Now they sell for 1,000 because of competition from Iran." Nearby lay boxes of dates from Saudi Arabia.

Many Iraqi farmers can barely make ends meet. In addition to water shortages and a lack of pesticides, they have to buy gas for generators to keep refrigerators going through Iraq's frequent power cuts, a burden Iranian producers do not face. "We suffer from losses of up to 70 percent because of Iranian

dates," said farmer Adnan Jaber, 58. Other complain of corruption and bureaucracy. Far removed from regional power struggles, they just want to survive. "The government gives us water but it's not enough. The pesticide plane comes once a year," said Maitham Kathim, 35. A trade ministry spokesman said Iraq was doing everything in its power to protect local industry, including subsidies for farmers, but that the country had "chosen the path of free markets" since Saddam's fall. "We want the Iraqi citizen to be able to choose the best product and in some cases the local product is not the best," said Mohammed Hanoun, adding that farmers "need to depend on themselves" and on the private sector.—Reuters

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Boko Haram returns scores of abducted Nigerian schoolgirls

Five girls died in captivity: Freed student

LAGOS: Boko Haram Islamists who kidnapped 110 schoolgirls in Dapchi, northeast Nigeria, just over a month ago have returned 76 of the students to the town, the government said yesterday. Information Minister Lai Mohammed said the release was "unconditional" and the result of "back-channel efforts" with the help of "some friends of the country", without elaborating. "The 76 are those who have been documented so far," he said, adding that they were released at about 3:00 am and that a full head-count was under way. Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari said last week the government had "chosen negotiation" to secure the return of the Dapchi girls rather than use military force.

Mohammed said: "For the release to work, the government had a clear understanding that violence and confrontation would not be the way out as it could endanger the lives of the girls, hence a non-violent approach was the preferred option. "Within the period when the girls were being brought back, (an operational pause was observed in certain areas to ensure free passage and also that lives were not lost." Nigeria's presidency said separately that the girls were in the custody of the country's intelligence agency, the Department of State Services.

'Five died en route'

The Dapchi kidnapping on February 19 brought back painful memories of a similar abduction in Chibok in April 2014, when more than 200 girls were taken. Aisha Alhaji Deri, a 16-year-old student who was among those kidnapped in Dapchi, told reporters they were not mistreated

during their time in captivity. But she added: "When we were being taken away, five of us died on the way. "They brought us back this morning, dropped us outside the motor park and said we should all go home and not go to the military because they will claim to have rescued us."

Parents earlier told AFP the girls were brought back to Dapchi in nine vehicles at about 8:00 am. Some of the students headed to their homes in surrounding villages. Bashir Manzo, who heads a parents' support group in Dapchi, said: "These girls were not accompanied by any security personnel. "Their abductors brought them, dropped them outside the school and left, without talking to anyone." Parents in the remote town said the girls had been taken for medical check-ups after their ordeal and that security was tight in the town.

Ransom payment? Boko Haram has used kidnapping as a weapon of war during its nearly nine-year insurgency which has claimed at least 20,000 lives and made more than two million others homeless. The Islamic State (IS) group affiliate has not claimed responsibility for the abduction but it is understood that a faction headed by Abu Mus'ab Al-Barnawi was behind it. In August 2015, IS publicly backed Barnawi as leader of Boko Haram, or Islamic State West Africa Province, over Abubakar Shekau, whose supporters carried out the Chibok abduction. Analysts have attributed a financial motive to the Dapchi kidnapping given government ransom payments made to Boko Haram to secure the release of some of the captives from Chibok.

On Tuesday, Amnesty International claimed that the



YOBÉ, Nigeria: A girl released by Boko Haram walks with his father (left) in Dapchi. Boko Haram Islamists who kidnapped 110 schoolgirls in Dapchi, northeast Nigeria, just over a month ago have so far returned 101 of the students to the town, the government said yesterday. —AFP

military ignored repeated warnings about the movements of Boko Haram fighters before the kidnapping. The military rejected the allegation, calling it an "outright falsehood". Similar claims were made about the hours leading up to the Chibok abduction, which brought sustained worldwide attention on the conflict for the first time. The Chibok

abduction also triggered a global campaign for their release, spearheaded by the US former first lady Michelle Obama. There was no similar campaign for the Dapchi girls. Since May 2016, 107 Chibok girls have escaped, been found or been released as part of a government-brokered deal with the jihadists.—AFP

News in brief

Porn video shown briefly

MANILA: The mayor of the major financial hub in the Philippines said yesterday she was investigating after a pornographic video appeared briefly on a prominent billboard, startling motorists on one of the bustling city's major roadways. The video appeared for about half a minute on an electronic billboard at a busy intersection on the main road through Makati City, the central business district of the sprawling capital, Manila, on Tuesday afternoon. Makati Mayor Abigail Binay immediately ordered the billboard shut down after the clip of a couple having sex was shown, but pictures and videos of it captured by motorists on their mobile phones were shared widely on social media. —Reuters

Killer air pollution

BANGKOK: Asia is a critical battlefield in the global fight to rein in air pollution, registering about 5 million premature deaths each year, delegates at a United Nations conference said yesterday, as urged tougher enforcement of curbs. The World Health Organization (WHO) calls air pollution the greatest environmental risk to human health. About 90 percent of related deaths take place in low- and middle-income countries, most of them in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. —Reuters

Policeman surrenders

KARACHI: A senior Pakistani policeman accused of a role in police killings surrendered to the Supreme Court yesterday after two months on the run, media said, in a case that has stirred anger about extra-judicial killings. Rao Anwar, senior superintendent of police in the port city of Karachi, was suspended on January 20 after four men were killed in a shoot-out with police. Police initially said the men were suspected Islamist militants but later suggested the incident may have been an extra-judicial killing. The shoot-out, in which police gunned down aspiring model Naqibullah Mehsud, has also brought to the fore the issue of racial profiling of Pakistan's Pashtuns, who say they are targeted and harassed because many militants hail from their communities close to the border with Afghanistan. —Reuters

Italy's political deadlock

ROME: Italy's parliament reconvenes tomorrow with the country looking for solutions to the political stalemate that emerged from the March 4 general elections. On Friday the newly-elected lower house Chamber of Deputies and upper house Senate will begin the process of electing their new speakers. Not until both are chosen can consultations start between Italy's President Sergio Mattarella and those vying to form a new government. The right-wing coalition headed by the far-right League gained the largest share of the votes with 37 percent. That was just over four points ahead of the anti-establishment Five Star Movement (M5S), which won more votes than any other single party. —AFP

Bus plunges off cliff

MANILA: Nineteen people were killed and 21 others injured when a passenger bus lost control and plunged off a cliff in the central Philippines, police said yesterday. The bus, which was heading to the capital Manila, skidded off a mountain road on Mindoro island late Tuesday, said regional police spokeswoman Imelda Tolentino. Rescue workers were pulling the dead and injured from the vehicle, which landed at the bottom of a wooded ravine, she added. "Police are investigating why the driver lost control—whether there was mechanical trouble or the driver fell asleep," Tolentino said. Police photos showed rescuer workers clambering down the cliff to reach the bus, which lay on its side amongst trees and grass about 15 meters (49 feet) below the road. —AFP

Syrian Kurds bitter over West turning a blind eye to Afrin

PARIS: After leading the charge against Islamic State jihadists on Syria's frontlines, Kurds feel betrayed by their Western allies following the seizure of their stronghold Afrin by Turkish forces. Turkey's offensive aided by its Syrian allies including secular rebels and Islamist groups who rampaged through Afrin and triggered a mass exodus—has left Syrian Kurds claiming the world stood by and watched as "ethnic cleansing" took place. "The silence of the international community is complicit in the macabre plan of (Turkish President Recep Tayyip) Erdogan. Silence means acceptance," a group of Kurds originally from Afrin and now living in Europe told the French daily Le Monde on Tuesday. "Don't abandon your allies!" they said.

The People's Protection Units (YPG), a Kurdish militia, was driven out of Afrin on Sunday, one the cantons in the self-proclaimed autonomous administration run by Syria's Kurds. Turkey considers the YPG "terrorists" allied with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) which has waged a three-decade insurgency inside Turkey. But Washington and the anti-Islamic State international coalition have backed the YPG to spearhead its effort to oust IS jihadists from Syria. "The same fighters who fought courageously against Daesh (the Arabic acronym for IS group) are today left to the mercy of the Turkish army," said Khaled Issa, the official representative in France of Syria's Kurdistan.

"There's a moral responsibility for the international community in the face of an unjustified and illegal aggression," Issa said. "What is happening in Afrin is ethnic cleansing and the great powers are spectators," he said.

Bloody scenes of life under IS haunt Mosul's returnees

MOSUL: For residents of the Old City, returning to Mosul is an exercise in trying to forget. Its streets bear the scars of the horrors they survived – either living under Islamic State's (IS) draconian rule or during nine months of brutal fighting, as the US-led coalition battled to recapture the city from the jihadists. "This corner is where Daesh whipped my sons for talking out of turn," said Um Abdullah, using the Arabic acronym for Islamic State, walking around the neighborhood she returned to in January. "And this corner is where they killed my father for trying to stop them."

The spot was meters away from her home in the Bab Al-Jadeed district. Though the front door had been blown off its hinges, the house remained standing unlike most others on the street. Where there were once 40 families living, there are now only three. Um Abdullah says she returned reluctantly to the area, which has no electricity and no running water, because conditions were nevertheless better than the refugee camp where she had lived before.

A few streets away, Um Russell said she had also recently returned to the area, where her husband had been wounded in an air strike. "Some of our neighbors don't want to return – they say they are scared by what they went through and can't come back," she said. "But we had to come back

... we had no choice." Prior to the move back, Um Russell had been living in the eastern part of Mosul, Islamic State's main base in Iraq which suffered heavy damage from bombing and fighting.

Forced underground

Many residents of the Old City were among the last to leave Mosul. As the fighting intensified in the spring of 2017, the militants retreated further inwards, to the densely packed buildings of the historic quarter. They took over entire homes, turning them into makeshift bases, forcing families underground. "We lived for three months in the cellar, before they liberated our areas on July 7," said Moayad, 45. He was forced to live – along with his mother, his children and grandchildren – in his small, windowless basement by Russian-speaking Islamic State fighters who took over his home in the Zanjili district last spring.

"They had everything they needed," said Moayad, who declined to give his full name. He added that without clean drinking water or food to eat, his family survived on flour mixed with saline water he stole from IS fighters' medical kits. He was jaundiced and starving when Iraqi security forces cleared his street and evacuated civilians who had been living under intense shelling for months. It wasn't always like this. When Islamic State first came to the city, they were mostly welcomed by the predominantly Sunni residents, some of whom – at least at first – were sympathetic to their cause.

"Nothing really changed at first," said Moayad, a market trader who sells second hand clothes. "We could still move around, go to the market, walk in the streets and everyone would greet each other and chat, even the new people in their strange clothes." Many residents were relieved to gain reprieve from the Shiite-led govern-



QAMISHLI, Syria: Syrian-Kurds gather in the northeastern Syrian town of Qamishli as they celebrate Noruz (Nowruz), the Kurdish New Year yesterday. For Syria's Kurds, Nowruz symbolizes the deliverance of Kurdish people from a mythical tyrant. —AFP

The loss of Afrin has been a huge blow to the Kurdish minority in Syria, which has been torn apart by civil war since 2011. Around 250,000 civilians have fled the violence in Afrin and dozens of others have been killed, as well as around 1,500 Kurdish fighters, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

But the Kurdish Community of Germany, where about one million Kurds live, claims that Turkey will face no repercussions for its offensive. "Given that the aggressor (Turkey) is part of NATO, this violation of international law will never be sanctioned," the group said. "Afrin is the most brutal expression of what's called Realpolitik," Didier

Billion, deputy director of the Institute for International and Strategic Relations told AFP.

"The Western powers, especially the Americans, were very happy to have the Syrian Kurdish troops on the ground to fight against IS. But Ankara, a NATO member, will always be more important than Afrin," the French specialist on Turkey said. Washington had on Monday warned Ankara of its "great concern" over the taking of Afrin. French President Emmanuel Macron expressed the same sentiments and called on Moscow, the Syrian regime's main ally, "to do all it could to stop the fighting and civilian losses". —Reuters



MOSUL: Iraqis pass destroyed buildings in the old city of Mosul, eight months after the Iraqi government forces retook the city from the control of the Islamic State (IS) group. —AFP

ment forces that they say treated them badly, and happier still to get a break from car bombs that had dominated since al Qaeda, Islamic State's predecessor, fomented a years-long insurgency.

Clean streets and brutality

Islamic State quickly set about building the apparatus of its so-called caliphate, including establishing a new local government. Some of the city's employees left Mosul, current municipality head Abdelsattar Al-Hibbu said. But most stayed and were either forced to work for or willingly joined the new regime. The militants ensured streets were cleaned and roads were paved.

Some residents said the Islamic State's administration, run by a French-Moroccan jihadi, was more efficient than the previous regime. The militants subsidized services

and food for some of the city's poor. But they also imposed a system of oppressive religious taxes and issued a series of decrees covering all aspects of public and private life. Punishments ranged from chopped hands to beheadings, a spectrum of unfettered violence which turned many initial supporters away.

"You lived in constant fear of getting in trouble with the religious police or a senior fighter walking by," said Moayad, who said crimes could be as small as smoking to wearing the wrong clothing. As the war began and later intensified, residents of the Old City were prevented from leaving, serving as human shields for the dwindling numbers of IS fighters. "They killed four people who tried to escape the neighborhood right outside my house," said Moayad, recalling the scene. "And they did it publicly to scare people into staying." — Reuters

International

IS bomber kills 26; Kabul marks Persian New Year

The fifth suicide bombing in recent weeks

KABUL: A suicide bomber yesterday killed at least 26 people, many of them teenagers, after detonating a device among a crowd of people in Kabul who were celebrating the Persian new year holiday, officials said. The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the deadly attack—the fifth suicide bombing in the Afghan capital in recent weeks—via its propaganda arm Amaq, SITE Intelligence Group said. The Taliban earlier denied involvement on Twitter.

Another 18 people were wounded in the blast, interior ministry spokesman Nasrat Rahimi said, "all of them civilians". There were fears the figure could rise, however, with the health ministry giving a higher toll of 29 people killed and 52 wounded. Afghan officials often give conflicting tolls in the wake of attacks. The bomber, who was on foot, detonated his device in front of Kabul University and a hospital that was opposite, Rahimi said. The blast occurred less than 200 meters from Karte Sakhi shrine where many Afghans gather every year to mark Nawrooz, which is the traditional Persian new year holiday-but had been unable to reach it due to heavy security for the holiday. So he "detonated himself among teenagers returning from there", Kabul police chief Mohammad Daud Amin told Tolo News. Bloodstains could be seen among scattered belongings on the road at the site of the attack. A man who was standing meters from where the explosion happened told Tolo that he saw "at least four bodies in blood" on the ground.

IS has attacked the same shrine once before, in October 2016 when gunmen killed 18 people gathered to mark Ashura, an important date for many Muslims, especially Shiites. President Ashraf Ghani, whose government has been repeatedly lambasted for its inability to protect its citizens, condemned the attack in a statement as a “crime against humanity”. Taliban and Islamic State militants have increasingly targeted the

China activists fear high-tech crackdown in Xi's 'new era'

BEIJING: As Xi Jinping embarks on a potentially lifelong presidency, activists fear that the Chinese leader's promise of a "new era" sounds the death knell for human rights under an increasingly digital-savvy police state. The Chinese government has severely reduced space for civil liberties since Xi took power in 2012, and authorities are developing new technologies to keep the vast population in check.

They include facial recognition software as well as a “social credit” system for good behavior—eerily similar to an episode of Netflix’s sci-fi hit “Black Mirror” that depicted a dystopian society governed by such scores. Ye Du, a poet and activist who lives in southern Guangdong province, warned that China is entering a stage of “high-tech totalitarianism” in which most citizens will feel the psychological impact.

"The Chinese Communist Party has begun to pay more and more attention to cloud technology, monitoring technology and other tools, trying to integrate the most cutting-edge technology for the monitoring of the behavior and thoughts of the people," Ye said. Xi's move to stay in office beyond the end of his second term in 2023, rubber-stamped

Grief and stitches at Damascus hospital after rocket attack

DAMASCUS: Inside a hospital in Syria's capital, Ilham slaps her head in grief after her daughter stepped out to buy her a Mother's Day present but never came back. Ilham's daughter was among 35 people killed in a rebel rocket attack on a shopping area in a Damascus suburb on Tuesday, the eve of Mother's Day. "I don't want a present. I don't want anything," cried the woman in her 50s,

"O Lord, I just want to hear back from her," she said, surrounded by mourning relatives. The rocket was fired on a busy shopping area in Jaramana known for its stores selling affordable clothes and food. It was one of the deadliest rebel rocket attacks to hit the capital in Syria's seven-year war. It came as government forces press a deadly assault to retake control of the last rebel bastion on the capital's doorstep. Mother's Day falls on March 21 in Syria like other parts of the Arab world to coincide with the start of spring.

war-weary city in recent months as US and Afghan forces ramp up air strikes and ground offensives against the groups.

against the groups.

Yesterday's blast comes days after a Taliban suicide attacker blew up a bomb-laden car in Kabul, causing multiple casualties. Some Western and Afghan security experts believe the Haqqani Network, a hard-line wing of the Taliban, has been behind some of the attacks in Kabul in recent months, including those claimed by IS. The Taliban, Afghanistan's largest militant group, faces growing pressure to take up a recent offer by Afghan President Ashraf Ghani of peace talks to end the 16-year war. So far it has given only a muted response.

Little incentive for talks

Little incentive for talks

This latest suicide attack underscores the growing challenge facing Afghan and foreign forces to protect the already heavily militarized city. Authorities had increased security ahead of Nawroz festivities, which militants have previously struck with deadly force. General John Nicholson, who leads US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, recently told reporters that protecting Kabul was a priority for foreign troops. "Kabul is our main effort right now, to harden Kabul, to protect the people of Kabul and the international community that are here because of the strategic impact that has and the importance to the campaign," Nicholson said.

and the importance to the campaign," Nicholson said.

But he acknowledged that preventing further attacks would be challenging in the sprawling city that is poorly mapped and extremely porous. The latest attack comes as US Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford visits Afghanistan to assess the military campaign against insurgents—weeks before the start of the spring fighting season, which is expected to be particularly bloody this year. Despite calls for the Taliban to sit down with the Afghan government, the group

A somber scene in a hospital morgue. A woman in a black hijab and dark clothing is seated on a white tiled floor, her head bowed in grief as she looks down at a lifeless body lying on a nearby counter. The body is covered in a dark shroud. In the background, other people, also dressed in dark clothing, stand near a wall or counter. The setting is a clinical, tiled room.

KABUL: Afghan families weep next to dead bodies that were brought to a hospital following a suicide bombing attack in Kabul yesterday. —AFP

appears to have few reasons to negotiate.

The Taliban has been resurgent since the withdrawal of US-led NATO combat troops at the end of 2014, taking back territory and devastating Afghanistan's beleaguered security forces. In October, insurgents controlled or influenced nearly half of Afghanistan's districts—double

the percentage in 2015, the US government's office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction said in January. Over the same period, the watchdog said, the number of districts under Afghan government control or influence fell to its lowest level since December 2015.—AFP

An advertisement for Paintball Kuwait. At the top, 'Kuwait Times' is written in a serif font, with 'Established 1961' and a small logo. Below it, the words 'SUBSCRIBE OR RENEW' are in large red letters. A large red number '25' is prominently displayed next to the word 'KD'. To the right of 'KD' is a graphic of paint splatters with the text 'PAINTBALL KUWAIT'. In the center, several purple Paintball Kuwait entrance tickets are shown, each with a green circular logo containing '50+ 135+ KD 250' and 'www.paintball-kuwait.com'. Below the tickets is a large image of a person in a paintball suit aiming a gun. At the bottom, there are three smaller images showing people playing paintball in various settings. The background features a map of Kuwait.

Analysis

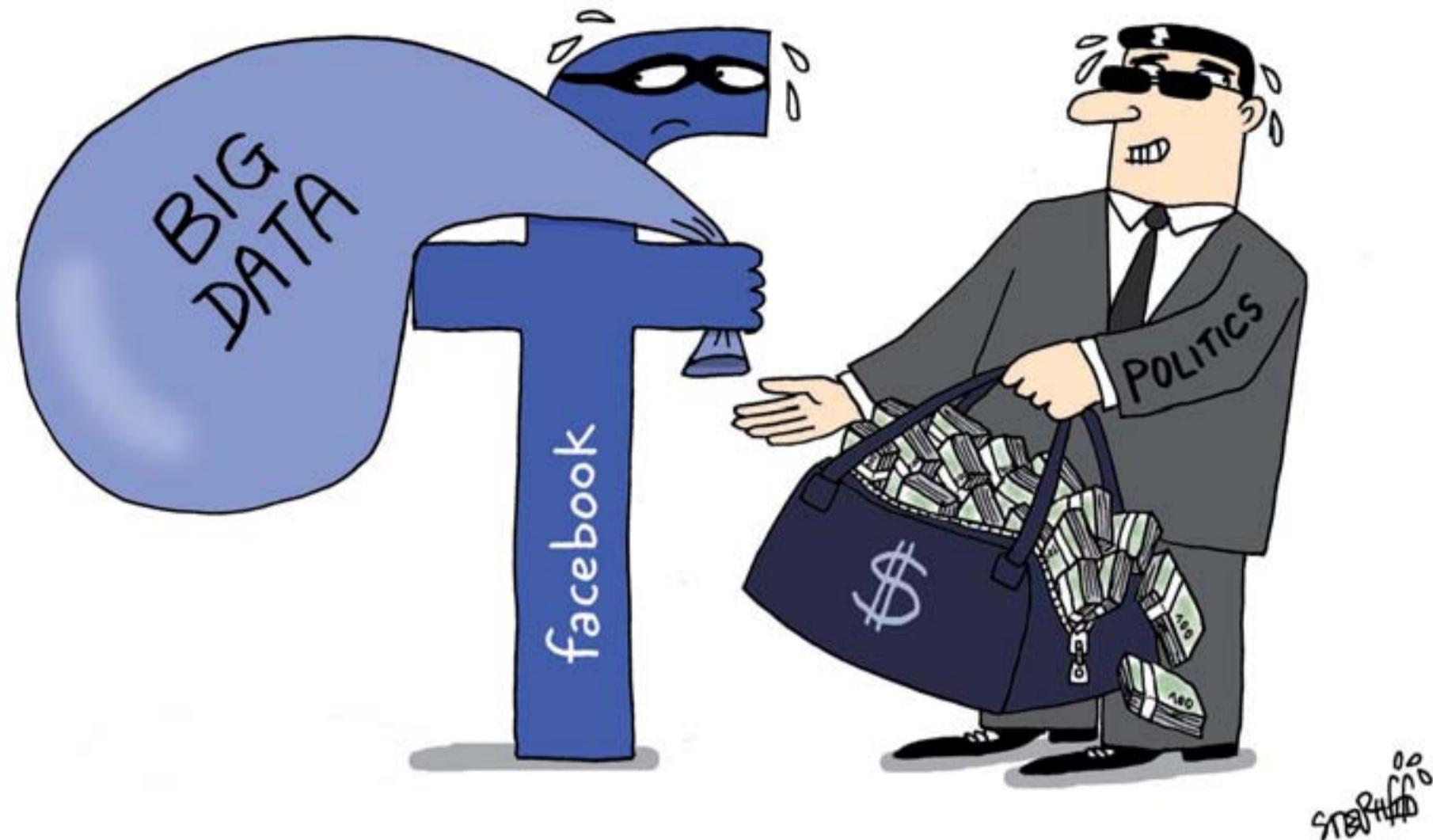
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China stays on the sidelines as Venezuela spirals downward

China is likely to extend an agreement proving crisis-stricken Venezuela with favorable loans to President Nicolas Maduro's government, according to sources in Caracas and Beijing familiar with the situation. During a decade, China plowed more than \$50 billion into the OPEC member's coffers through oil-for-loan agreements that helped Beijing secure energy supplies for its fast-growing economy while bolstering an anti-Washington ally in Latin America.

