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Manila to sign labor deal with Kuwait, may partially lift ban

Kuwait to repatriate 600 runaways at its expense • 4 Pinoy 'rescue' drivers freed

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The Philippines and Kuwait have finally reached an agreement for the protection of Filipino workers in the country. In a press conference yesterday at the Philippine Embassy, Philippine Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque, along with Philippine Labor and Employment Secretary Silvestre Bello, announced that a final memorandum of agreement will be signed tomorrow (Friday, May 11).

Earlier yesterday, the two Philippine officials met Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah, Minister of Social Affairs and Labor and Minister of State for Economic Development Hind Al-Sabeeh and Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah.

According to Bello, a technical working group from Kuwait met with their counterparts in Manila a month ago to work on the provisions of the agreement. "The draft of the MoA was initiated by both sides, and they were ready for it to be signed by the labor ministers of Kuwait and the Philippines, and perhaps even be witnessed by our president (Rodrigo

Duterte) and H.H. the Amir of Kuwait (before the three-month crisis worsened). The provisions of the MoA have been cleared and final discussions will be held (today)," Bello added.

The two countries have been working on the pact to protect expatriate workers after the Philippines banned the dispatch of workers to Kuwait after reports of abuse. In February, Duterte called on Filipino workers in Kuwait to return home after the discovery of a domestic worker's body in a freezer in an abandoned home.

Last month, Kuwait expelled the Philippine ambassador and recalled its own envoy for consultations after embassy staff tried to "rescue" Filipino domestic workers amid reports of abuse. A day earlier, Manila had apologized for what Kuwait viewed as a "flagrant" violation of its sovereignty. After the Filipino envoy was expelled, Duterte announced that the temporary ban on workers going to Kuwait will be made permanent.

Duterte spokesperson Roque said all the provisions which Duterte wishes to see are present in the agreement. These include conditions that employers will not be allowed to confiscate workers' passports, which will be

kept at the Philippine Embassy; and the domestic helper will be allowed a day off weekly and at least seven hours of sleep daily.

"The sponsor is obliged to provide decent food to housemaids and a good place to sleep. They are also allowed to have cellphones for communication purposes with their loved ones or when needed. In our talks, the ministry also promised to create a model contract which will be implemented not just for Filipino domestic helpers, but all other nationalities. All these provisions will be printed and specified in the contract," Roque said.

"The ministry of interior will create a special unit which will coordinate 24 hours a day with the Philippine Embassy over cases of maltreated housemaids. The ministry assured us that since we only have very few maltreated housemaids and the majority of Filipinos in Kuwait are not in danger, anyone mistreating the helpers will be brought to justice and the laws will be followed. The unit which will be formed will be under the ministry of interior and can be contacted at any given time, especially by the embassy, for any help.

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KUWAIT: Philippine Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque and Philippine Labor and Employment Secretary Silvestre Bello meet Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah yesterday. — KUNA

Sheikh Nasser tours EPA



KUWAIT: First Deputy PM, Defense Minister and Chairman of the Supreme Environment Council Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad visits the Environmental Protection Authority yesterday. — KUNA

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Environmental Protection Authority Chairman and Director Sheikh Abdullah Ahmed Al-Humoud Al-Sabah yesterday received First Deputy PM, Defense Minister and Chairman of the Supreme Environment

Council Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah at his office. Sheikh Nasser later toured various EPA departments, where he was briefed about the systems followed in each department as well as EPA's efforts in boosting public awareness about environmental issues.

MPs to vote on two motions of no-confidence

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly holds a special session today to vote on two no-confidence motions against Oil Minister Bakheet Al-Rasheedi and Social Affairs and Labor Minister Hind Al-Sabeeh, which were filed last week following marathon grillings. The two ministers were accused in the grillings of various administrative and financial violations and for squandering public funds, besides misusing their powers. The oil minister in particular was charged of squandering hundreds of millions of dinars by delaying major projects or allowing top oil executives to make ill-advised investment decisions.