But the flow of cash halted nearly three years ago when Venezuela asked for a change of payment terms when a fall in oil prices and declining crude output pushed its state-led economy into a hyperinflationary collapse. Though unwilling to throw Venezuela a financial lifeline, the state-run China Development Bank (CDB) will likely extend next month a grace period begun in 2016 that allows Venezuela to make only interest payments on its loans, the sources said.

However, China has ignored several requests for new funding. "Given Venezuela's falling oil production, it's natural for Chinese banks not to renew loans," said one Chinese oil industry source who asked not to be identified. A second oil industry source, asked if the conditions would be tightened, cited a Chinese proverb, saying China would not "drop stones on somebody who has fallen into a well".

Venezuela still owes China \$19.3 billion, according to one Venezuelan finance industry source who has tracked the information via contacts in both countries. Some \$10.4 billion of that is owed under the \$20 billion Large Volume Long Term fund signed in 2010. A further \$8.4 billion remains outstanding under the Joint China Venezuela Fund via three tranches of \$4 billion to \$5 billion each, according to the source. China's policy is not to lend new funds until old loans have been paid off - which cannot happen under the interest-only scheme created in April 2016 because the outstanding balance does not change.

CDB President Zheng Zhijie, asked by Reuters if the bank was having second thoughts about financing Venezuela given its situation, said: "We've done our assessment of its political and economic situation. We're just monitoring now." However, one Beijing-based diplomatic source familiar with Chinese thinking on Venezuela said China increasingly sees Maduro as similar to former Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe, who was pushed out after 40 years in power that dragged his once-prosperous country into hyperinflation and economic crisis. China would have no concern about abandoning Maduro as it did Mugabe when he was ousted, the source said, but does not expect China to take an active role in pushing him out. "China looks at Venezuela as another Zimbabwe: A poor return on its investment," he said.

China eyes 'pragmatic cooperation'

Venezuela's Information Ministry did not reply to a request for comment. China's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that bilateral cooperation was proceeding smoothly at present, adding that: "China will continue to carry out pragmatic cooperation with Venezuela." Prominent Chinese ratings agency Dagong Global Credit Rating Co in November put Venezuela's sovereign debt on negative watch in a scathing review that warned of high default risks on bonds, which are not linked to financing arrangements with Beijing. "Venezuela lacks the ability to create wealth on its own while debt repayment sources are highly fragile, thus a low solvency," Dagong wrote.

Sanctions levied by the government of US President Donald Trump have left Venezuela unable to refinance its crippling debt burden and left it struggling to import basic goods such as food. Beijing has also declined to renew financing to state oil company PDVSA that is tied to oil industry investment, according to Venezuelan finance industry sources, in contrast to other loans that are used for a broader range of expenditures. PDVSA in December paid off a \$1.5 billion loan that it received in 2014, but was unable to renew it. The loan is paid off in cash rather than in oil, which made it less attractive, the source said.

Venezuela has in recent months proposed different arrangements under which China would put in new cash, including renewing part of the \$20 billion Large Volume Fund, according to Venezuelan finance industry sources. Those requests have been ignored, the sources said. But despite China's discontent, halting the grace period would have little practical benefit because it would most likely lead Caracas to get behind on payments - something it has done in the past.

In order to enforce its claims, China would have to open a cumbersome commercial dispute and engage in an unfriendly process of forcibly collecting on the loans, embarrassing a government that it actively supported for years. Venezuela as of last year had fallen behind on oil shipments to China as well as Russia, another ally that has been providing financing, according to internal documents seen by Reuters. —Reuters

Ghouta US mom urges Trump to 'do something'

In the United States, her children could have "played under the sun". But trapped in Syria's Eastern Ghouta, Michigan native Deana Lynn and her eight children are living out a nightmare underground. At 44, US-born Lynn has spent nearly half of her life in Douma, a sprawling town at the heart of the now-infamous Ghouta suburbs, east of the Syrian capital. Air raids and rocket and artillery fire have pounded Ghouta for more than a month as Syrian troops, their Russian ally and loyalist militia battle to capture the last rebel bastion on the doorstep of Damascus.

Douma, where Lynn lives with her Syrian husband, children, and grandchildren, has been hit hard. "Now, we're living under bombardment daily, every day. My children are in a state of hysteria," she tells AFP in her living room, where thick green curtains block out sunlight and the boom of bombardment can be heard. "The children are screaming. The parents are screaming. When the bomb comes close, it's just terrible," says Lynn, in a traditional overcoat and dark brown headscarf.

Lynn met her Syrian husband at the University of Michigan. They married and had five children in the United States before moving to his native Ghouta just before 2000 - the year Bashar Al-Assad rose to the presidency. She remained in Douma as protests against Assad erupted in 2011, when rebels captured it in 2012, and after regime troops completely encircled it in 2013.

Lynn says her children, five of whom are American citizens, have been traumatized by a half-decade of siege and strikes that have hit hospitals and schools. "I tell my

children that in America you can play under the sun. You can climb trees. You can have fun. You can go to a playground and be safe," she says. Not so in Ghouta, says Lynn, where "if you go outside, you just worry that maybe a bomb will fall."

'Our home now'

Syrian troops have recaptured more than 80 percent of the one-time rebel bastion in a blistering air and ground assault that has killed more than 1,500 civilians, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. More than 300 of them have been children. "We're being bombed day and night. By shells, by missiles, by anything you can think of. We spend the day and the night in our basements," Lynn says.

During rare moments of calm, she comes upstairs with her children to use the bathroom and cook whatever simple meals they can scrounge up - sometimes just boiled cauliflower. "I do think about America and I think about the children of the free world everywhere. I think to myself, why can't the children here be a part of that free world? Why do they have to be oppressed like this?" Lynn says.

She imagines taking her children to visit her native United States, where her brother still lives, but insists that Ghouta is their real home. "I don't want to leave a place that we've made our home now for 18 years, a place my children know, a place that I've grown up in," Lynn says. "It's not right for us to leave. It's not right for it to be bombed. This is where they grew up. Their family is here," she adds. As Syrian troops eat away at rebel territory in Ghouta, they have opened several "corridors" - routes through



US-born English teacher Deana Lynn holds her passport as she sits in her living room in Douma, the main town of Syria's rebel enclave of Eastern Ghouta, on March 17, 2018. —AFP

which residents can flee into government-held territory.

'Trump doesn't care'

An estimated 70,000 have used these corridors in recent days, bringing whatever they can carry and arriving shaken and exhausted at collective shelters. "When you see thousands of people coming out, that's because they're fleeing. Their homes have been bombed to the ground - they have nothing left," Lynn says. "They're not evacuating. You evacuate for a flood and then you come back. They're kicking them out of their homes. They're fleeing from the

hunger, bombing and starvation."

Lynn is a prolific Twitter user, firing off strings of tweets on the humanitarian situation in Douma and elsewhere with the hashtag #SaveGhouta. On her account, she has criticized the US administration for not acting more forcefully to stem the violence in her hometown and says she has even reached out to the American president. "I've sent to Mr Donald Trump several messages. Actually, I think he doesn't care, because I haven't heard him speak about the Eastern Ghouta at all," Lynn says. "I wish he would listen and hear. I wish he could do something." —AFP

First, Brazilian activist is shot - then the lies start

First, Marielle Franco was gunned down in an apparent organized hit, prompting tens of thousands of Brazilians to protest. Then came the character assassination. The immediate reaction to the killing March 14 of the Rio de Janeiro city councilwoman was raw and spontaneous. Huge crowds took to the streets in Rio and in São Paulo, with smaller demonstrations in cities around Brazil and the world. Franco was held up as an example of a black Brazilian who overcame racism and poverty, inspiring millions with her courageous stand for human rights in Rio's favelas.

Or was she actually a drug user? Could it be she'd once married a drug gangster called Marcinho VP? Had her much vaunted election to the city council been funded by Rio's terrifying narco group Red Command? It took a blink of the social media eye for the narrative around Franco to switch direction. Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp - all hugely popular in Brazil - lit up with claims that the 38-year-old was not the saintly figure claimed.

"Check out the left's latest myth, Marielle Franco. Pregnant at 16, ex-wife of Marcinho VP, she used marijuana... was elected by the Red Command, had just fired six employees," tweeted congressman Alberto Fraga, from the small, rightwing DEM party. The story about Franco's deep criminal past flooded the Internet, often expressed in furious language, but lent gravitas by the likes of Fraga. A Rio appeals' court judge called Marilia Castro Neves warned on Facebook that Franco "wasn't just a fighter." No, she "was involved with bandits" and was killed because "she didn't carry out her promises." Startling stuff. Shocking. And totally fake.

Setting the record straight

The rumor mill works at lightning speed in Brazil, one of the world's most social media-addicted countries. It's also a country deeply divided between left and right, and richer whites and poorer blacks. Franco had made plenty of enemies on the right with her prominent accusations of police



Aniele Silva (center) takes part in a demonstration against the murder of her sister, Brazilian councilwoman and activist Marielle Franco, in front of Rio's Municipal Chamber on Tuesday. —AFP

brutality in the favelas. Some, for example, asked angrily why Franco and her supporters were not more concerned about the astonishing number of police officers killed in Rio - more than 100 last year.

So the attempt to transform her from rights campaigner to criminal sympathizer fell on fertile ground. "This was an orchestrated campaign, not just one or two people saying bad things," said Cristiane Costa, coordinator at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro's journalism school. Yet the reaction to the backlash was even more powerful, showing how the fake news virus can be fought.

Lawyers with Franco's leftist PSOL party have appealed online for tips on fake news posts, which they then identify and refer to the police. By the start of this week, they'd got more than 15,000 emails in response, G1 news site reported. Others are responding directly. "Let me say a few more things," Franco's sister Aniele Silva, wrote on her Facebook page. "Marielle was not a bandit and much less a defender bandits. Marielle was never mar-

ried or involved with Marcinho VP. Marielle never was a drug user, and Marielle was not financed by any gang." The post was liked by 140,000 people.

Franco's family also built a page on the late councilwoman's website called "The truth about Marielle," carefully rebutting each item of fake news. And the traditional media, which Costa says has "the tools to check rumors very quickly," also joined the cause. Globo newspaper, part of Brazil's dominant media conglomerate, ran a full page Tuesday to shoot down the rumors, under the headline: "Lies cannot stop justice."

Fraga deleted his tweet. "The regret, perhaps, is having put something that I didn't check," said Fraga. "I am a police officer, a military colonel, I should have had better information and from an appropriate source." As for the judge, she says she wishes she had decided "to wait for the end of the investigation, so as to be able, as a citizen, to give my opinion." Just what a manual on combating fake news might have advised. —AFP



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Sports

Driven to perfection: Can anyone stop F1 champ Hamilton?

'The only way to beat Lewis is to be 100 percent with everything'

MELBOURNE: A refreshed and hungry Lewis Hamilton has declared he's ready to take the new Formula One season by the scruff of the neck—which is bad news for his long-suffering rivals. The Mercedes driver is the man they all have to beat again, but at 33 it seems that Hamilton, the four-time world champion and now a veteran of the sport, wants to speed up rather than slow down.

Hamilton, who has Juan Manuel Fangio's five F1 titles in his sights, gave a glimpse into his mindset when he revealed that even after a record 72 pole positions, he feels he's never driven the perfect lap.

"I have never done the perfect lap, ever," he said, according to British broadcaster Sky Sports. "The perfect lap? No, and that is what is so great about this sport: you never get perfect."

Hamilton added: "You get close, maybe. But imagine if in those 30,000-odd laps, I did 1,000 or 10,000 perfect laps. That would really be boring. "If you played the perfect game time and time again, you would lose motivation because it is easy. You always have to move on to something more difficult.

"But there is no other class better than Formula 1 so if I was to perfect it, it would suck." Formula One's only black driver comes from humble roots in Britain's Stevenage, a town outside London, and appears to thrive on adversity.

Hamilton, who has adopted "Still I Rise", the title of a

Maya Angelou poem, as his personal motto, hit a bump in the road when he was criticised for mocking his nephew for wearing a dress, prompting him to withdraw from social media and delete years of posts. But after his self-imposed silence Hamilton resumed posting in January, writing bullishly on Instagram: "I will never stop, I have no finish line."

HE IS UNBELIEVABLY FAST*

Worryingly for Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel and the Red Bull drivers, Daniel Ricciardo and Max Verstappen, Hamilton also has the benefit of what looks like an improved Mercedes this season as sets out to retain his world championship.

Technical chief James Allison says the Mercedes W09 would "blow away" last year's model, and the car showed no obvious weaknesses as it completed more laps than any other

during pre-season testing. Former Mercedes team-mate Nico Rosberg, the only man to deny Hamilton a sweep of the last four F1 titles, said the other drivers needed to make the most of the Briton's moments of inconsistency.

"He has these periods when he is just not on it... you have to make the most of it, absolutely, and Sebastian did that pretty well last year," the 2016 champion said, according to Sky. "When Lewis has his good weekends he is almost unbeatable, he is unbelievably fast and maybe the best guy out there."

"The only way to beat Lewis is to be 100 percent



Lewis Hamilton

with everything, do the perfect season. Otherwise there is no chance." At last year's season-opener, Hamilton finished second behind Vettel and it wasn't until after the mid-season break that he hit his stride, turning a 14-point deficit into a title victory by 46 points.

This year, the 62-time grand prix-winner seems to have travelled to Melbourne fully focused on the job at

hand: securing world title number five. He told ESPN: "That hunger that I had when I was eight years old; when the teachers said that I was never going to amount to nothing; when the other racing drivers' dads said I was never going to amount to nothing; when the kids shouted abuse at the race track to me and my family. "That still powers me on through the races." —AFP

McLaren car is '100 percent' ready: Alonso

MELBOURNE: Fernando Alonso has played down reliability concerns about the new Renault-powered McLaren, saying problems that arose during pre-season testing have been fixed and the car will be "100 percent" ready for the season-opening Australian Grand Prix.

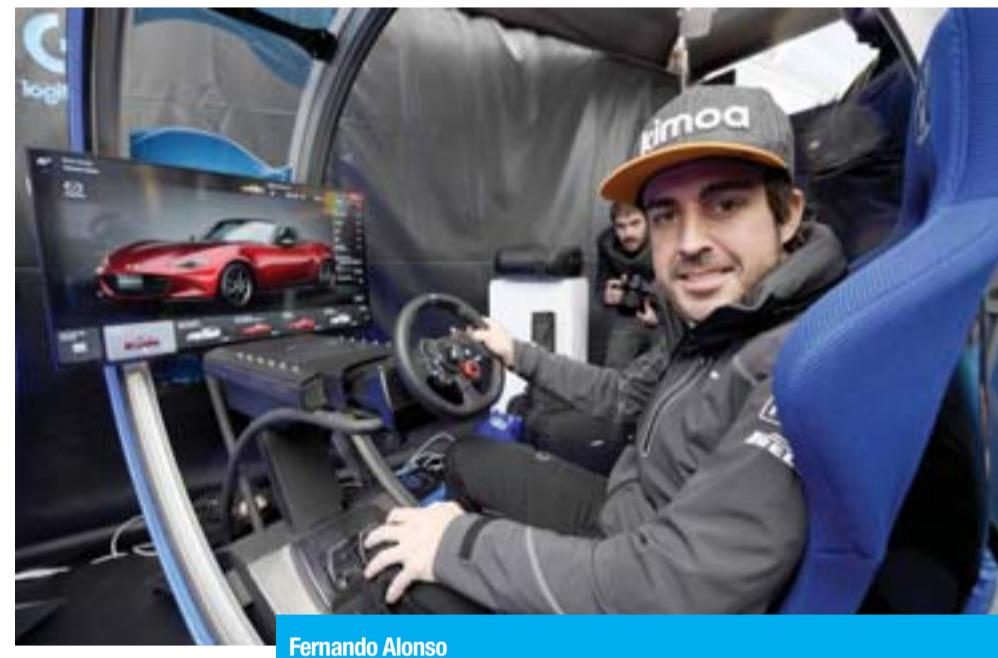
After switching to the Renault power unit after three gloomy years with Honda, McLaren's MCL33 suffered more glitches and completed fewer laps on the test track than any other team. However, double world champion Alonso, who considered quitting Formula One last year as McLaren slumped to ninth in the constructors' championship, said the car's gremlins had been banished in time for Sunday's race at Albert Park.

"Well, I think we should be optimistic," the 36-year-old Spaniard told Reuters at a Melbourne event held by McLaren sponsor Chandon. "I think we had some reliability issues in testing but all of them are fixed now and the team did an amazing job in the past two or three weeks to have the car 100 percent for Australia."

"I think being in the points, being close to the top five, I think that will be the best thing we can do to start the season. "We need this good result to motivate the team and to keep working for the rest of the season."

McLaren, dominant in the late 1980s and early 1990s with Ayrton Senna and Alain Prost, have not won a race since 2012. The fallen giants' last title was with Lewis Hamilton, who has won three world championships since at Mercedes, in 2008.

The Honda engine's struggles with power and reliability led to McLaren announcing the



Fernando Alonso

split last September. The striking papaya orange and blue MCL33 is the team's first to be powered by Renault, whose engines took Red Bull to three race wins last season.

TOP FOUR TARGET

Since crossing to McLaren, Alonso has been stuck on 97 podium finishes, his last with Ferrari at the Hungarian Grand Prix in 2014. He was bullish about his chances of reaching the milestone 100th podium during the coming season and felt the team should also have big ambitions in the constructors' championship.

"I think so. I think top four is definitely a target for us and we know that Mercedes is a little bit ahead of everyone and is dominating the sport for the last four years," said Alonso, who will also race for Toyota at the Le Mans 24 Hours in June and in the full World Endurance championship.

"And they are the big favourites again to start the new season. But then we have Red

Bull, we have Ferrari and definitely McLaren has to the next team on that order."

With Mercedes having dominated the past four seasons, sweeping both the drivers' and constructors' titles, Alonso agreed that the Silver Arrows' rivals needed to lift their game to keep fans interested in a series that has been criticised for becoming predictable.

"It's always important to have some competition in any sport," he said. "I think competitions and close fights will attract more people and will make the championship more interesting but I don't think that's any problem with Mercedes' dominance. They did a better job than the others in the last couple of years because they deserve it."

"So it's up to us to improve and to race our game and hopefully beat them very soon. And McLaren is probably one of the teams that can do that in the future, in the near future. "And hopefully that near future is soon and even this year." —Reuters

Hamilton-led Mercedes' domination. The optimism comes from winter testing in Barcelona when Ricciardo consistently registered fast lap times, suggesting Red Bull may have overcome the teething issues of last year.

"It feels like we are in a better place than we have been the last few seasons," he said ahead of the new season. "We seem solid. Soon we'll know on one-lap pace where we are, but I don't think we are far off." Reliability will be crucial if they are to mount a serious challenge to Mercedes and Ferrari.

Red Bull had lifted four straight drivers' and constructors' world titles when the Australian was promoted from Toro Rosso in 2014, but have not claimed another since with Ricciardo winning five races for the senior team.

Intoxicating mix

"We're certainly relying on the reliability to improve, and we have made a pretty good step with that," Ricciardo said. "I think we are obviously still not going to be on Mercedes' level. "But in any case, to win a championship you need to be finishing races, let alone winning, and once we can finish we can start taking points away and do our thing."

Adding to the intoxicating mix is the threat from ambitious 20-year-old Dutch teammate Max Verstappen, who while outscored by

Ricciardo on race points last year, regularly topped the Australian in qualifying. Ricciardo said both of them desperately wanted to win.

"You need that in a way and it's not being a bad sport, it's not cheating; it's just that ruthless streak that every winner has in them. I think Max and all the top guys in the sport have that in them."

Ricciardo will become a free agent in 2019, raising speculation about where he will be next season given the contracts of Valtteri Bottas at Mercedes and Kimi Raikkonen at Ferrari are also due to expire at the end of the year.

So much hype'

"It's nice to be in a position to plan my next two or three years to see what I want in the sport and where I plan on pitching it," he said.

"It will be interesting, I will go through some conversations that will be new to me and I'm kind of looking forward to that experience. "I think they (Red Bull) are keen to keep me, obviously they've got Max but I think they are keen to keep me and Max together. But yeah, we'll see."

Ricciardo is seeking to become the first home driver to win the Australian Grand Prix since it became part of the world championship calendar in 1985. — AFP

KSSC to conclude season with late Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud tourney

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Eng Duaij Khalaf Al-Otaibi thanked, on behalf of the Kuwait Shooting Sport Club (KSSC) board of directors, 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 government for their care, encouragement and support of shooters, which took them to Olympic and international achievements that we are all proud of.

Al-Otaibi said KSSC is happy to conclude its season with the tournament of late Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah, thanking the family of the late Sheikh for continuing to support this annual event.

Eng Al-Otaibi said the honorary president of KSSC Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah laid down the foundations that placed Kuwait shooting on the right track and took it to success, and he is still giving advice and encouraging shooters to exert

more efforts towards making more achievements in the name of Kuwait.

Engineer Duaij Al-Otaibi said, as we conclude our season, we are proud of the achievements of Kuwait Shooting and the new records our shooters made both locally and internationally, adding that the Asian Championship that was held in Kazakhstan was a bright moment among the achievements and Kuwait won the first mixed competition gold medal through shooters Abdulrahman Al-Faihan and Sarah Al-Awal, who compared with very well established shooters around the world.

Al-Otaibi said the shooting community appreciates the support HH the Amir is giving to shooters, and the construction of the Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex.



Duaij Khalaf Al-Otaibi

Opportunity knocks for Ricciardo in new F1 season

MELBOURNE: Daniel Ricciardo faces a pivotal year in his Formula One career with expectations of a much-improved Red Bull performance and mounting speculation over where he will drive next season.

The 28-year-old Australian, who embarks on his eighth F1 season under the suffocating pressure and hype of competing at a home Grand Prix in Sunday's opener in Melbourne, endured a frustrating 2017 campaign.

He retired from three races with engine-related problems—including the misery of failing to finish in last year's Melbourne race—and amassed 70-places-worth of grid penalties stemming from the unreliability of the team's Renault engines.

But Ricciardo is considered a championship threat with Red Bull's new RB14 car expected, along with Ferrari, to threaten the Lewis

Ricciardo on race points last year, regularly topped the Australian in qualifying. Ricciardo said both of them desperately wanted to win.

"You need that in a way and it's not being a bad sport, it's not cheating; it's just that ruthless streak that every winner has in them. I think Max and all the top guys in the sport have that in them."

Ricciardo will become a free agent in 2019, raising speculation about where he will be next season given the contracts of Valtteri Bottas at Mercedes and Kimi Raikkonen at Ferrari are also due to expire at the end of the year.