The motions require 25 votes in the 50-member Assembly to pass. Cabinet ministers are banned from voting on such motions, and only elected MPs can take part. If the motions are passed, the ministers will be dismissed immediately, something that had not happened in

Kuwait's democratic life, which began in 1962. But all indications show that the two ministers are highly expected to survive the voting and stay in office. Rasheedi said he is confident about the proceedings and reiterated that grillings are the constitutional right of lawmakers.

Besides the no-confidence motions, the Assembly is due to vote on forming an investigation committee to probe allegations made by the grillers against the oil minister. Assembly speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said yesterday that voting to form the committee does not cancel the no-confidence motion, which will take place according to procedures. Ahead of the two votes, which will take place separately, two lawmakers supporting the grilling and two opposing it will speak, and the minister will be allowed to defend himself.

Islamist MP Osama Al-Shaheen said yesterday that he will not support the no-confidence motion against Sabeeh, adding that he believes the grilling involved conflict of interests. The main issue in the grilling was the minister's decision to shut a Shiite charity society headed by MP Saleh Ashour, who grilled the minister. On Tuesday, Ashour challenged the minister to prove her allegations that the society took a KD 100,000 loan.

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News in brief

Social media to be monitored

KUWAIT: The finance ministry plans to procure special software to monitor social media networks (Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat) by contracting a company specialized in this field. The new program is scheduled to be activated in the 2018-2019 fiscal year. Informed sources said the ministry had already listed this project in its purchase plan with a total cost of KD 75,000, which means the project does not need to be sent to the Central Tenders Committee. The sources said the ministry wants to follow up and directly respond to whatever is circulated on social media, especially rumors that might affect Kuwait's financial status. — A Saleh

Malaysian opposition wins election

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's opposition alliance headed by veteran ex-leader Mahathir Mohamad, 92, has won a historic election victory, official results showed today, ending the six-decade rule of the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition. The results from the Election Commission showed the opposition grouping, Pakatan Harapan, plus a party in the Borneo state of Sabah they are allied with, winning 115 seats - giving them a simple parliamentary majority. — AFP

Skies to clear after storms



KUWAIT: A pedestrian shields himself from the rain with a supermarket flyer yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT: The Sarrayat season is in full swing as dust storms and heavy rain hit Kuwait yesterday, but weather conditions are expected to improve early today, according to a Kuwait Meteorological Center official. Strong wind at speeds of 20 to 55 km/h caused

the dust storm, which reduced horizontal vision to less than 1,000 m, Abdulaziz Al-Qarawi told KUNA. Strong wind and unexpected rain showers are common features of the Sarrayat season, which usually starts in mid-March and lasts until the end of May. — KUNA

Kuwait cautious as nations vow to save Iran deal

KUWAIT: Gulf countries were yesterday bracing for the economic and security fallout after US President Donald Trump announced the United States was exiting the Iran nuclear deal. Three countries led by Saudi Arabia immediately backed Trump, while Qatar reacted cautiously. Oman and Kuwait also gave circumspect positions. Kuwait yesterday said it followed up with great interest Trump's announcement of withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal. A foreign ministry source said in a statement that Kuwait had welcomed the agreement when it was announced in 2015, especially since it was endorsed by UN Security Council resolution 2231.

At that time, Kuwait underlined the necessity of Iran honoring its full commitments in line with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Also, Kuwait had reiterated that the pact would contribute to boosting regional security and stability, despite realizing it did not fully respond to



TEHRAN: Iranian MPs burn a US flag in parliament yesterday. — AFP

worries and concerns of countries in the region resulting from Iran's negative conduct with these states.

Kuwait has always emphasized the necessity of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries and respecting their sovereignty in line with international charters and norms, the source added. If the US proposed amendments to the agreement that were not approved, prompting Washington

to take a certain stance toward the pact, Kuwait understands and respects the US move, the source noted. The foreign ministry stressed Kuwait's unwavering stance calling for turning the Middle East into a zone free of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), at a time when everyone is seeking to achieve security and stability in the region that has suffered from unrest and wars for long.