So much hype'

"It's nice to be in a position to plan my next two or three years to see what I want in the sport and where I plan on pitching it," he said.

"It will be interesting, I will go through some conversations that will be new to me and I'm kind of looking forward to that experience. "I think they (Red Bull) are keen to keep me, obviously they've got Max but I think they are keen to keep me and Max together. But yeah, we'll see."

Ricciardo is seeking to become the first home driver to win the Australian Grand Prix since it became part of the world championship calendar in 1985. — AFP

McIlroy hopes Bay Hill ascent can lead to Augusta joy

AUGUSTA: Rory McIlroy believes Sunday's Arnold Palmer Invitational triumph provided vindication to his assertion that he was close to his best as the Northern Irishman hopes to carry that form to a maiden U.S Masters victory at Augusta next month.

McIlroy entered last week's tournament in patchy form after missing the cut in two of his four PGA Tour starts this year but the 28-year-old produced a spectacular final round at the Bay Hill Golf Club to win a first title since 2016.

"I have even more optimism now," McIlroy told reporters. "It was just more validation that what I've been doing has been correct. It all sort of just came together. "...I'm optimistic not just the next few weeks but the whole season. It's great to get a win early. I've got all that great stuff to fall back on, how I handled Sunday."

"I've always been able to turn negatives into positives... I went with the feeling that felt quite comfortable going into

last week. And I'll hopefully continue to have that feeling for a while." McIlroy said that winning was his main goal and dismissed the notion that silencing his critics gave him extra motivation.

"I don't care because people don't know the full story," he added. "They make comments and they speculate but they don't have the facts 100 percent so they never really know. It's all speculation." McIlroy faces Peter Uihlein in his opening group contest at the WGC-Dell Match Play in Texas later on Wednesday, two weeks before the Masters tees off on April 5. A victory in Augusta would give the Briton a career grand slam of major titles. The 2015 winner has been handed a favourable Group 6 draw that includes Americans Uihlein and Brian Harman, who will be making their tournament debuts, and Venezuela's Jhonattan Vegas at the Austin Country Club.

British Open champion Jordan Spieth, who is also competing at the Match Play event, believes four-time major champion McIlroy is the player to beat at any tournament provided the Northern Irishman can maintain his fitness.

"Whether he won last week or not, he's always a force," Spieth said. "He just needs to be healthy. And I think most of last season, it was a struggle for him. "So just being rested, healthy and on the right path meant this year and going forward, Rory is Rory. And so he should always be a favourite at any event." — Reuters

Captains Du Plessis and Smith clash over Rabada decision

Australia to field an unchanged team for eighth Test in a row

CAPE TOWN: South African captain Faf du Plessis yesterday hit back at his Australian counterpart Steve Smith's criticism of the decision to overturn a ban on South African fast bowler Kagiso Rabada. Rabada's punishment of three demerit points for deliberate physical contact with Smith in the second Test in Port Elizabeth was reduced to one point, overturning a two-match ban that would have seen him ruled out of the series. Smith claimed in an overnight interview with Australian journalists that the contact with Rabada in the second Test in Port Elizabeth had been "a little bit harder than it actually looked on the footage". The Australian captain said he was surprised he had not been asked his opinion before the ruling was made and also claimed that a "line in the sand" had been drawn regarding physical contact.

"The ICC have set the standard, haven't they? There was clearly contact out in the middle," said Smith. "I certainly won't be telling my bowlers to go out there and after you take a wicket go and get in their space. I don't think that is on and part of the game. But the standard has been set."

Du Plessis, though, praised the appeal process, saying it was good for cricket. "I don't see a problem with having a fair system where a neutral guy sits and listens to both parties," he said.

"I was there and I said to our people that even if we didn't win the case I was very impressed with the judge and how he listened to both sides. He was very fair with the questions he asked. I think that process is really good." Du Plessis dismissed Smith's comment about not being called to testify, ahead of the third Test in Cape

Town with the series locked at 1-1. "He wasn't charged. If he was charged he probably would (have been) asked. KG (Rabada) was charged, he was defending himself and the judge has to decide if he sees that it was intentional."

'CONTACT WAS HARDER THAN IT LOOKED'

Asked whether he thought Rabada had made deliberate contact, Smith said: "It's not my place to make that judgment. It's been handed down now and it is what it is. I said yesterday the contact was harder than it actually looked on the TV, whether it was intentional or not is not for me to decide." Smith denied there was a deliberate attempt to goad Rabada as had been suggested in

reports of a pre-tour interview he had given in Australia. "For us it is about playing the game the way we've always played it," he said. "We'll speak out in the middle, we won't do anything I guess to antagonise him into making the sorts of mistakes he's been (making). That's up to him if he wants to make those errors."

Smith said Australia would field an unchanged team for the eighth Test in a row and said both Mitchell Starc and Mitchell Marsh had overcome injury concerns with a "good hit-out" at practice on Tuesday. Du Plessis said two positions were being debated in the South African camp with a fit-again Temba Bavuma challenging for a batting place ahead of Theunis de Bruyn and fast bowler Morne Morkel possibly replacing Lungi Ngidi, who had a "toe niggle".

Both captains said they had discussed with new match referee Andy Pycroft about the spirit in which the game should be played. — AFP

I don't see a problem with having a fair system



PORT ELIZABETH: File photo shows Australia's captain Steve Smith (C) leads his team including David Warner (R), off the field after their defeat on the fourth day of the second Test cricket match between South Africa in Port Elizabeth. —AFP

England guarded over Ben bowling in Test comeback

AUCKLAND: England were guarded over whether injury-hit Ben Stokes would bowl against New Zealand when he makes his Test comeback from suspension today. Speaking yesterday, ahead of the first day-night Test to be held in New Zealand, captain Joe Root said the all-rounder would "play a part" but would not discuss what role he would fill.

"There's still stuff that needs to come out of today to be very sure of that," Root said, when asked whether Stokes, 26, had recovered sufficiently from a back strain to bowl normally.

"But I'm quite happy that Ben will play a part in the game." Stokes, suspended after a nightclub incident last September which left him facing a charge of affray, was sorely missed by England in their 4-0 trouncing by Australia in the Ashes series.

He returned to international cricket in the recent limited-overs series against New Zealand, which England won 3-2, but has been hampered by back stiffness. Meanwhile, New Zealand captain Kane Williamson said senior batsman Ross Taylor, who has a Test average of 48.04, had been passed fit after recovering from a groin injury and stomach bug.

"He's good to go so that's great news for us," Williamson said. "Roscoe has played beautifully every time he's walked out to the crease, the calmness at the crease, the confidence. It's reflected in how much success he's had this year. It's important for us as a team that he's there."

DEFINITELY SOME UNKNOWNS'

The clash at Auckland's Eden Park will be the ninth day-night Test but the first to be played in New Zealand. Williamson described it as a "slightly unique and an exciting opportunity", but was aware the teams were heading into the unknown. "There is probably a danger of over complicating some of the finer parts of the pink-ball game," he said, pointing to variable characteristics at different stages of the ball and times of day.

"There's definitely some unknowns. There's a lot of talk about the evening session and the condition of the ball in that time. "There's heaps of different stats but there's still unknowns. The sample size of pink-ball cricket is fairly small but it's important that you adapt as a change of conditions may happen coming into different stages of the day." New Zealand are likely to make two changes from their last Test, against the West Indies.

Williamson said Todd Astle would replace Mitchell Santner as the spinner in the side and BJ Watling would return as wicketkeeper. Watling has recovered from the hip injury which sidelined him from the West Indies' Tests in December.

New Zealand have played only one pink-ball Test, when they lost the inaugural day-nighter against Australia in 2015. England have played under lights twice in the past year, beating the West Indies at Edgbaston before losing to Australia in Adelaide. "Having experienced both sides of it I think we're a better side for it," Root said. "We know generally what to expect throughout the five days at different times throughout each day." — AFP



Girls' training centers project to get a boost

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The girls sports festival basketball and table tennis concluded under the patronage of Public Authority for Sports (PAS) in the presence of its Director General Dr Humoud Fulateh and Director of Clubs Department at PAS Suad Hakem, and other officials at the Falat Sports Club.

Dr Fulateh said it is good that clubs and schools from various governorates participate in the festival and wished that the participation be in more games. He said this gives girls a chance to spend their energy, as he appealed to the finance ministry to increase the budget to include all schools and centers, so a true rise in girls sports can be achieved.

Dr Fulateh thanked the education ministry for its cooperation and the success of the girls training centers project.

Supervisor General of Training Center Dr Yusra Al-Otaib said the education ministry was keen on sports to discover talents, adding that the idea behind the training centers project that is organized by PAS in cooperation with the ministry as a supporting activity for



physical education and support for the girls sporting club. Director of Clubs Department at PAS Suad Hakem said she was happy with the success of sports training

centers and hope such centers increase in number adding that she appreciated the efforts made during the project and look for more projects to come.

Kuwait wins silver in Bocce competition

ABU DHABI: Kuwaiti athletes with intellectual disabilities added a silver medal to their tally at the Special Olympics IX MENA Games and Special Olympics World Games Abu Dhabi 2018. Kuwaiti athletes Abdulrahman Al-Hajri and Hamad Al-Shegy won the silver medal in the double Bocce competition.

This takes Kuwait's total tally in the competition up to 20 medals: eight gold, four silver and eight bronze. Kuwait is represented in the event by 50 athletes competing in football, basketball, table tennis, swimming,

track and field, bowling and bocce. The special Olympics IX MENA Games and Special Olympics World Games Abu Dhabi 2018 are part of the UAE's National Vision 2021 that highlights full integration of people of determination into everyday society.

Meanwhile, Kuwait will face Jordan in their first competitive football match, after a two-year international ban was lifted by world governing body, FIFA, late last year.

The FIFA-appointed "normalisation committee", tasked with running Kuwait Football Authority affairs, made sure to arrange the first match - a friendly - with a neighbouring Arab nation, the committee's chief Mishal Al-Rabeea told KUNA. The Amman-hosted clash will be followed by another three friendlies, including a home game with Cameroon next week, and an away fixture with Palestine in the occupied territories and a home encounter with Egypt, both in May. All

four matches will be registered under the official FIFA calendar, underlined the official, and will provide Kuwait's national side with points under FIFA's global world rankings.

Regarding player selection, he said the national squad would include a 23-man combination of older and young players, mentioning the importance of the new generation's need to gain international experience.

The friendlies will offer all players the opportunity to make their mark ahead of selecting a final squad as the nation looks to build a team ready to compete on the global stage after a two-year absence, he added.

The Serb head coach of local outfit Al-Tahamom, Radi, has been placed in charge of the national side for the upcoming fixtures. The squad arrived in Amman on Monday and is currently training at the King Abdullah Sports City ahead of their anticipated encounter at the facility's main stadium. — KUNA

Sports

Red Wings end 10-game skid with shootout victory over Flyers

Vegas roll past visiting Vancouver

DETROIT: Dylan Larkin notched his first multi-goal game of the season, and the Detroit Red Wings ended a 10-game losing streak with a 5-4 shootout victory over the visiting Philadelphia Flyers on Tuesday night. Evgeny Svechnikov scored his first career goal and Luke Glendening added a goal for the Red Wings. Detroit, 0-9-1 in the previous 10 games, broke its longest drought since losing 14 straight from Feb. 24-March 25, 1982. Frans Nielsen scored the only goal in the shootout. Jimmy Howard stopped all three Flyers attempts in the shootout after making 27 saves in regulation and overtime. Sean Couturier, Matt Read, Shayne Gostisbehere and Travis Konecny scored for Philadelphia. Claude Giroux recorded two assists.

LIGHTNING 4, MAPLE LEAFS 3

Alex Killorn scored the winner midway through the third period, and Andrei Vasilevskiy made 27 saves as Tampa Bay scored four unanswered goals-three in the third period-to beat visiting Toronto. Vasilevskiy won for the 41st time this season, a Lightning record. Victor Hedman, Ryan McDonagh and Nikita Kucherov scored in the comeback. James van Riemsdyk scored twice and Zach Hyman added a goal for the Maple Leafs.

SHARKS 6, DEVILS 2

Barclay Goodrow had a goal and an assist, and Brent Burns furnished three helpers as San Jose hammered visiting New Jersey. Eric Fehr, Joe Pavelski, Jannik Hansen, Logan Couture and Mikkel Boedker also scored for the Sharks, who posted their fifth consecutive win. Brenden Dillon supplied two helpers and extended his points streak to five games. San Jose goaltender Martin Jones made 26 saves on 28 shots for his 26th victory of the season. Devils starting netminder Cory Schneider blocked 10 of 14 shots in 30:31 during his first start after four games as a backup. Keith Kinkaid replaced him, finishing with nine saves on 11 shots.

GOLDEN KNIGHTS 4, CANUCKS 1

Vegas rolled past visiting Vancouver despite losing goalie Marc-Andre Fleury to an apparent injury. Jonathan Marchessault, Cody Eakin, Pierre-Edouard Bellemare and Tomas Tatar scored goals for Vegas, which improved to 26-9-2 at home. Malcolm Subban and Fleury combined to stop 29 shots for the Golden Knights. Fleury, who made his 10th straight start and 21st over 22 games, left after making seven saves in the first period, one of them coming on a Brandon Sutter shot that caromed off his mask midway through the period.

JETS 2, KINGS 1 (OT)

Rookie Kyle Connor scored his second goal of the night 97 seconds into overtime as Winnipeg completed a comeback to beat visiting Los Angeles. The news wasn't all good for the Jets, though. Second-year sniper Patrik Laine, whose 43 goals on the season trail only the 44 netted by Washington Capitals star Alex Ovechkin, left the game in the second period after he blocked a shot

with his foot. The early exit led to the end of a 15-game scoring streak in which Laine collected 18 goals and 26 points. Winnipeg goalie Eric Comrie made 16 saves and to earn a second victory in his first three NHL starts.

PANTHERS 7, SENATORS 2

Florida won its second consecutive road game, routing Ottawa to improve to 18-5-1 since Jan. 30. Colton Sceviour, Keith Yandle, Evgenii Dadonov, Jared McCann, Frank Vatrano, Nick Bjugstad and Jamie McGinn scored for the Panthers. Florida backup goalie James Reimer earned the victory with 33 saves. He has won his past three starts while allowing a combined total of three goals. The Senators played without star defenseman Erik Karlsson after it was announced that he and his wife lost their unborn son. Ottawa goalie Craig Anderson was chased 7:19 into the second period, having allowed four goals on just 17 shots.

Florida goalie James Reimer earned victory with 33 saves

AVALANCHE 5, BLACKHAWKS 1

Alexander Kerfoot scored two goals, and Semyon Varlamov stopped 44 shots as Colorado won at Chicago. Mikko Rantanen, Tyson Barrie and Erik Johnson added goals for the Avalanche, and Nathan MacKinnon notched two assists. Brent Seabrook scored for the Blackhawks, who

got 35 saves from Anton Forsberg.

BLUE JACKETS 5, RANGERS 3

Artemi Panarin recorded his second career hat trick and added an assist as Columbus stretched its winning streak to nine games with a road victory over New York. Alexander Wennberg and Markus Nutivaara also scored for the Blue Jackets, and Sergei Bobrovsky made 29 saves. Kevin Hayes scored a short-handed goal while Mika Zibanejad and Chris Kreider scored power-play goals for the Rangers.

CAPITALS 4, STARS 3

John Carlson scored the tiebreaking goal with 4:59 left, leading host Washington past Dallas, which took its sixth straight loss. The Capitals got a goal and two assists from Alex Ovechkin, plus a goal and an assist apiece from Carlson and T.J. Oshie. Matt Niskanen scored a goal, and Eller had two assists. Alexander Radulov and Jamie Benn each had a goal and an assist for Dallas. Tyler Seguin also scored, and John Klingberg registered two helpers.

ISLANDERS 4, PENGUINS 1

Mathew Barzal's goal early in the first period provided New York a lead it would never relinquish in a victory over visiting Pittsburgh. Adam Pelech, Anders Lee and Jordan Eberle also scored for the Islanders, who snapped a three-game losing streak and won for just the third time in their past 14 games (3-7-4). Christopher Gibson earned the win by recording 36 saves. Conor Sheary scored for the Penguins. Goalie Matt Murray, who missed the previous nine games with



LAS VEGAS: Bo Horvat #53 of the Vancouver Canucks takes a shot on goal as Brayden McNabb #3 of the Vegas Golden Knights defends in the first period of their game at T-Mobile Arena on Tuesday in Las Vegas, Nevada. The Golden Knights won 4-1.—AFP

NHL results/standings

NY Islanders 4; Pittsburgh 1; Columbus 5; NY Rangers 3; Washington 4; Dallas 3; Edmonton 7; Carolina 3; Florida 7; Ottawa 2; Detroit 5; Philadelphia 4 (SO); Tampa Bay 4; Toronto 3; Winnipeg 2; Los Angeles 1 (OT); Colorado 5; Chicago 1; Las Vegas 4; Vancouver 1; San Jose 6; New Jersey 2.

Eastern Conference						Western Conference							
Atlantic Division						Central Division							
Tampa Bay	50	19	4	264	205	104	Nashville	48	14	10	236	178	106
Boston	45	17	9	239	184	99	Winnipeg	44	19	10	242	190	98
Toronto	43	23	7	246	208	93	Minnesota	41	24	8	227	210	90
Florida	37	27	7	219	218	81	Colorado	40	25	8	236	210	88
Detroit	27	35	11	189	228	65	Dallas	38	28	8	212	201	84
Montreal	26	35	12	182	232	64	St. Louis	39	28	5	201	193	83
Ottawa	26	35	11	199	251	63	Chicago	30	35	9	209	228	69
Buffalo	23	37	12	172	236	58	Las Vegas	47	21	5	248	200	99
Metropolitan Division						San Jose	41	23	9	225	201	91	
Washington	42	24	7	229	217	91	Los Angeles	40	27	7	212	186	87
Pittsburgh	41	27	5	238	222	87	Anaheim	37	24	12	206	197	86
Columbus	41	28	5	210	206	87	Calgary	35	29	10	204	222	80
Philadelphia	37	25	12	222	220	86	Edmonton	32	36	5	208	234	69
New Jersey	37	28	8	219	221	82	Arizona	24	37	11	175	230	59
Carolina	31	31	11	197	232	73	Vancouver	25	39	9	187	240	59
NY Rangers	32	33	8	211	236	72	NY Islanders	31	32	10	235	263	72

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

From non-league to World Cup, Pope dreams of keeping for England



BURTON-ON-TRENT: England's goalkeeper Nick Pope (R) speaks with England Football staff at St George's Park in Burton-on-Trent on Tuesday, ahead of their international friendly football matches against the Netherlands on March 23 and Italy on March 27.—AFP

number one jersey is up for grabs".

Long-time number one Joe Hart's place is under threat as he has featured in just one of West Ham's last 16 Premier League games. Everton's Jordan Pickford and Stoke's Jack Butland also have more Premier League experience than Pope.

But he isn't content with just receiving a call-up he once believed impossible and wants to start England's World Cup opener against Tunisia on June 18.

"It's every man for himself. I want it to be me," Pope added. "It's a massive honour. To represent your country first of all, and go to a World Cup." Pope isn't the only beneficiary of Burnley's fantastic season to gain international recognition as centre-back James Tarkowski is also included in the England squad for the

first time.

"It's always an ambition but you need to get to a particular position just to be recognised as an English player," said Tarkowski. "It wasn't until a few weeks into the season when I started to do okay and the club started to do well that I thought 'maybe I've got a chance here'."

Southgate hailed the work done by Burnley boss Sean Dyche when he announced his squad last week, and Tarkowski backed Dyche to be a future England manager. "I don't see any reason why not in the future," said Tarkowski.

"There are always rumours about him. Maybe it is a surprise (he hasn't moved), but I'm quite happy. I'm not going to complain about that." — AFP

Aberg, Yohann Auvitu and Jesse Puljujarvi also scored for the Oilers, who are 5-2-1 in their past eight games.

Despite all the offense, Edmonton's scoring leader, Connor McDavid, had only two assists. Brock McGinn, Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen produced the Carolina goals. — Reuters

Clock ticking for injured Neuer as World Cup looms

DUSSELDORF: The clock is ticking down for Manuel Neuer to return from a fractured foot, but the Germany camp is hopeful he will be ready for their World Cup defence. Germany host Spain tomorrow in Duesseldorf and Brazil in Berlin next Tuesday in high-profile friendlies, but will again be without their captain and goalkeeper.

In the 31-year-old's absence, Barcelona's Marc-Andre ter Stegen, Kevin Trapp of Paris Saint-Germain and Bayer Leverkusen's Bernd Leno will be vying for Germany's number one shirt.

Neuer has not played since fracturing his foot last September—the second time he suffered the same injury in 2017. His club Bayern Munich have not set a date for his return, but the countdown is on before Germany announce their World Cup squad on May 15.

"There is no pressure from our side, it's a decision for him and the doctors," said Germany team manager Oliver Bierhoff yesterday. "Of course, we hope he will be 100 percent ready and fit by the time we nominate (the World Cup squad)."

Neuer has not played for Germany since October 2016, and the defending world champions are desperate for him to be ready for their opening World Cup match against Mexico in Moscow on June 17. Neuer was voted the world's best goalkeeper for four years running up until 2016. His six-month absence and lack of match practice is a cause for worry in football-mad Germany. Thomas Mueller understands the concern but is backing his Germany and Bayern team-mate to get fit.

"I see 'Manu' a bit more than most and he always give the impression that everything is okay," said Mueller. I am not privy to what the medical situation is, but I haven't heard anything to suggest things aren't going to plan.—AFP

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14 Captains Du Plessis and Smith clash over Rabada decision



15 From non-league to World Cup, Pope dreams of keeping for England



PORLAND: James Harden #13 of the Houston Rockets handles the ball against the Portland Trail Blazers on Tuesday at the Moda Center in Portland, Oregon. — AFP

Rockets shoot down red-hot Blazers

Morris drills game-winner as Celtics stun Thunder

LOS ANGELES: James Harden poured in 42 points to lift the visiting Houston Rockets to a 115-111 victory over the Trail Blazers on Tuesday night, ending Portland's 13-game winning streak. Chris Paul added 22 points, including a pair of free throws with 1.3 seconds left, as the Rockets won their sixth in a row and earned their 23rd victory in 24 outings. Al-Farouq Aminu scored 22 points and Jusuf Nurkic had 21 points and 11 rebounds for the Trail Blazers. Portland had won 18 of its previous 19 home games. Portland's top two scorers on the season, Damian Lillard and CJ McCollum, combined for 28 points on 9-for-32 shooting, including 0 of 12 from 3-point range.

CELTICS 100, THUNDER 99

Marcus Morris made a go-ahead 3-pointer with 1.2 seconds remaining as host Boston snapped Oklahoma City's six-game winning streak. Thunder star Russell Westbrook missed a 3-point attempt at the buzzer. Westbrook had 27 points, eight rebounds and nine

assists to lead Oklahoma City, but his streak of games with a triple-double ended at five. Jayson Tatum scored a team-high 23 points and grabbed 11 rebounds, and Morris added 21 points for the Celtics, who won for the fourth time in eight March games. It was Tatum's first-career game with at least 20 points and 10 rebounds.

RAPTORS 93, MAGIC 86

Kyle Lowry scored 25 points, and Toronto rallied in the fourth quarter to knock off host Orlando. The Raptors trailed by eight entering the fourth quarter but surged past the Magic with a 16-2 run, fueled by Lowry. The Raptors, who bounced back after having their 11-game winning streak snapped by the Oklahoma City Thunder on Sunday. Shellyn Mack came off the bench to score 17 points, and Aaron Gordon had 16 points for Orlando, which has dropped seven of eight.

PELICANS 115, MAVERICKS 105

Anthony Davis scored 37 points to help New

Orleans top visiting Dallas. Rajon Rondo added 19 points, 14 assists and nine rebounds. Ian Clark scored 19 points, E'Twaun Moore had 14 and Cheick Diallo 10 for the Pelicans. New Orleans guard Jrue Holiday, the team's second-leading scorer, did not play because of the flu. Dirk Nowitzki and Harrison Barnes scored each 19, and Yogi Ferrell had 15 points for the Mavericks.

TIMBERWOLVES 123, CLIPPERS 109

Minnesota completed its first season-series sweep of visiting Los Angeles thanks to Karl-Anthony Towns' game-high 30 points. Andrew Wiggins (27 points), Jeff Teague (20) and Jamal Crawford (20) made it four Timberwolves with 20 or more points. DeAndre Jordan recorded an 18-point, 12-rebound double-double for the Clippers, who lost their fourth straight for Los Angeles.

HAWKS 99, JAZZ 94

Dennis Schroder scored a career-high 41 points

on 16-of-28 shooting, and DeWayne Dedmon added 15 points and 15 rebounds to help Atlanta snap Utah's nine-game winning streak. Taurean Prince added 11 points for the Hawks, who swept the season series with the Jazz. Donovan Mitchell scored 24 points and Ricky Rubio added 23 to lead Utah. Joe Ingles tallied 16 points, eight rebounds and seven assists, and Rudy Gobert chipped in 15 points and 16 rebounds.

PISTONS 115, SUNS 88

Blake Griffin had 26 points, 10 assists and nine rebounds, and Andre Drummond added 10 points and 10 rebounds as Detroit handed Phoenix its ninth loss in a row. Pistons point guard Reggie Jackson had seven points and two assists in 15 minutes in his return from a serious ankle injury. Alex Len had 19 points and 12 rebounds, Josh Jackson had 15 points and 11 rebounds, and Troy Daniels had 18 points for the Suns. Phoenix has lost 19 of 20 and 24 of 26. —Reuters

Jet-skier awarded for breaking world record

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Captain Mohammad Burabee from the traffic department was honored for entering the Guinness Book of World Records after winning 21 gold medals over 11 years from the International Jet-Ski Association (IJG SPA). The honoring took place in the presence of Interior Ministry Undersecretary Lt Gen Mahmoud Al-Dousary, State Ministry for Youth's Undersecretary Sheikha Al-Zain Sabah Al-Nasser Al-Saud Al-Sabah, Public Authority for Sports' Director General Dr Humoud Fulaih, Head of the Kuwait Sea Club Maj Gen Fahd Al-Fahd, and Assistant Director General of the Relations and Security Information Department Brig Tawheed Al-Kandari.



Captain Mohammad Burabee (right)



Captain Mohammad Burabee seen with top officials.

Business

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Zain supports Kuwait Investment Forum 2018

We will continue to contribute to the development of national economy: Al-Kharafi



KUWAIT: The Kuwait Investment Forum 2018 (KIF 2018) was held under the patronage and in the presence of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah between March 20-21.

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading telecommunications network in Kuwait supported the Kuwait Investment Forum 2018 (KIF 2018), that was held under the patronage and in the presence of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace and Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center (JACC), between March 20-21.

The two-day forum, co-organized by the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA), and the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI), reaffirmed the Kuwait government's interest in promoting and facilitating value-added investments in the country's dynamic economy.

Zain officials participated in the KIF 2018 inauguration ceremony at Bayan Palace, which provided an interactive platform for high-ranking government offi-

“ Zain to support the Vision Kuwait 2035 - New Kuwait **”**



KUWAIT: Bader Al-Kharafi, Zain Vice Chairman and Group CEO (Center), with Al-Roudhan and Al-Othaim during the

cial, local and foreign investors as well as industry leaders, executives, and consultants from various global institutions. The gathering showcased the progress that is being achieved in Kuwait's business environment, and investment opportunities, with a view on emerging trends.

Zain's support of the Forum is in line with its strategy to contribute to the further progress of the national economy and in support of the vision Kuwait 2035 - New Kuwait. The event provided an opportunity to further highlight the role of the private sector in supporting the country's major developmental projects and the importance of both public-private partnerships and foreign investment.

Bader Al-Kharafi, Zain Vice Chairman and Group CEO, said "The State of Kuwait is diversifying its efforts on multiple fronts to achieve HH the Amir's desire to diversify the country's sources of income through streamlining the business environment and improving competitiveness, as well as attracting foreign investment into the country, with the aim of transforming Kuwait into a financial and commercial center."

Al-Kharafi noted that the message conveyed by HH

the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak to the conference audience emphasized the State of Kuwait leadership's interest to invest directly and create the right legislative and economic atmosphere to attract local and foreign investment. This is further reconfirmed by the keen personal interest and attendance of HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad at the event.

Al-Kharafi welcomed the economic vision announced at the opening session by the First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, who revealed a national plan to develop the Kuwaiti Islands in the north that will create more than 200,000 non-oil jobs and generate revenues exceeding \$35 billion annually. This vision came within the ongoing feasibility study to merge the Islands project with Kuwait's Sili City enterprise that will create an international free trade investment zone that will act as a launchpad for more cooperation with neighboring countries.

Furthermore, the Zain Group CEO added the Islands

project that will be carried out by local and international investment entities, "will further stimulate the confidence of private sector institutions in the country, given their vital role in supporting the public sector in the execution of this prominent development project in north of the country. The area will become a fertile environment for investment and housing and we look forward to playing a significant role in developing the infrastructure of the islands and smart cities."

Al-Kharafi noted the significant role that the introduction of modern technology through foreign investment will play in further bolstering economic growth.

This is further supported by the country's growing and dynamic youth population, and the determination of state institutions who have in recent years enacted favorable legislative environment to attract local and foreign investment, moving away from a narrow-minded local economic perspective to an international economic perspective.

The two-day forum saw various sessions being held

on topics such as: Investing for the Future of Kuwait; Trade Facilitation: A Driver For Development; An Update on Kuwait 2035 Vision: New Kuwait; Investment Opportunities - Lucrative Options In Dynamic Sectors; Financing For Sustainable Development; Dialogue On "Kuwait Development Path: The Vision & The Determination".

Zain considers itself a key partner of the community, especially for initiatives and projects that are in favor of supporting the national economy, as the company is keen to consolidate its commitment to sustainability programs in the economic-socio development of the country.

Al-Kharafi praises KCCI Chairman, KDIPA's DG

KUWAIT: Bader Al-Kharafi, Zain Vice Chairman and Group CEO, praised the efforts exerted by the Chairman of the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI), Ali Thunayan Al-Ghanim, which enhances the role of the private sector in contributing to the achievement of the country's development goals especially that the KCCI is very active and keen to improve the level of cooperation with the private sector and support the holding of such prominent investment forums.

Also, Al-Kharafi commended the efforts exerted by KDIPA and its Director General, Sheikh Dr Meshaal Al-Jaber, in maximizing and strengthening the country's strategic directions aimed at restoring Kuwait to its position as a financial and commercial center in the region. "The holding of this forum and bilateral dialogues are very important to highlight the State of Kuwait as an attractive incubator for businesses, thus attracting and stimulating foreign investment. With KDIPA's involvement, Kuwait has a long list of major and sustainable development projects, sound infrastructure, a favorable corporate tax rate, and an open business environment with a distinctive cultural appeal." Al-Kharafi recognized and applauded KDIPA's role in recently attracting \$2.5 billion in foreign investment and creating over 1,000 direct jobs for Kuwait nationals and its prominent future role in achieving the Kuwait vision 2035 - New Kuwait.

France braces for travel misery ahead of public sector strike

One-day strike today against low pay and reform

PARIS: French rail operator SNCF and aviation authorities warned of major disruptions today as public sector employees and their supporters carry out a one-day strike against low pay and President Emmanuel Macron's reform drive.

Only 40 percent of high-speed TGV services will be running, and just one in four regular trains across the country, SNCF chief Guillaume Pepy told RTL radio.

Outside Paris, just one in three SNCF trains serving the outlying suburbs is expected as unions protest an overhaul that would strip new hires of a special status that guarantees early retirement and other benefits.

Four Eurostar trains between London and Paris have already been cancelled. "We're going to do everything possible to help passengers," Pepy said, adding that the SNCF's national headquarters and regional offices would be closed in order to free up personnel.

In Paris itself, metro and bus services are set to run normally, but some suburban commuter lines will be affected, with just two out of three trains scheduled during rush hours on the heavily used RER A and B lines. France's civil aviation authority said a third of flights into and out of the main Paris airports of Charles de Gaulle, Orly and Beauvais would be cancelled Thursday because of a strike by air traffic controllers.

Air France said shorter flights would be the most affected, while all long-haul flights were currently expected to operate. Those cancellations come ahead of a separate

strike by Air France pilots and cabin crew Friday seeking a six-percent raise. Teachers are also striking today, mainly at primary schools, as are hospital workers and some civil servants in the biggest test for Macron since a wave of demonstrations last September and October.

Warning by rail workers

More than 140 protests are planned across France, the biggest at the Bastille monument in central Paris where unions expect 25,000 demonstrators. Public servants are angry over pay that has not kept up with inflation, while unions accuse Macron of wanting to take a sledgehammer to the public sector. Macron has pledged to cut 120,000 public jobs during his five-year term and his government has raised the prospect of voluntary redundancies, prompting fears that the quality of services will take a hit.

Plans to use more contractors and increasingly offer pay based on merit, rather than on experience, are seen by unions as attacks on traditional job security.

On the railways, plans to strip new recruits of a guaranteed job for life and other benefits have riled unionists who also fear that a restructuring of the SNCF could eventually see it privatized. They have announced a three-month wave of intermittent strikes to try to force the government to back down, vowing two days of strikes every five days. But a leaked letter from an official at the hardline CGT union, the biggest at the SNCF, suggested that workers



ROISSY, France: This file photo taken shows passengers reading a departure board at Roissy Charles-de-Gaulle airport, during a nation-wide strike to protest against job cuts.—AFP

were preparing more severe disruptions. "The disarray to operations will also affect the days when we're working," since trains and agents often won't be where they are supposed to be, according to the letter, obtained today. "Management will be totally lost and unable to anticipate anything," making it impossible to accurately warn users at 1600 GMT of disruptions for the next day, as the SNCF has promised. Transport Minister Elisabeth Borne responded on RMC radio: "I cannot believe rail workers would support such methods."—AFP

Skoda also ditches UK vehicle agency over Brexit uncertainty

LONDON: Skoda is at least the second automaker to stop approving its cars with Britain's Vehicle Certification Agency (VCA) due to uncertainty over its post-Brexit powers, in an example of the steps firms are taking to fill a void of uncertainty.

The VCA can now sign off on models to be used in the whole of the EU, like national equivalents across the 28-member bloc, and is used by the likes of Jaguar Land Rover, Nissan and Aston Martin.

Its powers after the Brexit transition period, which ends in December 2020, remain unclear and are likely to be determined as part of the final agreement due to be decided this autumn. Carmakers can spend years on the approvals process at significant expense. Many like Skoda, which does not build in Britain, have picked the VCA in recent years due to its expertise.

However, quintessentially British brand Aston Martin, famed for being James Bond's car of choice, told Reuters this month it had no choice but to stop using the VCA for its latest models with Skoda taking a similar approach. "As long-term certainty is required for developing and manufacturing new models, as well as making ongoing changes and modifications to them, it has become necessary for SKODA to find a type approval authority who will have authority to function within the European Union," a spokesman said.

Skoda has used the VCA for all its recent models except the Karoq, Kodiaq and Citigo and will now use the Czech ministry of transport for all future vehicles, the spokesman at the Volkswagen-owned Czech brand said. At stake is the future of a key regulator for Britain's car industry, which has been one of the few manu-



LONDON: Skoda became the second automaker to stop approving its cars with Britain's Vehicle Certification Agency (VCA) due to uncertainty over its post-Brexit powers, in an example of the steps firms are taking to fill a void of uncertainty.

facturing success stories since the 1980s, employing over 800,000 people and generating turnover of 77.5 billion pounds (\$110 billion).

Britain's transport ministry, which oversees the VCA, did not offer an immediate comment when contacted by Reuters. It turned down a Reuters request to interview the head of the VCA, Pia Wilkes, or anyone else from the organization. The ministry has previously said: "We are committed to securing the best deal for Britain, and will work hard to ensure the UK motor industry and authorities continue to thrive following EU exit."

European partner?

Losing carmakers would be a blow to both the VCA's finances and prestige. But at the Geneva Motor Show earlier this month, the chief executive of McLaren Automotive – which uses the VCA – suggested the regulator may be looking to find a European partner for future work.

"We are in discussions actually with the VCA at the moment who are considering having a partnership with a European agency," Mike

Flewitt told Reuters. "There may be a route there. I don't want to walk away from the VCA if I can possibly help it," he said.

But it can take up to 18 months to obtain a licence and carmakers often begin discussions with regulators three to ten years beforehand, according to Britain's car industry body the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT). It said in October that due to concerns that licenses granted by the VCA may be deemed invalid in the future, some carmakers were already going to other regulators, without naming specific brands.

Several executives who spoke to Reuters at the Geneva Motor Show said it would make no sense for a different regulatory system to develop in Britain compared with the rest of Europe.

"It only adds costs for admin and red tape," Ralf Speth, the boss of Britain's biggest carmaker Jaguar Land Rover, told Reuters. "It doesn't bring civilization forward, it doesn't give us new solutions for technology, it doesn't help us in making the environment better. Sorry, I'm an engineer."—Reuters

Nestle provides lifeline for struggling Kenyan coffee farmers

planting more trees so we can harvest more," she said, standing amid newly planted seedlings provided by the Nestle project, which she joined three years ago.

Multiple effect

Since Kenya's production peaked at 129,000 tons in 1988/89 it has dropped steadily due to poor management and global price swings. Farmers have switched crops or sold their land.

Nestle, which is counting on growth in its coffee business as it overhauls its business to improve performance, works with a local milling and marketing company, Coffee Management Services (CMS), to train farmers regularly on fertilizer application, pest and disease control. It provides seedlings for farmers wishing to plant more.

"People didn't know how and when to apply fertilizer properly. Nestle has taught us a lot," said William Njeru, a farmer who harvested 7,600 kg last year, up from around 1,200 kg a year before he joined the project five years ago. "If we can have other partners who are doing what Nestle is doing, the multiplier effect on productivity in Kenya can be very high," said Peter Kimata, deputy head of Nestle's partner CMS.

A half hour drive up the road from his office sits an abandoned coffee factory with rusting machinery. Farmer Moses Wachira says it was closed in 2013 after its management embezzled farmers' money. That forced 500 farmers to start selling their coffee to brokers who offer lower prices.

"These problems are causing production to fall because nobody watches to ensure managers do not misappropriate farmers' money," said the white-bearded farmer. Kenya's harvest fell 12 percent in the 2016/17 season to 40,700 metric tons, according to government data. Government efforts to revive the sector have faltered.—Reuters

EXCHANGE RATES

AL-MUZAINI EXCHANGE CO.

ASIAN COUNTRIES

Japanese Yen	2,827
Indian Rupees	4,618
Pakistani Rupees	2,720
Sri Lankan Rupees	1,925
Nepali Rupees	2,901
Singapore Dollar	229,090
Hongkong Dollar	38,348
Bangladesh Taka	3,598
Philippine Peso	5,789
Thai Baht	9,654

GCC COUNTRIES

Saudi Riyal	80,267
Qatari Riyal	82,671
Omani Riyal	781,705
Bahraini Dinar	799,260
UAE Dirham	81,973

ARAB COUNTRIES

Egyptian Pound - Cash	19,600
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	17,054
Yemeni Riyal/for 1000	1,208
Tunisian Dinar	127,190
Jordanian Dinar	423,690
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	2,005
Syrian Lira	0,000
Morocco Dirham	33,311

EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES

US Dollar Transfer	300,800
Euro	370,440
Sterling Pound	422,920
Canadian dollar	231,920

Turkish lira

77.130

Swiss Franc

316,630

Australian Dollar

232,970

US Dollar Buying

299,600

20 Gram

260,520

10 Gram

133,180

5 Gram

67,430

GOLD

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Business

EU proposes online turnover tax for big tech companies

Google, Facebook and Amazon set to foot a large chunk of bill

BRUSSELS: The European Commission proposed rules yesterday to make digital companies pay their fair share of tax, with US tech giants such as Google, Facebook and Amazon set to foot a large chunk of the bill. Under the Commission's plan, companies with significant digital revenues in Europe will pay a 3 percent tax on their turnover on various online services in the European Union, bringing in an estimated 5 billion euros (\$6.1 billion).

If backed by EU states and lawmakers, whose support is far from certain, the tax would apply to large firms with annual worldwide revenue above 750 million euros (\$920.9 million) annual "taxable" EU revenues above 50 million euros. The tax, designed as a short-term measure before the EU finds a way to tax profits based on where they do business, could also encompass other high-profile US firms such as Airbnb and Uber.



EU countries split over issue, but backing required

investigating the business practices of Amazon, Google and Apple, leading to accusations, which the Commission denies, that it is targeting Silicon Valley.

Deep divisions

The Commission said that top digital firms, whose average revenue growth of 14 percent far exceeded that of other multinationals, faced an effective tax rate of 9.5 percent, less than half the level of traditional companies. The proposals require backing from the European Parliament and the 28 EU countries, but they are divided on the issue. EU tax reforms need the backing of all member states to become law.

Large EU states have accused the tech firms of paying too little tax in the bloc by routing some of their profits to low-tax member states such as Ireland and Luxembourg.

US tech companies themselves have said they are paying tax in line with national and international laws and, in some cases, that the tax should be paid in the United States on profits repatriated there.

The proposal is to tax companies according to where their digital users are based. A senior EU diplomatic predicted it would be hard to push through the legislation, among the most important for the bloc, because of deep divisions between larger countries set to gain more tax income and



BRUSSELS: European Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs Pierre Moscovici addresses a press conference at the European Union in Brussels yesterday. —AFP

smaller ones set to lose.

Smaller countries also fear becoming less attractive to multinational firms. Ireland has warned that the proposals risk merely re-slicing the tax cake, rather than actually taxing more. Some countries also believe that smaller companies should also face a bill. Commission Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis said that the EU would prefer globally agreed rules, but that the amount of profits currently going untaxed was unacceptable.

The tax would apply to online advertising sales, which would bring in companies such as Google and Facebook, to platforms offering services such as interaction with other users or online sales and those selling data generated from users.

The tax would be collected in countries where the users are located. Tech industry groups have complained that it is wrong to tax revenues as that would unduly hit companies, such as Amazon, with thinner margins. —Reuters

Asian business sentiment edges up to 7-year high

SYDNEY: Business confidence among Asian companies rose in the first quarter to the highest level in seven years, a Thomson Reuters/INSEAD survey showed, as a fresh surge by the Chinese economy offset concerns about rising trade barriers. The Thomson Reuters/INSEAD Asian Business Sentiment Index, representing the six-month outlook of 67 firms, advanced one notch to 79 for the January-March quarter compared with three months before.

A reading above 50 indicates a positive outlook. "The improvement is not dramatic but with a historical perspective this is a good reading," said Antonio Fatas, a Singapore-based economics professor at global business school INSEAD. Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia saw robust jumps in sentiment, showing that many countries in Asia continue to benefit from accelerating global growth. In particular, China has seen exports soar, up 45 percent in February to mark their fastest growth in three years.

"China ... has escaped the fear of a crisis that started back in 2016 and that's why you see strong confidence. Imbalances persist but there is no real threat of a crisis over the short term," said Fatas.

The subindex for Thailand surged to 100 from 85 and the Philippines saw a climb to 83 from 70 while sentiment in Malaysia improved five notches to 75.

"The tourism and export sector expansion will help drive growth (in Thailand) this year," said Rathan Somboonchareon, a planning manager at survey respondent Thai Airways, adding that government spending was also a key driver of growth.

Australia's subindex dropped to 80 from 92, although the figure is relatively high when compared with its historical average of 69. While the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have raised their global growth forecasts for this year due to strong trade, consumer spending, and investment in many major economies, intensifying rhetoric in favor of protectionism has become a major concern.

US President Donald Trump has announced import



PANAJI: This picture shows an Indian man laying out mackerel fish to dry at a fishing harbor in Agonda village in South Goa district. Business confidence among Asian companies rose in the first quarter to the highest level in seven years. —AFP

tariffs on steel and aluminum, and is expected to consider additional tariffs targeted specifically at China. He has also repeatedly said the US free-trade deal with South Korea is "unfair" and has threatened to scrap it altogether on multiple occasions.

That has battered sentiment in South Korea, with the country's subindex plunging to 50 from 83.

"There is a sense among Korean businesses that Trump will continue to be aggressive against their country," said Fatas. Singapore's subindex declined to 75 from 79. The country's exports took a surprise dip in February as tech product shipments continued to retreat from the hot pace of recent months.

Japan, where consumer spending numbers have been subdued, recorded its lowest reading in a year, at 67 compared to the fourth-quarter's 70. India also experienced a decline in sentiment, falling to 72 from 79. The index for sentiment in China increased to 88

from 83, but the number of respondents was low at four companies.

Increasing trade friction and higher interest rates were cited as the biggest concerns in the Thomson Reuters/INSEAD survey.

By industry, the technology, construction, energy and metals sectors expressed concern about trade friction, showed the survey, which was conducted March 2-16.

Sectors which identified rising interest rates as a risk included the energy, real estate, retail and technology sectors. The energy sector also showed concern about the potential for a sudden asset price correction. The auto sector matched its highest subindex reading posted seven years ago, while the retail and leisure sector recorded its best ever reading. Healthcare had its highest score in two years. —Reuters

newly-installed Chairman Jerome Powell will hold his first quarterly press conference and his words will be closely scrutinized for hints about the central bank's thinking and the likely pace of interest rate increases.

Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics said markets already accepted the coming Fed rate hike, so the comments and the updated quarterly forecasts will be of more interest.

"After a widely-anticipated central bank policy move, what really matters is what policymakers say about their actions and intentions," he said in a client note.

But Powell seeks to avoid sending ripples through markets by criticizing the \$1.5 trillion tax cuts, even though they are expected to balloon the government deficit and stimulate an economy already at full employment, Shepherdson said.

Carefully chosen words

"No matter how hard the press push him, he's not going to say that the fiscal easing is a mistake," he said. First-quarter economic forecasts have dimmed in recent weeks on a batch of mixed economic data, including a widening trade gap, weak sales of housing, autos and durable goods, as well as soft retail and construction spending. But with very strong job markets, record business and con-



NEW YORK: Fed Chairman Jerome Powell is monitored from the floor of the New York Stock Exchange earlier this year.

sumer sentiment, low unemployment and signs of rising inflation, even dovish Fed officials have indicated their support for tighter monetary policy. Meanwhile, industry groups and markets have been badly rattled this month by President Donald Trump's sudden

decision to impose punishing duties on steel and aluminum imports. Tariffs could raise prices for key inputs and consumer products, and spark tit-for-tat retaliatory measures by trading partners, factors that move the inflation needle higher. —AFP

British jobs data strengthens rate hike prospect

LONDON: British wages growth is catching up with overall inflation and UK unemployment has hit a 1975 low, official data showed yesterday, increasing expectations of an interest rate hike, analysts said.

The data, published on the eve of the Bank of England's latest monetary policy decision, helped push the pound back above \$1.40 as it recovers from a Brexit-fuelled slump.

However it was accompanied by gloomier news from Britain's struggling retail sector. Average weekly earnings growth, excluding bonuses, accelerated to 2.6 percent in the three months to January compared with a year earlier, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) revealed.

That followed 2.5-percent expansion in the three months to December. Nevertheless, wages growth is still lagging annual inflation which stood at 2.7 percent last month.

The combination of rising wages and slowing overall inflation means that many Britons will have more cash in their pockets. Owing to the pick-up in wages growth, markets expect the Bank of England (BoE) to deliver a quarter-point rise to its main interest rate.

But it won't occur at this week's meeting, analysts said. Rather the BoE is set to raise borrowing costs to 0.75 percent at its May gathering.

Laying ground for hike

EY ITEM Club economist Howard Archer said he expected the BoE to use this week's "meeting to lay the ground for a May rate hike". Britain's annual inflation rate slowed to 2.7 percent in February from 3.0 percent in January, as food and transport costs rose by less than one year ago, ONS data showed Tuesday. "Wage growth still is not quite beating inflation, but both pay and prices now appear to be moving in the right direction for UK consumers," said Laith Khalaf, analyst at stockbrokers Hargreaves Lansdown.

Inflation had jumped last year and remains at an elevated level after Britain voted to leave the European Union in 2016. The Brexit referendum pushed down the pound, in turn hiking the cost of imported goods.

The ONS yesterday added that Britain's jobless rate—or the proportion of the workforce that is unemployed—stood at 4.3 percent in the three months to the end of January.

That was slightly down from 4.4 percent in the quarter to December 2017, which had been the first increase in 16 months. Yesterday's data "will come as a huge relief to the consumer who has suffered months and months of elevated inflation and falling wages in real terms", said City Index analyst Fiona Cincotta. "The easing of pressure on households as they no longer experience falling wages in real terms should, in theory encourage more spending on non-essential items, something which had declined dramatically across the end of last year and the beginning of this year."

"Suddenly the return of 'good' inflation is a real probability, as opposed to the 'bad' pound-induced inflation which has plagued the UK since the Brexit referendum," she added. —AFP

Shares slip as jitters build on Fed, trade

LONDON: World shares fell yesterday and the dollar eased off three-week highs as markets awaited a likely increase in US interest rates and guidance on how many more to expect for this year.

Markets were also spooked by signs of a brewing global trade war - a Wall Street Journal report saying China was planning counter-measures against US trade tariffs. European shares fell and investors scurried for the safety of German government bonds and the Japanese yen. And equity futures indicated that US stocks, which have been roiled by a hefty sell-off in technology shares this week, are set for another weak session.

The sell-off wiped some \$50 billion off the value of social media giant Facebook, leaving investors on edge as the Federal Reserve prepares to raise US rates for the first time this year.

The Facebook losses, caused by uproar over the alleged misuse of user data, have filtered through the tech sector, with shares in Twitter falling more than 10 percent on Tuesday.

A pan-European equity index fell almost 0.3 per-

cent, its early weakness accelerating after the WSJ report on China and a tech shares index reversing an early bounce. The yen, typically bought during times of stress, rose to the day's high versus the dollar around 106.26.

"So far, we have seen low-level (trade) skirmishes, which are not material enough to affect the world economy. But if we see retaliation, and significant trade disruptions, it's a different order or magnitude, could begin to affect global growth forecasts," said Andrew Milligan, head of global strategy at Aberdeen Standard Investments. The tech sell-off is a serious setback to markets just as they recover from an early-February sell-off, Milligan said, noting tech had been "the leading light of US and Asian equity markets for over a year." MSCI's all-country equity index flatlined and is now 6 percent off January's record highs, pressured by the trade war fears and the possibility that the Fed will tighten policy more than expected.

The US central bank has raised borrowing costs five times since late 2015. Markets are pricing in three rate increases this year, but some reckon policymakers

might squeeze in a fourth, triggering a bond and equity sell-off.

The 1800 GMT announcement will also be the first under new Fed chair Jerome Powell. "We might have significant changes in communication compared with what we've seen under (previous chair Janet) Yellen," said Chris Scielci, head of economic research at Daiwa Capital Markets.

"The economic situation post-tax cuts also justifies a significant shift upwards in the dot plot," he added, referring to fears the Fed's de facto policy forecast chart will signal four rate rises rather than three because of the effects of US tax reforms.

Those expectations had sent the dollar to nearly three-week highs on Tuesday, but it eased back a quarter percent against a basket of currencies on Wednesday, having lost almost half a percent this month.

The dollar's weakness - it fell 10 percent last year - is at least partly down to U.S. capital seeking to invest overseas amid robust world growth. Milligan said that would continue unless trade skirmishes started hurting

the world economy or US growth accelerated further.

"To get the dollar higher, we will need a combination of the Fed being more aggressive and signalling more changes for 2019," he said.

Trade war fears

The WSJ report on potential Chinese tariffs comes as US President Donald Trump prepares to announce on Friday up to \$60 billion in import duties on Chinese goods. He imposed tariffs on imported steel and aluminum earlier this month.

This week's meeting of finance ministers and central banks of the world's 20 biggest economies failed to diffuse tensions, with the G20 said only it "recognized" the need for more "dialogue and actions".

The currencies of export-heavy nations such as the Australian, New Zealand and Canadian dollars and most emerging currencies fell. The Aussie traded near three-month troughs against the dollar of \$0.7679 and the Kiwi hit its lowest since early January. The Canadian dollar held at \$1.3029 after dropping to \$1.3124 on Monday, its weakest since mid-2017. — Reuters

Daily Kuwait Stock Exchange Report									
Index	Change	Closing	Last Closing						
Price Index	▼ -18.75	6,686.94	6,705.69						
Weighted Index	▼ -0.67	409.25	409.92						
KSX 15	▼ -2.25	954.88	957.13						
Security	High	Low	Volume	Value (KWD)	Trades	Last	Change		
IFG	0.0	0.0	0	0	418	—	0.0		
NAPESCO	850	833	18,860	15,733	18	833	▲ 1.0		
ENERGYH	26.0	26.0	50,090	1,301	2	26.0	▼ -1.5		
GPI	28.3	25.2	477,543	12,198	19	25.2	▼ -1.9		
ABAR	0.0	0.0	0	0	87	—	0.0		
Oil & Gas	546,403	28,219	39	960.43	▼ -13.90				
KFOUC	253	251	24,410	6,150	6	251	▲ 1.0		
BPC	737	710	1,532,931	1,112,400	67	730	▲ 2.6		
ALKOUT	0.0	0.0	0	0	680	—	0.0		
ALQURAIN	352	342	1,523,954	531,498	132	347	▲ 4.5		
Basic Materials	3,681,305	1,650,048	206	1345.23	▲ 19.30				
KCEM	0.0	0.0	0	0	446	—	0.0		
CABLE	0.0	0.0	0	0	412	—	0.0		
SHIP	212	210	238,132	50,098	7	210	▲ 1.0		
PCEM	1,080	1,051	2,581	2,713	2	1,080	—		
PAPER	0.0	0.0	0	0	245	—	0.0		
MRC	0.0	0.0	0	0	65	—	0.0		
ACKO	0.0	0.0	0	0	245	—	0.0		
HCC	70	70	5,000	350	1	70	▼ -6.0		
NICBM	165	165	15,664	2,565	1	165	▲ 4.5		
EQUIPMENT	33.0	30.0	145,844	4,462	10	32.7	▲ 1.7		
NCCI	0.0	0.0	0	0	86	—	0.0		
GYPSUM	0.0	0.0	0	0	95	—	0.0		
SALBOOKH	46.0	46.0	500	23	1	46.0	▼ -3.9		
AGLY	841	837	1,905,972	1,598,586	181	840	▲ 7.0		
EDU	0.0	0.0	0	0	312	—	0.0		
CLEANING	63	59	284,353	16,990	28	59	▼ -2.6		
KGL	104	101	313,420	32,003	32	102	▼ -2.9		
KCPC	0.0	0.0	0	0	160	—	0.0		
HUMANSOFT	4,100	4,079	71,027	290,962	29	4,079	▼ -2.10		
GFC	0.0	0.0	0	0	84	—	0.0		
SHOOTING	0.0	0.0	0	0	18.5	—	0.0		
CGIC	456	441	43,967	19,591	23	455	—		
MTCC	0.0	0.0	0	0	66	—	0.0		
UPAC	0.0	0.0	0	0	708	—	0.0		
ALAFCO	377	375	170,000	63,875	12	377	—		
MUBARRAD	66	64	361,480	23,242	8	65	▼ -0.5		
LOGISTICS	90	49.2	1,206,215	59,925	58	49.3	▼ -0.7		
SCEM	0.0	0.0	0	0	85	—	0.0		
GCEM	82	82	15,000	1,229	1	82	▲ 1.9		
QIC	0.0	0.0	0	0	82	—	0.0		
FCEM	78	78	100,000	7,800	1	78	—		
RKWC	83	81	530,000	42,993	19	81	—		
SPEC	65	50	2,147,700	110,529	65	54	▼ -1.5		
Industrials	7,887,755	2,327,844	478	1,910.90	▼ -4.80				
PAPO	0.0	0.0	0	0	80	—	0.0		
CATTL	0.0	0.0	0	0	199	—	0.0		
DANAH	74	74	194,000	14,294	8	74	—		
FOOD	0.0	0.0	0	0	1,000	—	0.0		
Consumer Goods	194,000	14,294	8	779.39	▼ -1.39				
ATC	0.0	0.0	0	0	1,100	—	0		
YACO	0.0	0.0	0	0	142	—	0.0		
Health Care	0	0	0	0	1,432.16	—	0.00		
KCIN	0.0	0.0	0	0	1,099	—	0		
KHOT	0.0	0.0	0	0	197	—	0		
SULTAN	42.5	38.6	2,352,996	94,424	195	40.6	▲ 2		
CABLETV	0.0	0.0	0	0	15	▲ 15.0	—		
IFAHR	100	100	89	8	1	100	▼ -12		
ULIAFUEL	114	113	10,322	1,167	11	113</td			

Business

Egypt's middle class faces hardship as austerity bites

Middle class savings devoured

CAIRO: Teacher Abdelrahman Ali wonders if he will be able to afford diapers for the second child his wife is expecting. He can no longer put meat on the dinner table and has to borrow money from his mother-in-law as hard times bite in Egypt. Ali and other middle class Egyptians - the social backbone of successive governments - are bracing for more hardship after an election next week widely expected to give President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi a second term. "With our first pregnancy, we bought all we needed to prepare ... but this time around, we're leaving it in the hands of God. It's very difficult," said Ali, who teaches Arabic at a private school.

Sisi's only challenger in the election leads a party that has expressed support for the president, while other candidates have dropped out, complaining of intimidation. The election commission has promised a free and fair vote. Sisi has repeatedly urged Egyptians to be patient and make sacrifices for their country while the economy recovers. But political analysts say he has to be careful in dealing with the middle class, whose savings have been devoured by skyrocketing prices during his four years in office.

It was the middle class that invaded Cairo's Tahrir Square in 2011, triggering the protests that toppled President Hosni Mubarak. Middle-income Egyptians also staged mass demonstrations that ended with the army, led by Sisi, toppling Muslim Brotherhood President Mohamed Mursi in 2013. Their votes then helped Sisi become president the following year, but his popularity has waned.

Reforms

Faced with the need to fix Egypt's public finances, Sisi agreed to economic reforms under a \$12 billion International Monetary Fund loan package. Egypt floated the pound in November 2016, and the currency lost half its value, pushing inflation to record highs over

30 percent last summer as energy prices soared. That compared with an increase in wages of about 15 to 20 percent over the past year, according to economists.

People like Ali, who could once afford a car and vacations abroad, are still having to cut costs and manage one financial crisis after another as they become ever poorer. His family's combined income of 4,000 pounds (\$228) a month will amount to 33 pounds per day per person when his second child is born - less than \$2. Beef is too expensive and the only chicken Ali can afford is inedible. "After it was boiled, the chicken would turn blue," he said. "We bought it once and were scared to buy it again."

No signs

Since Egypt signed the IMF agreement and introduced reforms, foreign reserves have doubled, foreign investment has slowly returned and economic growth begun to recover. IMF and World Bank economists praised the government for the reforms and for shielding the poorest from the fallout, but that has not helped middle-income Egyptians. A simple home repair can cost Ali's family

more than half its monthly income. "The hardest thing at the moment is when something happens at home, suddenly, like a problem with plumbing," said Ali. "In that case, I have to borrow money to fix it."

Shopping also has problems. "When I used to go to the nearby market with 50 pounds, I'd buy everything I needed, and they could last maybe two to three weeks. But now I take 150 pounds and spend it and feel like I didn't buy anything," Ali said. There are no signs that the middle class is about to stage demonstrations, but some analysts say Sisi's government knows current conditions could push people onto the streets again.

"While I doubt the middle class will protest in large numbers in the near future, their main grievance that would drive them to do so would be economic hard-

ship," said Timothy Kaldas, non-resident fellow at the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy. Sisi has promised that cuts in state subsidies will help revive the economy, promote long-term growth and attract foreign investment. But that comes with a price. "As with any austerity package, things are expected to get worse before they get better," said Amr Adly, a researcher with the Middle East Directions Program at the European University Institute. "The IMF will remain in charge of Egypt's economic policies for the coming four to five years."

No relief is in sight for Ali and his relatives. The family used savings to invest in a small videogame lounge that generated some cash. But as austerity started to bite last year, they had to shut down the business because customers could no longer afford to visit. "I

had four PlayStations and six or eight computers and a pool table. I sold everything two months before things became expensive, so I lost a lot of money," said Ali.

"We've had to give up a lot of things. You know things - what does Sisi call them? Luxury," said Ali's wife Sarah, who works at a nursery school. "Like we used to buy certain shampoos or oils. These were specific things that I can no longer afford." Ali is paying scant attention to an election with only one serious candidate. He worries more that soaring prices mean his second child will have to be less pampered than the first. A pack of diapers for their daughter Talia cost 57 Egyptian pounds when she was born two years ago. Now, with the new baby imminent, the price is 135 pounds (\$7.68). "If it's a girl, she can take Talia's clothes," said Ali. — Reuters

NBK salary portal makes paying staff salaries easy, convenient

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait provides customers with the most convenient and efficient products and solutions especially tailored to suit their personal and business banking needs. NBK's innovative salary portal service provides a simple, easy and secure solution for business owners to pay salaries and comply with all Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor reporting requirements.

"NBK is always looking for simple and convenient solutions to make banking easier and more efficient for our customers," said Faisal Al-Fulaij, Deputy Head of Business Banking National Bank of Kuwait. "We take a lot of time to know our customers' needs and create innovative, easy-to-use products to that end."

The NBK Salary Portal is simple and straightforward. Companies can transfer monthly allowances or salaries each month with the click of a button from the comfort of their own home or office. The salary portal processes the salaries and creates a record of the payments which is then automatically reported to the Social Affairs and Labor Ministry. This reduces the monthly hassle for businesses to maintain compliance with government

regulations and also makes the process easier to track, reducing errors or inconsistencies. Processing via the portal saves both time and money. The fee is KD 1 per salary as opposed to a KD 2 process fee using the salaries unit.

NBK offers a variety of products and services specifically designed for local Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and multinationals doing business in Kuwait.

NBK Business Banking also offers point of sale, business credit cards, online banking, insurance, business loans, letters of credit and guarantee and local bills. Additionally, NBK has 13 dedicated Business Banking hubs at branches around the country including: Head Office, Surra, Shuaiba, Al-Tadamoun, Mubarak Al-Kabeer, Jabriya, Arraya Tower 2 (fifth floor), Fintas, Salwa, Sharq, Al-Ghazzali, Ras Salmiya and Hawally. Specialized relationship officers are dedicated to serving the needs of Business Banking clients. Clients will also have access, via their relationship manager, with experts in Credit, Investment Banking, Trade Finance and Treasury.

Customers can complete all their necessary business banking transactions in a seamless, efficient and convenient way. Visit NBK.com to learn more about NBK's Salary Portal service and other Business Banking products and services.



Faisal Al-Fulaij

ability to enjoy wholesale shopping in an ambiance that is unparalleled in the wholesale market sector.

In early 2018, ONCOST launched its first and the only retail Membership Program that offers a cash-back reward of up to four percent, for those who register and shop at Oncost Cash & Carry outlets, with registration being absolutely free.

As part of its expansion drive, Oncost plans to open a new branch in Farwaniya governorate in the immediate future, with more branches slated to open shortly in the Hawally and Jahra governorates. The expansion is in line with the company's strategy of extending its reach across Kuwait, while providing affordable prices to customers in all governorates. Oncost Cash & Carry, established in 2011, opened its first branch in Sulaihiya, within the central fruits and vegetables market. Its success led to the opening of second and third outlets in Hawally and Fahheel respectively in 2016.

In January 2017, ONCOST entered the online shopping market with the launch of its online store. The easily accessible and interactive Oncost website allows shoppers to browse and pick from a vast inventory of products, and to have their selections delivered straight to the shoppers' homes at no extra charge.

Salah Al-Tunaib



T.A. Remesh

KUWAIT: Oncost Cash & Carry, the first wholesale membership retail store in Kuwait, is slated to open its 4th outlet in the country in Shuaiba next week. The new outlet will not only be the largest Oncost store in Kuwait, but also the brand's first wholesale outlet in the Capital Governorate.

Adhering to its high international standards, Oncost's new branch offers customers the unique ambiance of wholesale shopping in a modern retail environment, while ensuring significantly discounted prices to its customers. Commenting on the upcoming opening of the 4th Oncost outlet, the company's CEO Saleh Al-Tunaib said, "Keeping our customers as a priority, we made the decision to open our largest branch in the Capital Governorate so they can benefit from the Oncost concept of wholesale prices, quality, and variety." The COO of Oncost, T.A. Remesh, added "the voluminous area of the new store and its easy accessibility from surrounding areas will provide a convenient shopping environment for families, while also catering to discerning shoppers who are both quality and price conscious". The outlet will provide shoppers with an amazing variety of products at the best value-for-money prices all under one-roof. Wholesale shopping in a retail environment is a new and unique model that provides customers with the opportu-



ABOU SHOSHA, Egypt: Cattle traders gather at a livestock market yesterday in this village in Qina governorate, some 550 km south of the capital Cairo. — AFP

44 African nations sign pact to set up free trade area



KIGALI: The African Heads of States and Governments pose during African Union (AU) Summit for the agreement to establish the African Continental Free Trade Area in Kigali yesterday. — AFP

KIGALI: Forty-four African countries have signed an agreement establishing a free trade area seen as vital to the continent's economic development, the head of the African Union said yesterday.

"The agreement establishing the CFTA (African Continental Free Trade Area) was signed by 44 countries," said Moussa Faki Mahamat, chairperson of the AU commission. The creation of a free trade area-billed as the world's largest-comes after two years of negotiations, and is one of the AU's flagship projects for greater African integration. However, the agreement will still have to be ratified at a national level, and is only due to come into force in 180 days.

The full list of countries which did not sign the

agreement is not yet available, however Nigeria is a notable absentee after President Muhammadu Buhari pulled out of this week's launch in Rwanda saying he needed more time for consultations at home.

Nigeria, one of Africa's largest markets, hesitated after objections from business leaders and unions-a sign that getting the deal through scores of national parliaments may face several hurdles.

"Some countries have reservations and have not finalized their national consultations. But we shall have another summit in Mauritania in July where we expect countries with reservations to also sign," said Albert Muchanga, the AU Commissioner for Trade and Industry. — AFP

Six days left for first Al-Danah quarterly draw

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank announced that the first quarterly Al-Danah draw, for a cash prize of KD 200,000, will be held on 28 March 2018 and will be aired live on the "Diwaniyat Al-Yaqout and Al-Ansar" program on Kuwait Pulse (88.8 FM) at 1.30pm. The Al-Danah draw, which celebrated its tenth anniversary of the KD 1 million grand prize earlier this year, is internationally recognized by the Guinness Book of World Records as the acclaimed largest prize linked to a bank account in the world. The grand prize of this internationally renowned draw was claimed last year by the draw's youngest winner, 11-year old Obaid Saad Al-Rashidi.

Al-Danah's 2nd quarterly draw for the prize of KD 250,000

will be held on 27 June and the 3rd quarterly draw for the prize of KD 500,000 will be held on 26 September. The final Al-Danah draw for KD 1 million will be held on 10 January 2019, where the Al-Danah millionaire will be announced. Gulf Bank encourages you to increase your chances of winning with Al-Danah by depositing more into your Gulf Bank account using the new ePay (Self-Pay) service, which is available on Gulf Bank's online and mobile banking.

Al-Danah also offers many unique services including the Al-Danah Deposit Only ATM card, which helps account holders deposit their money at their convenience, as well as the Al-Danah calculator to help customers calculate their chances of becoming an Al-Danah winner. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is open to Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. Customers require a minimum of KD 200 to open an account and the same amount must be maintained for customers to be eligible for the upcoming Al-Danah draws. If the customer's account balance falls below KD 200 at any given time, a KD 2 charge will be made monthly to the account until the minimum balance is met. Customers who open an account and/or deposit more will enter the daily draw within two days.

Microsoft offers useful insights to Kuwaiti cyber-security pros at executive Summit

Renowned experts gather to discuss cyber security trends and best practices

KUWAIT: Microsoft yesterday hosted the third edition of its popular CISO Executive Series in Kuwait, where industry experts and Chief Information Security Officers gathered to share and discuss current trends in cybersecurity. The event, held at the Radisson Blu hotel in Kuwait City, was titled "Insights for the Progressive CISO", and allowed the region's security professionals to engage in candid exchanges with some of the world's most renowned experts, in a day of insights, networking and learning.

Microsoft released the 23rd edition of its Security Intelligence Report, a bi-annual publication that the company creates for customers, partners, and the industry to educate organizations about the current state of threats, recommended best practices, and solutions. The analysis on threat intelligence gathered from a global customer base across 100+ countries and millions of computers revealed three important trends in 2017. First, the impact of Botnets, and how they continue to impact millions of computers globally, infecting them with old and new forms of malware. The second most notable trend was low-cost attack methods being used by Hackers for potentially higher returns. Third and still trending was Ransomware, which is still does not seem to be slowing down.

A live survey of Kuwait-based PCs, conducted by Microsoft in the first quarter of 2017, revealed that 12.9% of computers experienced malware of some kind, compared with worldwide average of about 7.8%. Another research conducted by Microsoft among Chief Information Security Officers in the Gulf region in 2017, revealed that 60% of regional organizations still use usernames and passwords to authenticate users to corporate networks. Only 30% use two-factor authentication (2FA) - the combination of username+password with SMS or some other form of mobile notification. About 5% said they used facial recognition.

The intelligent cloud'

Dr Erdal Ozkaya, Cybersecurity Architect at Microsoft, spoke on the pressing need for "Intelligent Security", as GCC CISOs continue to battle against increasingly sophisticated threats. "An alarming number of regional organizations are still using outdated strategies and authentication models, even as international headlines continue to illustrate the intensity of the ongoing battles against bad actors," said Ozkaya. "The good news is that the intelligent cloud is armed with weapons that can match the sophistication of the attacks. Microsoft will con-

tinue to strengthen those capabilities on behalf of our customers, as we progress with forums like The CISO Executive Series, where security professionals can hear from seasoned White Hat experts and like-minded CISOs."

Along with Microsoft's security experts, other industry leaders also addressed attendees at the event. Megha Kumar, Research Director at IDC, presented "The Evolving Security Landscape". "There are malicious parties out there that seemingly never sleep; so CISOs need to take a 24-7, 360-degree view of cyber security. The challenge has always been to find a workable middle ground between the rigidity of IT policy and the flexibility needed to be an agile, digital business," said Megha.

The Microsoft Gulf CISO survey also revealed that 24% of CISOs said their users had clicked on links within emails and discovered they led to websites of unknown origin. Only 21% reported having a data-classification solution in place, with almost half (47%) saying they were still in the process of acquisition and 32% saying they had yet to make progress.

"Cyber strategies need to be holistic," said Mohammed Arif, Regional Director, Modern Workplace and Security, Microsoft Gulf. "You need to consider that you will be breached. And



then you need to consider what happens next. What do you do? Who do you call? How do you get back on your feet? Never forget that business continuity is as important as the protection of intellectual property."

Microsoft invests around US\$ 1 billion annually in cyber security, so that customers can be

confident that the Microsoft cloud is a safe home. The Azure cloud platform is built from the ground up with industry-leading, AI-driven protection built into every layer. Data is encrypted at rest and in transit, and 24-hour event-remediation services are provided by a dedicated team of experts.

In India, digital gold sellers hope trickle will become a rush

MUMBAI: A digital revolution is reshaping India's \$34 billion gold market, with smartphones, e-wallets and flexible investment schemes drawing new buyers into a business dominated by traditional, face-to-face transactions. Digital payment systems have ballooned in popularity in India since the government scrapped large-value bank notes in 2016. Among these offerings are applications that enable smartphone users to buy, sell or store gold - even in small amounts - kept in secured vaults operated by MMTC-PAMP India Pvt Ltd, a joint venture between MMTC Ltd, the largest national trading firm, and Swiss gold refiner PAMP. Although online gold purchases have been growing globally for years, they are a relatively recent phenomenon in India, where jewelry and bars of the precious metal tend to be kept in hand and given as gifts.

"In India, the action is really starting now. The digitization of the economy will certainly lead to digitization of gold," said Somasundaram PR, managing director of World Gold Council's (WGC) India operations. "It is poised for significant growth, possibly in the next 12-24 months." The WGC estimated total Indian gold demand at 727 tons in 2017, and could be up to 800 tons in 2018. In China, the top consumer, 2017 demand was 953 tons.

It is difficult to gauge how many new buyers are entering the market because of online access. The digital payments firm Paytm said that in the first six months after it began offering digital gold last April, it facilitated about \$18.4 million worth of sales - a tiny fraction of the Indian gold market. With the vast majority of purchases made in the traditional way, demand for physical gold isn't abating, especially when physical gold plays an important role at Indian weddings," said Naeem Aslam, chief market analyst at Think Markets UK Ltd.

Newly attractive

Besides convenience, Indian consumers are attracted to competitive pricing and ability to make purchases in tiny increments. Gold-based financial offerings, including Gold Accumulation Plans (GAPs), allow users to buy and store gold in fractions as small as 0.1 grams - an amount that would be an uneconomical to trade physically because of the associated handling costs.

These accumulation plans, along with gold-backed bonds and websites selling coins

and jewelry that can be shipped for free or cheaply within India, are especially appealing to young Indians. In the past, even those with an enduring affinity for gold have needed to wait until they have saved enough to build holdings. Joe Jacob, a 29-year-old entrepreneur in the southern city of Bengaluru, recently bought 5 rupees (8 cents) worth of digital gold as a "trial investment." "Physical gold is a hassle in terms of storage, and I don't wear gold, but understand it is an asset to hold. Digital gold is better than storing the actual metal at home, worrying about its safety," he said. Security experts said that because the gold, guaranteed to physically exist in an MMTC PAMP vault, was insured, there was little risk of fraudulent sales. And digital wallet providers expect interest to grow. Paytm leads the crowded e-wallet space in India and announced two new gold gift and savings plans this month after launching its first digital gold product in April 2017. The company, backed by Japan's SoftBank Group and China's Alibaba, sources its 24-carat gold from MMTC PAMP.

"There is no 'season' for this product; it is running twenty-four seven. Sitting in their offices, homes or wherever they want, they can easily access, buy sell or redeem," said Gaurav Singh, deputy general manager of marketing at MMTC PAMP. Gold trading traditionally peaks around festival and wedding seasons, experts say. But Singh added that because digital gold lowers the minimum price needed to buy gold - from about 3,000 rupees previously, enough to buy roughly 1 gram of gold at current prices - and boosts market transparency via live pricing, there has been a rise in the frequency of gold purchases at other times of the year.

Nitin Misra, senior vice president at Paytm confirmed a similar trend, noting "about 40 percent of sales" happen during the "off-season" for buying gold in India. He said more than half of the company's users were repeat customers, and 70 percent were younger than 35. As of December 2017, about 1.4 million of its customers held some gold balance in their e-accounts. "We have stumbled upon a brand new segment," he said of younger users buying gold. "What we have done, is not cannibalizing the existing market, but grown it."

The company said last year it planned to sell \$200 million worth of gold in the 2017 fiscal year, which ended March 1. But its reported sales in 2017 appeared to be headed far short of that number. Its rival e-wallet provider PhonePe was upbeat. "The gold consumption market is expected to grow by 35 percent from 2015 to 2020, and customers are exploring digital options for purchase," it said in an emailed statement. For Bangalore-based P Vinod, a logistics consultant who still prefers buying ornaments and jewelry from retail stores, e-wallets now offer an alternative. "For long term, I previously invested in exchange-traded funds. Now I am using Paytm gold," he said. — AFP

Kaspersky Lab plans Swiss data center

MOSCOW/TORONTO: Moscow-based Kaspersky Lab plans to open a data center in Switzerland to address Western government concerns that Russia exploits its anti-virus software to spy on customers, according to internal documents seen by Reuters. Kaspersky is setting up the center in response to actions in the United States, Britain and Lithuania last year to stop using the company's products, according to the documents, which were confirmed by a person with direct knowledge of the matter.

The action is the latest effort by Kaspersky, a global leader in anti-virus software, to parry accusations by the US government and others that the company spies on customers at the behest of Russian intelligence. The US last year ordered civilian government agencies to remove the Kaspersky software from their networks.

The world is changing'

Kaspersky has strongly rejected the accusations and filed a lawsuit against the

US ban. The US allegations were the "trigger" for setting up the Swiss data center, said the person familiar with Kaspersky's Switzerland plans, but not the only factor. "The world is changing," they said, speaking on condition of anonymity when discussing internal company business. "There is more balkanisation and protectionism."

The person declined to provide further details on the new project, but added: "This is not just a PR stunt. We are really changing our R&D infrastructure." A Kaspersky spokeswoman declined to comment on the documents reviewed by Reuters. In a statement, Kaspersky Lab said: "To further deliver on the promises of our Global Transparency Initiative, we are finalising plans for the opening of the company's first transparency center this year, which will be located in Europe."

"We understand that during a time of geopolitical tension, mirrored by an increasingly complex cyber-threat landscape, people may have questions and we want to address them." Kaspersky Lab launched a campaign in October to dispel concerns about possible collusion with the Russian government by promising to let independent experts scrutinize its software for security vulnerabilities and "back doors" that governments could exploit to spy on its customers. The company also said at the time that it would open "transparency centres" in Asia,

Data review

Work in Switzerland is due to begin "within weeks" and be completed by early 2020, said the person with knowledge of the matter. The plans have been approved by Kaspersky Lab CEO and founder Eugene Kaspersky, who owns a majority of the privately held company, and will be announced publicly in the coming months, according to the source. "Eugene is upset. He would rather spend the money elsewhere. But he knows this is necessary," the person said. It is possible the move could be derailed by the Russian security services, who might resist moving the data centre outside of their jurisdiction, people familiar with Kaspersky and its relations with the government said. Western security officials said Russia's FSB Federal Security Service, successor to the Soviet-era KGB, exerts influence over Kaspersky management decisions, though the company has repeatedly denied those allegations. The Swiss centre will collect and analyze files identified as suspicious on the computers of tens of millions of Kaspersky customers in the United States and European Union, according to the documents reviewed by Reuters. — Reuters

Made in China: How the iPhone skews US trade deficit

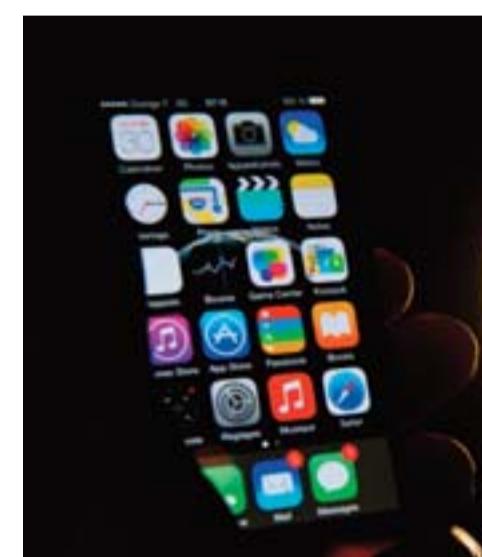
SHANGHAI: US President Donald Trump often tweets from his iPhone about pressuring China to address its \$375 billion trade surplus with the United States. But a closer look at the Apple smartphone reveals how the headline figure is distorted. The big trade imbalance - at the heart of a potential trade war, with Trump expected to impose tariffs on Chinese imports this week - exists in large part because of electrical goods and tech, the biggest US import item from China.

Apple Inc's iPhone, however, illustrates how a big portion of that imbalance is due to imports of American-branded products - many of which use global suppliers for parts but are put together in China and shipped around the world. Take a look at the iPhone X. IHS Markit estimates its components cost a total of \$370.25. Of that, \$110 goes to Samsung Electronics in South Korea for supplying displays. Another \$44.45 goes to Japan's Toshiba Corp and South Korea's SK Hynix for memory chips.

Other suppliers from Taiwan, the United States and Europe also take their portion, while assembly, done by contract manufacturers in China like Foxconn, represents only an estimated 3 to 6 percent of the manufacturing cost. Current trade statistics, however, count most of the manufacturing cost in China's export numbers, which has prompted global bodies like the World Trade Organization to consider alternative calculations that include where value is added. The impact on export data of just the iPhone could be major.

Final assembler'

Apple shipped 61 million iPhones to the United States last year, data from researchers Counterpoint and IHS Markit show, spending \$258 on average to make each iPhone 7 and 7 Plus. Using a rough calculation, that implies the iPhone 7 series added \$15.7 billion to the US trade deficit with China last year, about 4.4 percent of the total. That's also about 22 percent of the \$70 billion in cell phones and



household goods the US imported from China.

"With an iPhone, where China is just the final assembler, most of the value (contributed by China) is just the labour rather than the components themselves," said John Wu, an economic analyst with a US-based think tank, the Information & Innovation Foundation.

Louis Kuijs, head of Asia economics research at Oxford Economics, notes that US companies' using global supply chains to manufacture products in China means other economies would be caught in the crossfire of a trade war.

"That is an important reason why US-China trade friction will cause 'collateral damage,' especially in other Asian economies," he said, adding that in value added terms, the US trade deficit with China was only \$239 billion last year, 36 percent lower than the headline number. For its part, Apple has responded to Trump's concerns with a pledge to bring some suppliers to the United States. It said in January it planned to pay \$55 billion to US suppliers this year.

Designed in California

Over the last decade, Apple shipped 373 million iPhones, worth \$101 billion by manufacturing value, in the United States, according to researcher StrategyAnalytics. The iPhone's contribution to US trade deficits is almost certain to have grown sharply alongside higher retail prices and shipments. But the manufacturing value does not include the

intellectual property value Apple adds through engineering and design work done in its headquarters in Cupertino, Calif., as well as margins taken by distributors.

The iPhone X has a manufacturing cost of about \$400, an \$800 wholesale cost, and a \$1,200 retail unsubsidised cost, according to analysts. Siri, Apple's "digital assistant," reflects the challenge of knowing exactly where the value of an iPhone comes from - even if it's put together in China. If users ask Siri where she is from, the response is: "Like it says on the box... I was designed by Apple in California." The closely intertwined manufacturing ecosystem has led to warnings that a trade war would be painful for all sides. Forty-five US trade associations representing some of the largest US companies urged the president on Sunday not to impose tariffs on China, warning it would be "particularly harmful" to the US economy and consumers. Retailers and shoemakers, including Wal-Mart Inc and Nike Inc, also sounded the alarm on Monday over concerns the plans would result in higher consumer prices. A 10 percent tariff levied on Chinese electronics imports would slow the growth of US output by \$163 billion over the next 10 years, and a 25 percent tariff would slow output by \$332 billion, according to the Information Technology & Innovation Foundation. Kuijs wrote that both sides would likely show restraint. All-out economic war, he added, "would cause major economic damage globally." — Reuters



MUMBAI: A salesperson attends to a customer (not pictured) inside a jewelry showroom, during Akshaya Tritiya, a major gold-buying festival.

Health

Mishref Co-Op Society launches the Health and Beauty Festival

Nasser Maarifi: We strive to provide the best quality products



KUWAIT: Mishref Co-Operative Society inaugurated the Health and Beauty Festival in the presence of the Board Member and Chairman of Finance and Administration Committee, the Co-Op and Pharmacy Team, Mr Nasser Maarifi and the Secretary Mr Waleed Rashdan.

The launch ceremony took place in the presence of VIP guests and media delegates, where attendees enjoyed various offers on renowned international brands, as well as 50% discount on a wide range of cosmetics brands, medical products and appliances, other than skin care, health and children products. Not forgetting the food supplements and many more that satisfy the needs of every family member. The festival runs till end of March giving the opportunity to everyone to benefit from the amazing offers and surprises.

On this occasion, Mr Nasser Maarifi said "This year we will be planning and releasing various offers in the Co-Op, as well many promotions and discounts on products and goods". He added "The Health and Beauty Festival in Mishref Co-Op pharmacy is one of these initiatives that we are proud to introduce to shoppers as they can benefit from the amazing offers; including but not limited to, skin care

and cleansing, free consultancy from beauty experts, special offers and discounts on the biggest collection of brands and medical products."

He went on to say, "We are keen to choose the best quality products, best prices and the latest offerings in the market, in cooperation with renowned companies, which we consider as key partners in our success, and our executive management that has constant strive to develop and provide the best marketing services throughout the year" Maarifi stated. "We attempt to provide the best quality, lowest prices and special offers that generate better value to our shareholders."

He pointed out that the Board of Directors is planning to organize ongoing activities, festivals and promotions that play an integral role in improving sales and customer service as well as adding value to shareholders and Mishref residents. He concluded by saying that Mishref Co-Op will always be a role model in delivering service excellence and not-to-miss promotions, in addition to other social initiatives like the distribution of monthly food baskets at affordable prices, and the allocation of surplus profits to enrich the marketing plan and support various promotions and offers.



CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times
248 33 199

Global Medical Center Welcomes Dr. Marzouq Al-Bader Consultant vascular and general surgery



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TEC holds viewings of 'The Golden Age' for students with disabilities



The Touristic Enterprises Company (TEC) held two exclusive viewings of The Golden Age Circus, for a special audience comprised of young students and children with disabilities on March 14 and 15. The shows included more than 1,000 students from more than 12 schools across Kuwait.

The Golden Age Circus is a contemporary circus spectacle created exclusively for the people of Kuwait, developed in partnership with the internationally renowned Cirque Madona Bouglione and currently taking place at Entertainment City in Doha. With the final show set to take place on March 31st, TEC is celebrating

the final few weeks of the show with a special 30% off on all tickets prices.

A unique and artistic circus show, The Golden Age Circus seamlessly blends together the classical arts of the traditional circus with innovative, modern acts – combining acrobatics, music, dance, drama, comedy, horse shows, and much more to

create a one-of-a-kind entertainment experience. The show includes more than a dozen international circus performance acts, from clowns and acrobats, to stunt bikers and various equestrian displays, featuring a team of more than 75 artists and crew members from more than ten countries from around the world.



McDonald's celebrates moms at Avenues Mall

This Mother's Day, McDonald's Kuwait celebrated the most important person in every family with some great family fun, as the company took part in the 6th Love Your Mum Festival, which was held at the Avenues Mall from March 15-17. Over the course of the three days, McDonald's was present at the festival with an interactive booth, that featured a diverse program of crowd-pleasing games, activities and competitions for kids, mothers and the whole family. Additionally, there was a special activation that took place at the booth featuring the innovative and highly engaging Happy Studio app from McDonald's.

Moreover, McDonald's gave children the opportunity to get creative and showcase their love for their mothers with a beautiful, personalized gift: a customized mug that they can craft themselves at the booth. There were also giveaways and special prizes for the chil-



dren throughout the festival.

"At McDonald's we have always celebrated families and the importance of feel good family moments- and mothers are undoubtedly the heart and soul of every family, and the biggest source of those feel good moments," said Sherif Coutry, Marketing Director at McDonald's Kuwait. "With this fun, family

activity, we wanted to bring the whole family together to pay tribute to mothers, giving children especially the chance to thank their mothers with small tokens of love and appreciation. Our goal is to always draw smiles on people's faces - and I can't think of anything better to make people smile than celebrating the joy of motherly love," concluded Coutry.

KIB sponsors the 6th Ideal Mother Award

KUWAIT: For the fourth consecutive year, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) announced its sponsorship of the 6th Ideal Mother Award honoring mothers of disabled children. The award is organized annually by Al-Kharafi Activity Kids Center, under the patronage of the President of the Kuwait Foundation for Disabled Children, Sabeka Al-Jasser. Awards will be presented on April 7, honoring the hard work and dedication of mothers of children with mental disabilities.

A press conference was recently held to announce the winners of this year's award, with winners from Kuwait, the GCC and the Arab region. The press conference was attended by the Secretary General and the President of the organizing committee for the Ideal Mother Award, as well as a diverse group of participating parties and sponsors.

On this occasion, Fahad Al-Sarhan, Team leader of the Corporate Communications Unit at the Bank, commended all mothers on the occasion of Mother's Day and also congratulated the winners of the 6th Ideal Mother Award. He continued by saying: "We believe in the importance of this award, which recognizes the pivotal role parents play in the lives of children with mental disabilities. This is especially true of mothers, who not only nurture their children but also push them to overcome their disabilities, helping them channel these very disabilities into positive action for the benefit of themselves and their community. For that reason, KIB continues to lend its support to this event every year, reflecting the Bank's ongoing commitment to supporting persons with disabilities in the local community."

Sarhan also pointed out that this sponsorship came as part of KIB's strategy to support people with disabilities. Accordingly, the Bank has recently redesigned six of its branches in order to provide for more easily accessible banking services that accommodate the needs



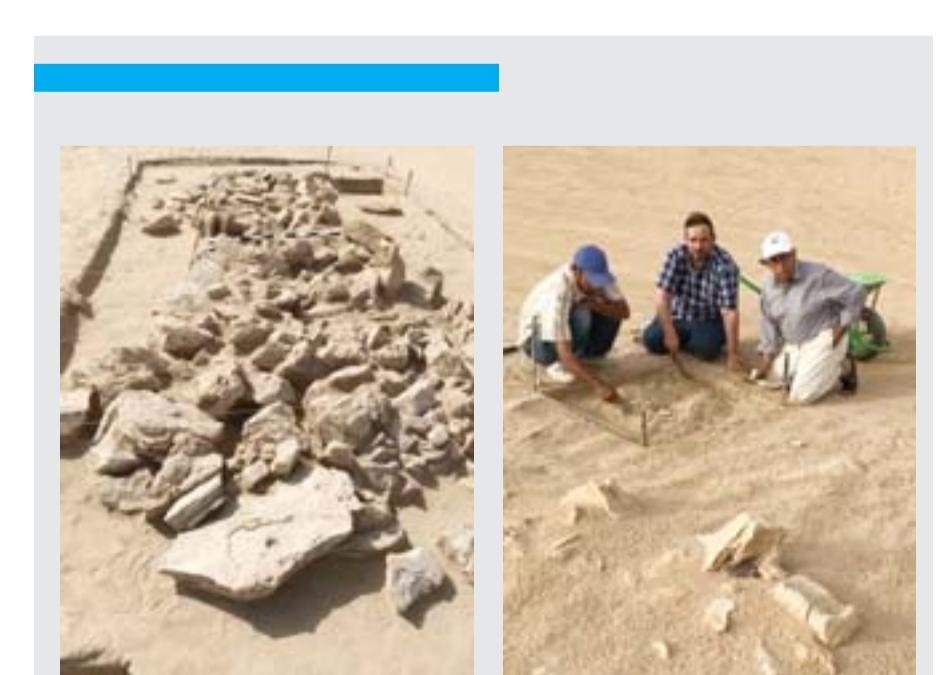
of customers with special needs, including those who are visually impaired and deaf.

At the end of his statement, Sarhan lauded the efforts of all organizers of this humanitar-

ian award, wishing all parties involved success in their ongoing efforts. He also noted that KIB will continue to be a supporter of their various impactful activities and initiatives.

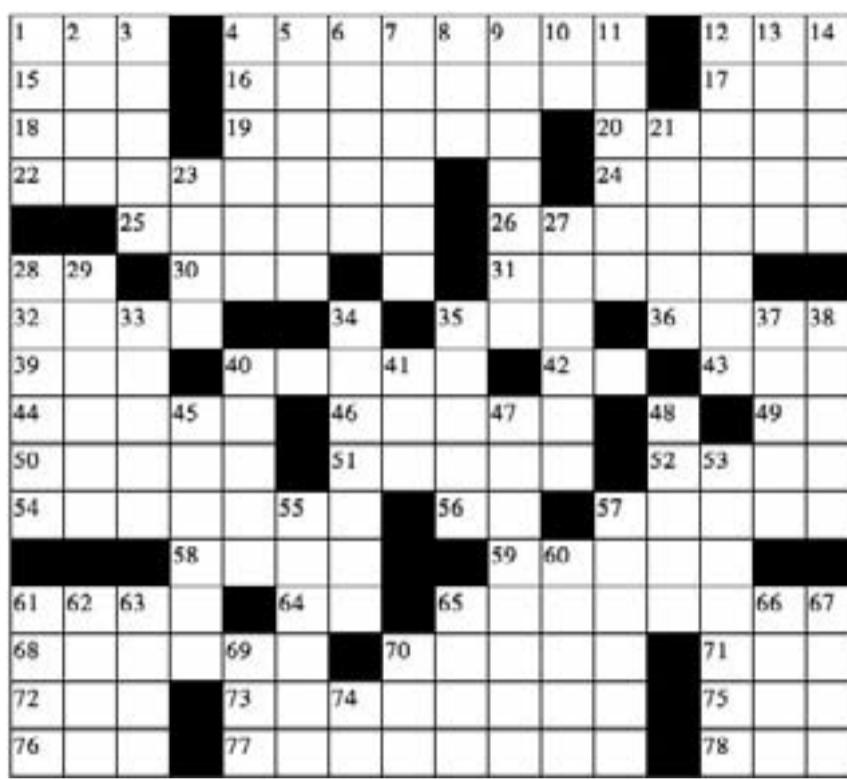
Science program held at Scientific Center

The Scientific Center, an affiliate of Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science (KISR) recently cooperated with Dar Al-Athar



In collaboration with the History Department at Kuwait University, the Department of Antiquities and Museums recently started excavating the Khairan area.

CROSSWORD 1864



ACROSS

- A former monetary unit in Great Britain.
- Bearing the signature of a witness attesting to something's legality.
- A periodic paperback publication.
- A Turkish unit of weight equal to about 2.7 pounds.
- Avitaminosis caused by lack of thiamine (vitamin B1).
- An artificial language that is a revision and simplification of Esperanto.
- A light touch or stroke.
- Decisively defeated in combat.
- Any of various thermoplastic resins used to make things.
- A protective cloth covering for an injured eye.
- An ancient city in northern Portugal.
- Chinese tree cultivated especially in Philippines and India for its edible fruit.
- A bed supporting a road.
- A silvery malleable metallic element that resists corrosion.
- A strong solution of sodium or potassium hydroxide.
- In accord.
- Freedom from difficulty or hardship or effort.
- The Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the Dali region of Yunnan.
- How long something has existed.
- A Russian river.
- North American republic containing 50 states - 48 conterminous states in North America plus Alaska in northwest North America and the Hawaiian Islands in the Pacific Ocean.
- Strong lightweight wood of the balsa tree used especially for floats.
- An oil port in southern Iraq.
- A radioactive element of the actinide series.
- Italian violin maker in Cremona.
- The fluid (red in vertebrates) that is pumped by the heart.
- A woman hired to suckle a child of someone else.
- Type genus of the Giraffidae.
- A white soft metallic element that tarnishes readily.
- Any of numerous local fertility and nature deities worshipped by ancient Semitic peoples.
- Remove gas from.
- The granite-like rocks that form the outermost layer of the earth's crust.
- The syllable naming the fourth (sub-dominant) note of the diatonic scale in solmization.
- Of or relating to or characteristic of Hades or Tartarus.
- A graphical recording of the cardiac cycle produced by an electrocardiograph.
- Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
- A genus of Picidae.
- The syllable naming the sixth (sub-mediant) note of a major or minor scale in solmization.
- The federal department responsible for safeguarding national security.
- A restraint that confines or restricts freedom (especially something used to tie down or restrain a prisoner).
- A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.

DOWN

- indicate by signs.
- (informal) Being satisfactory or in satisfactory condition.
- A confusion of voices and other sounds.
- The jurisdiction or office of an abbot.
- Growth teeth.
- A just detectable amount.
- After a negative statement used as an intensive meaning something like "likewise" or "also".
- The compass point that is one point east of due south.
- Small often spiny insectivorous mammal of Madagascar.
- A trivalent metallic element of the rare earth group.
- Remove from the bar.
- French revolutionary who was prominent in the early days of the French Revolution (1749-1791).
- A condensed but memorable saying embodying some important fact of experience that is taken as true by many people.
- A gland in which gametes (sex cells) are produced.
- A unit of dry measure used in Egypt.
- A collection of objects laid on top of each other.
- The cardinal number that is the sum of seven and one.
- Shrub bearing oval-fruited kumquats.
- Big-eyed scad.
- An esoteric or occult matter that is traditionally secret.
- A clear oily brown solution of cresols in soap.
- (Old Testament) The second patriarch.
- A hidden storage space (for money or provisions or weapons).
- A port in northwestern Israel on the Bay of Acre.
- A metric unit of volume or capacity equal to 10 liters.
- Resistant to change of position or condition.
- Edge of a way or road or path.
- A family of Sino-Tibetan languages spoken in southeastern Asia.
- Type genus of the family Mustelidae.
- (Norse mythology) The Norse dragon that guarded a treasure and was slain by Sigurd.
- (astronomy) The reappearance of a celestial body after an eclipse.
- An upright tripod for displaying something (usually an artist's canvas).
- The villain in William Shakespeare's tragedy who tricked Othello into murdering his wife.
- (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
- Thin and fit.
- Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
- Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
- A genus of Picidae.
- The syllable naming the sixth (sub-mediant) note of a major or minor scale in solmization.
- (Australian and New Zealand) A disparaging term for English immigrants to Australia or New Zealand.
- A white metallic element that burns with a brilliant light.

Yesterday's Solution

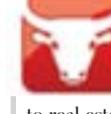


STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

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



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

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



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

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



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

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



Leo (July 23-August 22)

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



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

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

Wordsearch Puzzle

SCUBA Diving

Find and circle all of the SCUBA Diving words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell the meaning of the letters of SCUBA.

S	E	R	M	O	U	T	H	P	I	E	C	G	E	L	F	V	A	L	V	E	E	W	C	E
O	E	L	E	V	A	S	N	N	U	T	M	A	I	C	R	O	B	R	G	E	N	D	T	A
G	E	B	D	N	N	O	E	E	N	R	U	W	N	Y	O	T	O	E	A	N	S	N	E	T
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Classifieds

Thursday, March 22, 2018

STATE OF KUWAIT
DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION
METEOROLOGICAL DEPARTMENT



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Fax: (+965) 24348714
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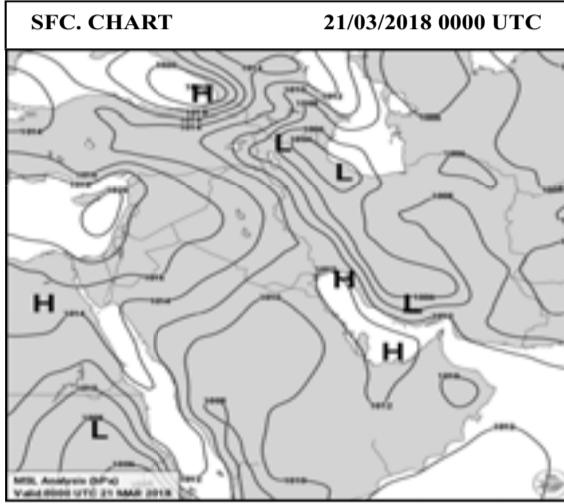


Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Relatively hot with light to moderate variable wind to south easterly wind, with speed of 06 - 24 km/h.

BY NIGHT: Fair with light to moderate variable wind changing to north westerly wind, with speed of 06 - 30 km/h.

WEATHER WARNING			No Current Warnings		
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.			
KUWAIT CITY	28 °C	20 °C			
KUWAIT AIRPORT	32 °C	15 °C			
ABDALY	34 °C	15 °C			
BUBYAN	28 °C	---- °C			
JAHRA	34 °C	18 °C			
FAILAKA ISLAND	28 °C	18 °C			
SALMIYAH	25 °C	21 °C			
AHMADI	29 °C	---- °C			
NUWAISIB	30 °C	15 °C			
WAFRA	33 °C	14 °C			
SALMY	33 °C	17 °C			



4 DAYS FORECAST					
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures	Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.	
Thursday	03/22	Relatively hot	33 °C	18 °C	NW 12 - 40 km/h
Friday	03/23	Relatively hot	34 °C	16 °C	NW-VRB 08 - 38 km/h
Saturday	03/24	Relatively hot and some scattered clouds will appear later on	33 °C	15 °C	VRB-SE 08 - 40 km/h
Sunday	03/25	Relatively hot causing rising dust over open areas and some scattered clouds will appear	35 °C	18 °C	SE-S 12 - 42 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	04:31
Sunrise	05:50
Zuhr	11:55
Asr	15:23
Sunset	18:00
Isha	19:17

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	30 °C
MIN. Temp.	14 °C
MAX. RH	58 %
MIN. RH	16 %
MAX. Wind	SE 32 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

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



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

DIAL161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Thursday 22/3/2018						Departure Flights on Thursday 22/3/2018						
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	Baku	13:30	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	MEA	405	Beirut
JAI	572	Mumbai	00:05	KAC	903	Riyadh	13:40	Al Nafaj	976	Goa/Chennai	00:05	Dubai
SAI	441	Lahore	00:15	PAL	668	Manila	14:00	JZR	528	Asyut	00:15	Alexandria
KAC	504	Beirut	00:30	KNE	231	Riyadh	14:10	JAI	573	Mumbai	00:30	Dubai
JZR	267	Beirut	00:30	SVA	500	Jeddah	14:15	FDB	072	Dubai	00:35	Cairo
KAC	102	London	00:50	KAC	618	Doha	14:20	PIA	240	Sialkot	00:40	Kozhikode
JZR	539	Cairo	00:50	FDB	059	Dubai	14:20	MSC	412	Asyut	01:00	Bahrain
PGT	858	Istanbul	00:55	QTR	1078	Doha	14:20	JAI	571	Mumbai	01:05	Taif
THY	772	Istanbul	00:55	KAC	516	Tehran	14:20	JZR	502	Luxor	01:30	Abu Dhabi
RJA	642	Amman	01:05	KAC	672	Dubai	14:25	JZR	142	Doha	01:45	Dubai
DLH	625	Bahrain	01:45	KAC	412	Bangkok	14:35	KAC	677	Dubai	01:50	Abu Dhabi
UAE	853	Dubai	01:45	GFA	221	Bahrain	14:40	KAC	417	Manila	02:00	Muscat
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50	JZR	239	Amman	14:40	THY	773	Istanbul	02:30	Riyadh
TRQ	230	KRT	02:00	FDB	8065	Dubai	14:45	PGT	859	Istanbul	02:30	Dammam
AXB	395	Kozhikode	02:00	KNE	529	Jeddah	14:55	SAI	442	Luxor	02:30	Abu Dhabi
JZR	555	Alexandria	02:15	KAC	788	Jeddah	15:10	DLH	625	Frankfurt	02:45	Swiss
QTR	1086	Doha	02:20	KAC	304	Mumbai	15:10	AXB	396	Kozhikode	02:55	Emirates



In this file photo, a man walks on the land at Ha Mampho village, Lesotho.

— AP photos



In this file photo, local Ethiopian farmers and their camels walk past the Obelisk steles area in Axum.



In this photo, Johannesburg's skyline is shown under the clouds in South Africa.

'Black Panther' fans can find glimpses of Wakanda in Africa

Want to go to Wakanda? The blockbuster success of "Black Panther" has created a new, compelling vision of Africa as a continent of smart, technologically savvy people with cool clothes living in a futuristic city amid stunning landscapes. The hidden, high-tech kingdom is fictional, of course. But the movie successfully weaves together many different aspects of the continent to depict Wakanda. For fans who long to visit, there are many real places to consider.



In this file photo, pedestrians cross the Nelson Mandela Bridge into downtown Johannesburg.

"The movie references a lot of different African cultures and tribes," says Meruschka Govender, a "Black Panther" fan who blogs about travel and calls herself an "African travel activist." "I loved the Afro-futurist costumes, production and black consciousness themes. I really hope that it changes the narrative of African travel and inspires people to travel more the continent," she added.

S Korea musicians to play first concert in North since 2007

K-pop stars will play the first concerts by South Korean artists in the North for more than a decade, officials said Tuesday, as the dramatic thaw in relations kicked off by the recent Winter Olympics gathers pace. Seoul will send a total of 160 performers to Pyongyang for a four day visit from March 31 to April 3, according to a statement issued after inter-Korean talks at the border truce village of Panmunjom.

The group will include local pop legends Cho Yong-pil and Choi Jin-Hee, five-member K-pop group Red Velvet and Seohyun, a member of the famous K-pop group Girls' Generation. They will stage the first performances by South Korean acts in the North since 2007. "It was not easy to select songs that are wanted by both sides," Yoon Sang, South Korea's chief delegate to the talks, told a press briefing Tuesday.

Seoul said the North had invited the art troupe "in order to keep the momentum for peace and reconciliation", which was galvanized by the Winter Olympics and built on when South Korean special envoys met North Korean leader Kim Jong Un earlier this month. The North sent its own art troupe to South Korea to celebrate the Olympics last month, with 140 members of the Samjiyon Orchestra staging two performances.

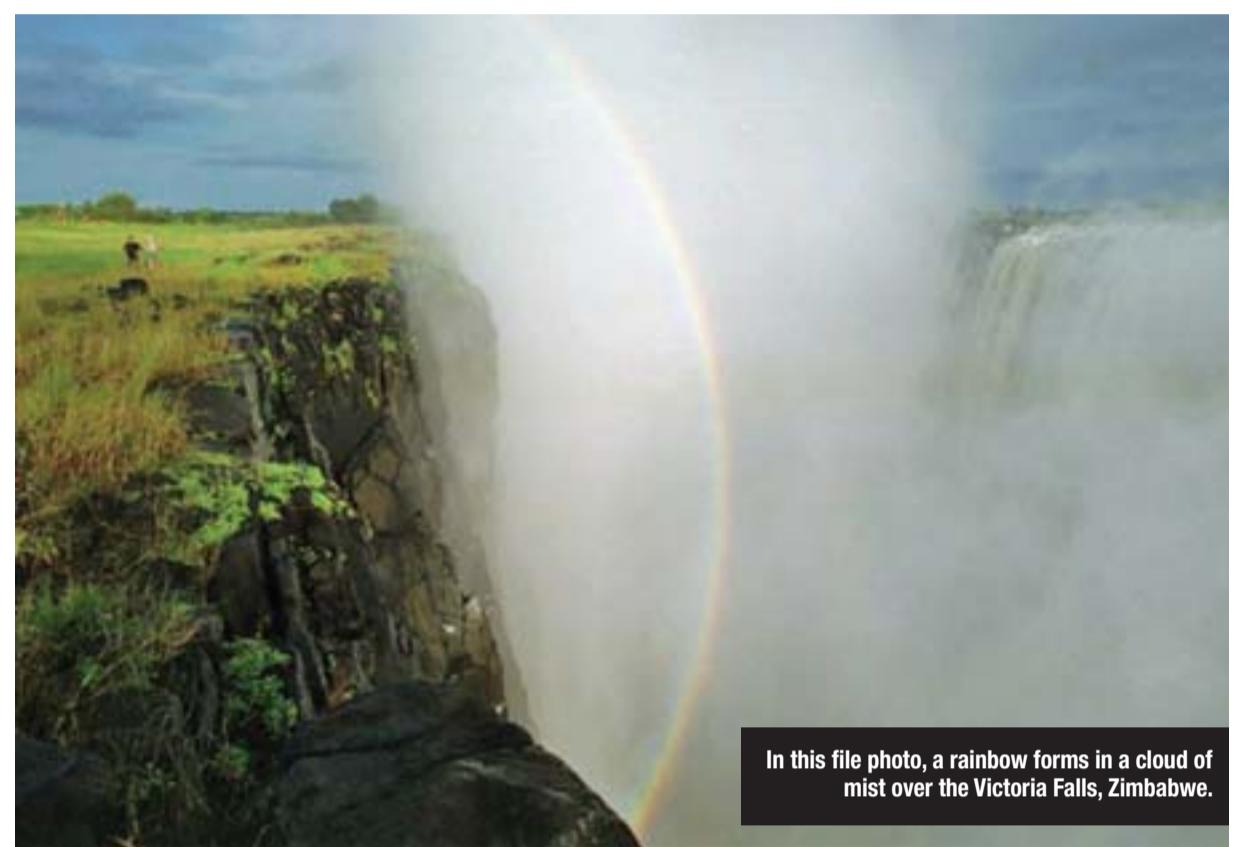
Despite the misgivings of some South Koreans, tickets were in high demand, with 156,000 people applying for 530 pairs of available seats. The South Korean troupe will give two concerts, at the 1,500-seat East Pyongyang Grand Theatre and the Ryugyong Jong Ju Yong Gymnasium, which can accommodate some 12,000 spectators. Yonhap news agency reported.

The concerts come ahead of an inter-Korean summit slated for late April at Panmunjom. In 1985, South Korean musicians held their first concert in Pyongyang as part of cultural exchanges. Following a historic summit between Seoul and Pyongyang in 2000, various Korean singers, including Cho Yong-pil, performed in the North.—AFP

Johannesburg

In South Africa, Johannesburg is a good place to start. "Joburg" is a dynamic, cosmopolitan African city, full of commerce, high-rise architecture and nightlife that is redolent of Wakanda. The high-speed Gautrain can whisk you from O.R. Tambo International Airport to Johannesburg's shiny financial center Sandton, with its modern skyscrapers. The train is quick, clean and pleasant.

Joburg's Braamfontein district is hip, edgy and fun. University students and hipsters frequent the coffee



In this file photo, a rainbow forms in a cloud of mist over the Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.

shops, restaurants and boutiques. By night there are fun bars and jazz clubs. The striking Nelson Mandela suspension bridge leads to gritty downtown Johannesburg. Braamfontein has come up in the past 10 years from a derelict, dangerous spot to a great place to visit.

Rocky Street in Yeoville is a bustling, hustling strip full of people selling their wares. South Africans, as well as Zimbabweans, Congolese and people from all parts of Africa are there. Security is a concern in Johannesburg, but if you are alert and careful, don't flash your cell phone or cash, it can be a manageable city.

Lesotho

"Black Panther" highlights the contrast between Africa's cityscapes and the landscapes of the countryside. The tiny mountain kingdom of Lesotho has that rural, traditional, spiritual side of Africa, where the Border Tribe in "Black Panther" resided. Lesotho has dramatic mountain scenery and picturesque rondavels, the round, thatched dwellings where many rural families live. Most

distinctive are the woven, cone-shaped hats and the brightly colored Basotho blankets worn over the shoulders of many in Lesotho. Those blankets feature prominently in the movie.

Ethiopia

With historic towers and churches dating back to the fourth century, Ethiopia has many sites that suggest Wakanda. The country was never colonized and its people are very proud of that, just as the people of Wakanda are proud of their history of independence. The obelisks of Axum and the churches of Lalibela, carved out of rock, speak of ancient traditions. Ethiopians wear flowing embroidered cotton robes and



In this file photo, Lesotho women draped in blankets, walk towards a polling station in the village of Machache.

also like their reputation as the place where coffee was first grown and served, which you can appreciate with an Ethiopian coffee ceremony.

Victoria falls, Kenya and more

Victoria Falls, where the Zambezi River spectacularly plummets 350 feet to make one of the world's largest waterfalls, is located on the border between Zambia and Zimbabwe. The awe-inspiring falls throw up a perpetual mist that supports a lush rainforest. The indigenous Tonga people called the falls "Mosi-oa-Tunya" which means "Smoke That Thunders." It's a fabulous place to visit and may bring to mind the waterfall fight scene from the movie.

Kenya's capital, Nairobi, is another city that is reminiscent of "Black Panther." Perhaps the place that best captures the juxtaposition of modern and rural Africa is Nairobi National Park, just 4 miles from the city, where you can see rhinos, giraffes and elephants, and look over their shoulders to see the office towers of the city in the background. East Africa's expansive savannas, with flat-top acacia trees, seen in Maasai Mara park and Tanzania's Serengeti park, look like they are right out of a sweeping movie scene.

But maybe the best place to get that Wakanda feeling is the Wits University campus in Johannesburg. To be surrounded by smart, opinionated, articulate students, fashionably dressed in colorful, sharp clothes, full of hope and plans for themselves, their country and their continent is to feel the heart of the Afro-optimism of "Black Panther." —AP

Olivia de Havilland defamed by 'lies' in FX miniseries, US court told

Hollywood veteran Olivia de Havilland was defamed by the "lies" in FX's "Feud: Bette and Joan," a court heard Tuesday, as the star pursued a lawsuit over how she was portrayed in the show. The 101-year-old two-time Oscar winner, who came to embody the elegant glamour of Golden Age Hollywood, says she did not consent to the use of her likeness in the hit 2017 miniseries, nor receive payment.

"Feud" focuses on the famous rivalry between Bette Davis, performed by Susan Sarandon, and Joan Crawford, as portrayed by Jessica Lange. British actress Catherine Zeta-Jones portrays De Havilland-Davis's friend-in-the-show. Of the stars of yore seen in the miniseries, only De Havilland is still alive.

Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Holly Kendig ruled in September that the actress could move forward with her "right-of-publicity" lawsuit, but the network is challenging the decision in a state appeals court in Los Angeles, claiming the producers' right of freedom of expression is protected by the First Amendment. De Havilland—who under the law is a public figure—contends that the series put her in a bad light, violating her right to privacy, by showing her fictional version describing her sister, Joan Fontaine, as a "b***h."

The star's attorney Suzelle Smith described the word as a "vulgarity," telling the appeals panel: "In my household, if you say b***h, you get your mouth washed out." Smith argued that allowing producers to take such liberties with characters would leave public figures unable to "control their identity." She said she had no problem with docudramas, but added that "what we need to have are docudramas that don't defame, that don't tell lies." FX attorney Kelly Klaus argued, however, that the show portrayed De Havilland in a positive light, painting her as a fiercely loyal friend.

Deep respect

"The show simply does not portray Ms. De Havilland as a vulgarian," Klaus said, noting that while the actress may never have called her sister a "b***h" in real-life, she had once referred to her as a "dragon lady." "Docudramas are understood not to be a literal retelling of history, that's the role of documentaries," Klaus said. In the September ruling under appeal, Kendig found that De Havilland had demonstrated that the network either knew that aspects of the series were false, or did not care whether they were.

The judge cited four examples, including a depiction of a 1978 Academy Awards interview in which De Havilland disparaged Davis and Crawford. Kendig said the evidence showed the interview never took place, adding that De Havilland had been falsely portrayed as someone who was a "gossip" who had bad-mouthed Fontaine and made disparaging remarks about Frank Sinatra's drinking habits. Kendig said she disagreed with the defense that the series was "transformative" and said there was evidence the network benefited

financially from the use of De Havilland's name.

The actress rose to fame in the 1930s playing ingénue roles alongside Errol Flynn, but moved on to more challenging fare, winning Academy Awards for the 1946 film "To Each His Own," and four years later for "The Heiress." Legendary director Victor Fleming chose her for the role of Melanie Hamilton in the US Civil War epic "Gone With the Wind." (1939) and other notable films included "My Cousin Rachel" in 1953 with Richard Burton, and "Hush... Hush Sweet Charlotte" in 1965 with Bette Davis.

"A key reason for the public's deep respect for Olivia de Havilland is that in her 80-plus year career, she has steadfastly refused to engage in typical Hollywood gossip about the relationships of other actors," her complaint reads. The case continues.—AFP



Lifestyle | Features



'4 Maghz' Mobile Library bus

Children read story books inside 4 Maghz Mobile Library Bus, Karte 4, Kabul, Afghanistan — Reuters

Internal view of '4 Maghz' Mobile Library bus in Kabul, Afghanistan.

CLIMB ONBOARD: AFGHAN WOMAN BRINGS STORIES TO KABUL'S CHILDREN

Undeterred by the risk of suicide bombers, 25-year-old Freshta Karim travels around Afghanistan's troubled capital every day in a big, blue bus to share the magic of reading with children. After graduating from Britain's prestigious University of Oxford, she set up Kabul's first mobile library to let some of Afghanistan's 3.5 million out-of-school children - mostly girls - listen to stories and pore over picture books.

"When I was a child, I did not have the opportunity to go to a library and read the storybooks I wanted to read," she said. "My goal is to enable them not only to think critically, but also to be able to question the wrongdoing they see." Afghanistan has one of the world's lowest literacy rates, with only three in 10 adults able to read, according to the United Nations cultural agency, UNESCO.

The Taliban have been waging an insurgency to overthrow Kabul's Western-backed government since their

2001 ouster and control large parts of the country. While the education system has made significant gains since the Taliban era - when girls were excluded from formal education altogether - worsening security has forced many school closures.

After decades of war, more than four in 10 Afghan children are not in school, government data shows, with many working to support their families. Karim set up the Charmaghz - meaning walnut in Dari - mobile library with three friends in January in a bus rented from the government, and painted it with colorful symbols, stars, balloons and footprints to attract children.

They installed bookshelves above the windows and chairs and desks for children and adults to sit and read - a luxury in a country where four in 10 schools do not even have a building, according to Human Rights Watch. A sign over the windscreen reads "4 Maghz", or four minds, to spark the interest of passers-by. "We intention-

ally did it to provoke the people's thought whether we mean a walnut or four minds," said Karim, who went to school as a refugee in Pakistan and then won scholarships to study abroad.

Climb on board

Residents of Kabul have welcomed the library on wheels, which stops for three or four hours at a time in different parts of the city so that children can climb on board to read hundreds of fiction and non-fiction books. "I loved the mobile library," said Farid, a 9-year-old shoeshine boy who is his family breadwinner and, like many Afghans, goes by one name.

"I was there with another 10 children and the boy read a story to us. I really enjoyed my time there."

Naweed Hamidi, who lives in northern Kabul, heard about the mobile library from relatives in the west of the city. "My 12-year-old son keeps asking me almost every

day about the mobile library and when will it come to our area," he said. Karim said she has not approached any international donors for support, preferring to rely on donations from friends and relatives, and plans to charge users. "No matter how small, but I would like them to pay something," she said.

"By putting a fee for the service, I encourage the children to value their time they spend in the library." Streetchildren who cannot pay can donate a drawing or painting, she said. It is not yet clear whether locals will be able to keep the mobile library running, but Karim is optimistic. "The other day an army officer brought his young son into the bus and read him a book," she said, adding that he donated 20 afghanis. "We decided to keep that money and frame it because this is very first donation that we got from the community." —Reuters

Superheroes to the rescue of storm-battered Puerto Rico

Comic book superheroes are coming to the rescue of hurricane-ravaged Puerto Rico. There's Batman, and Wonder Woman, of course, and also a Puerto Rican-inspired female hero named La Borinquena. Their mission is to help reconstruct the US island territory wrecked by Hurricane Maria six months ago. The 200-page book entitled "Ricanstruction: Reminiscing & Rebuilding Puerto Rico" - will be launched in May at Puerto Rico Comic Con, said the creator of La Borinquena and

coordinator of the comic book, Edgardo Miranda-Rodriguez.

All the proceeds from sales will go towards buying supplies for people on the island, such as flashlights. To this day, 30 percent of the island's electrical grid is still down. "These are all traditional superhero stories. But they are not fighting villains in any of them. They are helping people on the island, bringing food and water and rescuing animals," Miranda-Rodriguez said. He got permission from DC Comics to use its char-

acters for free.

The cover features La Borinquena and Wonder Woman holding the Puerto Rican flag. In one of the stories, these two heroes team up to save an endangered species - a parrot called the Puerto Rican amazon - few of which survived the storm. The administration of President Donald Trump drew strong criticism for what was seen as its slow response to the hurricane. —AFP



Today's houseplants do more than look pretty

Houseplants have been a mainstay of indoor decor item for generations, but their selection and use has changed over time, particularly with urbanization. People no longer are wedded to placing a few potted African violets on sunny window sills to add color and texture to small spaces. Instead, they're choosing less demanding houseplants, like succulents and cacti, or those offering utility, like herbs and strawberries.

Young folks new to independent living often lack the means or time to raise pets or children, so they find living substitutes like houseplants. The plants become part of the household. "People give their houseplants names and talk to them," said Bodie Pennisi, an Extension horticulturist with the University of Georgia. "They also play music for their plants so they'll grow better. I don't know if that kind of reaching out is scientifically proven to work but it certainly shouldn't hurt."

Houseplants do require care, but they don't need early morning walks or shuttling to and from soccer games. They aren't banned by condo boards, as pets might be. They are inexpensive and calming. And they've been enjoying a revival, Pennisi said. "Back in the '70s, the Green Revolution was a time when a huge push was made to grow things indoors," Pennisi said. "The more plants in planters the better."

"But times change," she said. "Growers are selecting different plants. They're going for smaller plants. Mobile plants. Succulents, orchids and cacti are being used to accessorize table settings and entries." One of the

newer trends is multi-functioning houseplants, Pennisi said. "Herbs, for example, are nutritious. They can go directly from planter to plate."

Some houseplants can clear the air in enclosed surroundings. They absorb pollen, bacteria and molds while taking in carbon dioxide to process into oxygen. These air-cleaning houseplants include spider plants, ficus, Boston fern, snake plants, aloe, English ivy and philodendron. Houseplants also can be therapeutic.

"The mental health benefits of plants are obvious," Pennisi said. "We're linked with nature. Plants are part of us, whether we notice it or not. They give us something to nurture." The DIY movement has also embraced plants, she added, whether through macrame hangers, decorated pots, or the popularity of terrariums, miniature fairy gardens and bonsai.

Houseplants are durable, but that doesn't make them easier to grow than ornamentals or vegetables, said Beth Berlin, an Extension educator with the University of Minnesota's St. Cloud office. "Selection is important," Berlin said. "Look at the natural environment in which they thrive and then look at your own. Plants have special needs inside your home and you have to find them."

That includes deciding which potting soil to use, watering and feeding them properly, and providing enough humidity and light. "Light is the big deal," Berlin said. "Leaves are the first symptoms to tell you if you're overwatering or underwatering." —AP



This photo shows the check-out counter at the indie bookseller Newtonville Books in Newton, Massachusetts. — AP photos



This photo shows Nathan Shafer, a life-long book collector, posing in front of his bookshelf in Arvada, Colorado.

Books placed backward: Art or nonsense?

Looking for an easy way to organize a messy bookshelf? You might consider turning all the spines backward. Yes, the backward bookshelf is one of the easiest ways - albeit, not too functional - to clean up a hodgepodge of texts. It's also an interior design craze that's about as culturally divisive as national politics in America.

Advocates tout the simplistic texture of the pages, while opponents argue that the idea is just plain stupid since you can't see which books are which. Generally speaking, you love it or hate it. The backward bookshelf began to trend in the mid-aughts, mostly as an artistic styling tool in photographs on small-scale design blogs or bookshop websites. Now, big-box retailers such as West Elm and The Container Store have incorporated backward bookshelves into their product displays.

A Google search for "backward books" will bring back millions of results, from sites including social-media mainstays like Pinterest and Instagram, various women's magazines and some interior design staples like Apartment Therapy. "I can see the appeal because a lot of times, if there's a lot of books in a room, people find it distracting or overwhelming," said Sarah Cole, a Boston-area interior designer. "But it's not super-functional, and unless the books are purely decorative, it just seems challenging."

Backward books, Cole said, do align with the neutral, monochromatic look that is popular now in design. Achieving a simple, stylish look is exactly why Cari Shane turned her books backward. Four years ago, the public relations executive was renovating a 1914 row house in Washington, DC, when her teenage daughter suggested the idea. "I had these beautiful orange chairs for the living room and I needed something to set them off," Shane said. "I needed something that was going to let the chairs be the focal point."

The books used in the display were ones Shane had no plans to re-read. "I couldn't tell you what books they are," she said. On the other hand, Nathan Shafer, a life-long reader and book collector, has filled his Arvada, Colorado, home with hundreds of books, none of which face backward. "They're entities, and when you turn them all backward it renders them one anonymous mass," Shafer said. And an anonymous mass, Shafer said, defies the purpose of books.

"They're for the unique words, the unique ideas, the unique characters inside them," he said. "Part of the reason for hanging onto books is so you can go back and find something. You can't do that if you're hiding every identifying mark." There are occasions, however, when art is executed just right, at least according to the customers of Newtonville Books, an independent bookseller in Newton, Mass. The store is known around the area for its visually intriguing counter, which is filled with backward books in different sizes and colors. The shop's owner, Mary Cotton, saw the styling tool on the website of an Australian book-store six years ago.

"We wanted to do something that was really beautiful and interesting, some sort of book art project," she said. An architect helped design and execute the plan. Customers ask what books were used to make the counter, but Cotton said they never wrote down the titles. And, since the books are glued into place, there's no way of moving them. "We had a lot of old used books that hadn't sold, and others we got from library sales and the covers were damaged," Cotton said. "I like it. It gives them another life. People seem to like it." —AP



Customers enjoy a meal at Bun Cha Huong Lien restaurant.



In this photograph, a waitress carries dishes to customers next to the glass-encased table where former US President Barack Obama sat at for a meal with chef Anthony Bourdain at Bun Cha Huong Lien restaurant, now dubbed 'bun cha Obama', in Hanoi's old quarter. — AFP photos

Eternal noodles: Obama 'bun cha' table encased in Vietnam

It's appropriate to preserve the memory of Mr Obama

The table where former US president Barack Obama famously slurped noodles in downtown Hanoi has been preserved-chopsticks and all-under a glass box for eternity, in a move that has attracted legions of bemused diners to the once low-key eatery, Bun Cha Huong Lien restaurant, since dubbed "bun cha Obama", shot to stardom in 2016 when the then-US leader took a break from official duties on a Hanoi visit to enjoy a \$3 bowl of pork noodles with fried spring rolls with globetrotting chef Anthony Bourdain.

Now customers are thronging to the hotspot for a taste of that famous evening. "I'm very happy to sit near the table where President Obama once sat because I love Obama very much," office worker Tran Dinh Ha said during

the busy lunch rush. Pictures of Obama and Bourdain's budding bromance over dinner-filmed for the chef's CNN series "Parts Unknown"-quickly went viral, and now plaster the walls of the simple joint in Hanoi's leafy Old Quarter.

Business has boomed ever since the presidential pork dinner. But the owner insists she isn't dining out on the Obama fame and has resisted offers from customers wanting to buy the table, instead freezing the dinner-tableau for posterity. "I think it's appropriate to preserve the memory of Mr Obama," owner Nguyen Thi Lien said, as amused tourists snapped selfies with the encased table, set with clean bowls, plates, chopsticks and condiment jars.

Lien wouldn't say whether the dishes on display are the ones used by Bourdain and Obama, who she described as "modest and friendly". The transparent box is a form of preservation, and reverence, familiar to Hanoians: Vietnam's much-praised revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh is embalmed and encased in glass at his mausoleum in central Hanoi. Still, not all of Lien's customers welcomed the stunt with open arms. "Not sure how I feel about this," Bourdain said on Instagram under a photo of the table at which he apparently once sat.—AFP



In this file photo, Olive Ridley sea turtles return to the sea after laying eggs on Rushikulya Beach, some 140 kilometers southwest of Bhubaneswar in India's eastern Odisha state. — AFP photos

India's turtle warriors embrace mission to save threatened species

Since he was a boy, Soumyaranjan Biswal has kept a night vigil at the beach near his coastal Indian village where tens of thousands of tiny olive ridley turtles gather to lay their eggs. Fishing communities in Odisha protect this threatened species from harm as they return year after year to nest, a unique ritual for both turtles and their custodians that stretches back decades.

Olive ridley turtles navigate thousands of miles of open ocean to reach the eastern state, where they come ashore in numbers not seen anywhere else in the world. It is familiar territory for the females, who hatched on these same sands many years ago. "We have seen them coming to these beaches right from our childhood," Biswal said on a moonlit night, as tiny white ocean crabs wriggled across his feet. "The turtles are just like our friends now."

The turtles arrive under the cover of darkness, trudging ashore to dig shallow pits with their flippers where they deposit dozens of eggs. Their work done, they return to the ocean. But their eggs are vulnerable to predators like dogs and vultures during the 50-odd day incubation period beneath the sand, and high tides can wash away an entire nest.



Unpaid job

Fishermen along this stretch of east Indian coastline have been intervening to give the unborn turtles a shot at life. Biswal, equipped with a flashlight and a bamboo pole, identifies nests at risk and carefully digs up the spongy eggs. They are relocated to freshly dug hatcheries a safe distance away, ringed with fencing and marked with a flag—an arduous process that can be repeated hundreds of times in a single nesting season.

Keeping a watchful eye over the brood is no easy task. The job is unpaid, usually following a long day at work. There is the added danger of scorpion bites and nipping crabs in the sand. But Biswal knows safe passage for the turtle hatchlings to the sea is crucial for their survival. "Their journey back to the sea is very important. The

females come back to this same beach to lay eggs, helped by the alignment of moon and stars," he said.

There was a time when two million turtles would emerge from the sea at Odisha for the mass nesting phenomenon known as "arribada", or arrival. But their numbers have sharply declined, with environmental pressures, coastal development and overfishing meaning many do not survive the journey to their ancestral nesting ground. Hundreds can wash ashore dead every year.

In 2014 and 2016, for reasons still unknown, no turtles arrived at all, spooking villagers who consider their fate intertwined with their ocean visitors. "For us, turtles are an incarnation of (Hindu God) Vishnu. If they die or don't come we feel we have missed out on their blessing," said one volunteer, Bichitrana Biswal.

Turtle love

However, the union between fishermen and turtles has not always been peaceful. In 1997, the coastal regions off Odisha were declared a marine wildlife sanctuary and fishing was barred in shallow waters for more than half the year slashing incomes in one of India's poorest regions. "For seven months a year the fishermen are left jobless," said Sumanth Bindumadhyav, wildlife campaign manager with Humane Society International, an NGO.

"It's natural for them to feel that it's because of the turtles," Bindumadhyav said it had been a "herculean task" motivating fishermen to protect the turtles during lean times when other work was scarce. One approach is to remind them that the turtles eat jellyfish, which prey on the sealife the villagers eat and sell. Ultimately, conservation efforts have succeeded in Odisha in large part due to the special relationship between turtles and locals.

"People here feel a personal connection with the turtles and have developed a sense of ownership. This has helped in our conservation effort," Bindumadhyav said. The state government provides 25 kilos of subsidized rice every month to families affected by fishing laws under the World Bank-funded Integrated Coastal Zone Management Program. But the villagers say they would rather learn new skills than depend on handouts.

Bijaya Kumar Kavi is director of the local Action for Protection of Wild Animals, which has been helping women set up self-help groups where each member contributes 60 rupees a month. "We teach them how each olive ridley lays around 100 eggs, but of more than 10 million eggs laid in an arribada, only around 0.2 percent survive," he said. "We also tell them how to handle eggs. If done the wrong way the embryo will drown in its own yolk. "When the fishermen learn about these fascinating characteristics, their attitude changes and they become turtle-friendly."—AFP

In Somalia, women defy strict rules to play football

Shortly after sunrise, a group of young women arrives at a football pitch in Mogadishu, where they shrug off their hijabs-some changing underneath the billowing veil-to reveal their team kit. Young Somali men stand nearby, some disapproving but all watching closely, as the women jog up and down, dribble a worn-out ball between colorful cones and do sit-ups, less than 200 meters from a heavily guarded security checkpoint.

The sight of young women playing football is highly unusual in Somalia, due to societal pressures as well as fear of Al-Shabaab. The Al-Qaeda linked Islamist group launches regular attacks in Mogadishu and considers forms of entertainment, such as football, to be evil, worse still if women are involved.

"It is obvious that we are scared despite the fact that we put on heavy clothes over our shorts and T-shirts (until) we get to the pitch. It is very difficult to walk normally with sports clothes-we never wear sports clothing in society," said Hibqa Abdulkadir, 20, one of the footballers. She is among 60 girls, who have signed up to train at the Golden Girls Centre in Mogadishu, Somalia's first female soccer club.

Think differently

Mohamed Abukar Ali, the 28-year-old co-founder of the centre, said he was inspired to create the club after he realized that Somalia had no female footballers. "We are... trying to make these girls the first Somali female football professionals," he said. However this is not an easy task. "When the girls have to attend training sessions, we have to organize to pick them up and bring them here and back home after the session because they are girls and we think about their security," said Ali.

"There are so many challenges, from security to lack of resources... but that will not deter our ambition to establish female football clubs in this country," he said. "We believe it is the right time and we should have the courage to think differently."

They look naked

Many of the girls who have joined the club said they had always wanted to try playing football but never had the opportunity. "I have been playing football for seven months, but my family has only known about it for two months," said Sohad Mohamed, 19. "I used to dodge my mother about where I was going because she would not allow me to play football, but at least my mum is okay with it now, even though the rest of my family is not happy."



In Somalia, it is taboo for women to appear in public dressed in shorts, trousers or T-shirts, with Islamic scholars saying sports clothing is not appropriate Islamic dress for women.

The players wear tights underneath their baggy shorts, and cover their hair, but still face criticism for their dress. "I come to watch them train but frankly speaking, I would not be happy to see my sister doing it, this is not good in society's eyes because they look naked," said Yusuf Abdirahman, who lives near the football field. Mohamed Yahye, another onlooker, is happy to see women playing football but is also concerned about how they are dressed.

"I think there is nothing wrong with women playing football, the only thing they should change is the dress code, they need to wear something that is not slim-fitting. But as long as their body is not seen, they are in line with the Islamic dress codes," he said. However the Golden Girls are not fazed. "My ambition is so high that I aim for the same progress as those female footballers who play for Barcelona," said Abdulkadir.—AFP

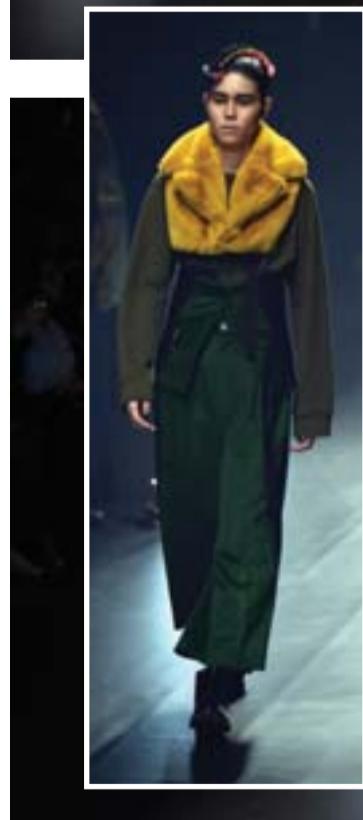


Somali football players of Golden Girls Football Centre, Somalia's first female soccer club, attend their training session at Toyo stadium in Mogadishu. — AFP photos



Models present creations by Chinese-born designer Viviano Sue for his 2018 autumn/winter collection at Tokyo Fashion Week in Tokyo. — AFP photos

Tokyo Fashion Week



Italian fashion chamber working toward sustainability goals

The head of the Italian Fashion Chamber says the body is working toward creating clear criteria of what it means for the fashion industry to be environmentally sustainable. Noting that fashion is the second-largest polluting industry behind oil production, Carlo Capasa said part of the challenge is communicating to consumers because "they love sustainability but they love to buy cheap clothing."

He told a forum Tuesday that without clear criteria, "sustainability

becomes esoteric." Capasa said the chamber is looking into issues including creating guidelines on chemical use and industrial discharge, and how to ensure supply chains can be traced. Italy produces 40 percent of all clothing, accessories and footwear made in Europe. That rises to 70 percent when only luxury is considered.—AP

Lifestyle

THURSDAY, MARCH 22, 2018



A snowman stands near The Eiffel Tower in Paris. — AFP

Afghan street artists haunt warlords with graffiti campaign

For days Hamida Barmaki's smiling face stared out over traffic in Kabul, painted in a towering mural near the home of the warlord blamed for her death, until it was mysteriously covered over in white.

The short-lived image on a concrete blast wall marked the beginning of a provocative campaign by social activist group ArtLords, whose artists are calling out Afghanistan's most powerful by depicting people killed by warlords in giant murals in public places.

They have been threatened on social media, branded infidels and told by gunmen and mullahs to stop painting—but are unrepentant. "This was a warning shot to everyone that we will not let you sleep at night, we will come after you, we will paint in front of your homes," ArtLords co-founder and president Omaid Sharifi said at his studio in the Afghan capital.

Rather than seek justice for the countless victims—something that is not realistic given the huge number of them and the country's weak judicial system—the group

hopes to pressure warlords to acknowledge their past actions and apologize, said Sharifi, 31. Barmaki's portrait was near the home of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, one of the most notorious warlords in Afghanistan's history.

His group claimed involvement in the 2011 suicide attack on a Kabul supermarket that killed Barmaki—a prominent law professor and human rights activist—as well as her husband and their four children. The Taliban also claimed responsibility for the attack. Conflicting claims have long been a feature of the 16-year war. Hekmatyar, whose spokesman declined to comment on the mural, is one of several infamous warlords whom Kabul has sought to reintegrate into the mainstream political system in the post-Taliban era.

A two-time prime minister, he is accused of responsibility for the death of thousands of people during Afghanistan's 1992–1996 civil war. Other such figures include General Abdul Rashid Dostum, a powerful ethnic Uzbek linked to multiple human rights abuses in



This handout from the Afghan social activist group ArtLords shows artists painting a mural of Hamida Barmaki, who, along with her husband and children, was killed in a 2011 suicide attack on a supermarket, on a blast wall near the home of warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, whose followers had carried out the attack, in Kabul. — AFP photos

“We will paint in front of your homes”

Afghanistan who is now the country's first vice president, and Atta Mohammad Noor, the former governor of Balkh province. Noor is seen as a potential presidential contender but has been accused of links to people involved in kidnapping and other crimes.

You're not going to heaven'

The murals—which typically cover several square meters—will put faces to the victims, Sharifi says, and send a message to warlords that "we have not forgotten... what they did in this country". Over the past four years ArtLords has turned Kabul's grey maze of concrete barricades—shaped like a wide-based inverted 'T' to provide protection from bomb blasts—into a canvas to tackle issues such as rampant corruption and abuse of power.

With permission from local authorities, businesses and institutions, the group's artists have painted more than 400 murals on blast walls and other prominent places in around half of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. Sharifi said the latest campaign would also target the violence of the Taliban and other militant groups now terrorizing the country.

"There will be murals that say 'you're not going to heaven,'" Sharifi said. It is risky work for the group's 45

artists, who are paid for their efforts. Sharifi said he rarely goes out and is careful to use different routes when he does. "The threat is very real. At any moment anything can happen, a bomb can go off," Sharifi said. "Despite all these challenges... we have to take responsibility. Somebody has to do it."

Courage and guts

The mural of Barmaki has changed the "narrative of street art in Afghanistan" and people were now recognizing art as a "powerful tool" for social change, he said. It has also galvanized other socially conscious artists around the country to use street art to send "very harsh messages to these people". While ArtLords receives widespread support from Afghans and the international community for its work, reaction on social media to the Barmaki mural has been mixed.

Some have applauded the group's "courage and guts" while others have accused them of bias and exacerbating discord in the country. "Use your art to promote unity and serve Afghanistan, do not use it to spread division," Facebook user Yaser Baburi wrote. Sharifi admits the new campaign will upset people "because we will remind them of all these crimes".

"But I think this is the way to continue this discussion and force these people to come out and apologize for what they've done." With the help of the public, ArtLords is compiling a list of warlords and of people allegedly killed by them, who will be the faces of the next murals. "We will have faces of these victims in front of their (warlords') houses or the streets they are passing by," Sharifi said, without disclosing who will be targeted. "There are a lot of names that come to mind." —AFP



In this photograph, Artlords co-founder and president Omaid Sharifi takes part in an interview with AFP in Kabul.