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Local

Crown Prince meets speaker, ministers at Bayan Palace



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with the Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday at Bayan Palace the Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem and His

Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. His Highness Sheikh Nawaf also received Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy

Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah and State Minister for Housing Affairs and State Minister for Services Affairs Dr Jenan Bushehri. — KUNA

Arab League honors Amir on Sunday

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The Women's Institute for Development and Peace will honor His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at the Secretariat General of the Arab League headquarters in Cairo on Sunday, May 13. The institute held a press conference yesterday titled 'Peace has a Leader' at the information ministry to speak about honoring HH the Amir as 'The Man of Peace', which is an initiative of the institute and is sponsored by the Arab League. Thirty Kuwaiti personalities representing various sectors and categories of the community will attend the honoring ceremony. Arab ambassadors in Cairo and some international organizations will also attend.

Kawthar Al-Jouan, president of the institute, said this occasion is special as it's honoring an important and special personality. "A musical group from the institute will participate in the program of the honoring ceremony, in addition to speeches by some personalities. The program will also include a seminar on the role of HH the Amir in peace, which will be addressed by the former Egyptian minister of education Dr Mofeed Shihab and former minister of information Sami

Al-Nasef," she pointed out.

Jouan said Kuwait detests terrorism and violence. "For this reason, Kuwaitis always aim to spread love and tolerance. Also, HH the Amir played a key role in reconciling between Arab countries and ending their conflicts. We hope that this ceremony will present a model for other countries to take Kuwait as an example in working for peace," she added.

Researcher and economic expert Amer Al-Tamimi noted that HH the Amir is always playing an important role in the development process and achieving peace in countries hit by complicated political and security problems. "Kuwait plays a great role in the humanitarian field in developing countries, including those hit by natural disasters, financing infrastructure, education and health projects through various institutions such as the Kuwait Fund for Economic Development, Kuwait Red Crescent and the International Islamic Authority," he explained.

Kuwait's annual spending on donations is much higher than what is set by the United Nations for rich countries to support developing countries. "Kuwait spends over 1.5 percent of its gross domestic product on supporting poor countries, while the UN has set it only at 0.7 percent of the GDP. This is besides the individual unofficial donations by Kuwaiti NGOs or individuals to countries in need. Kuwaitis have always been known for volunteering in humanitarian activities. And honoring HH the Amir expresses the role of Kuwait in achieving and preserving peace in the world," stressed Tamimi.



KUWAIT: Researcher and economic expert Amer Al-Tamimi (right) speaks as Kawthar Al-Jouan, President of the Women's Institute for Development and Peace looks on. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



KUWAIT: Italian Ambassador to Kuwait Giuseppe Scognamiglio hosted a reception Tuesday night to celebrate his country's national day. Senior Kuwaiti officials led by Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah, diplomats and other dignitaries attended the event. — Photos by Joseph Shagra

Housing market poised to boom in Q2 of 2018

KUWAIT: Despite mixed performance in the first quarter of 2018, the various sectors of the property market in Kuwait, particularly the housing one, are projected to recover in the current quarter, experts agreed yesterday. The new housing areas such as Al-Metla, East Sulabkhat, Sabah Al-Ahmad and Saad Al-Abdullah has showed signs of recovery since the beginning of the year backed by government-funded infrastructure projects, said CEO of the Arab Real Estate Company (AREC) Dr Haidar Hasan Al-Juma. The commercial sector, one of the most active sectors on the market, has seen increased demand and active contract bidding in such areas as Hawally, Salmiya, Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Al-Mubarkiya, he said.

However, Dr Juma attributed the recent 15-20 percent decline in the rents in the property investment sector to decline in demand which impacted negatively on the revenues of landlords whether individuals or companies. "The slump has been across the board in the first quarter of 2018 and reached 20 percent in the housing sector," he said, noting that some property owners tended to selling below cost. When compared to the housing sector, the commercial one witnessed a relatively lower decline, which did not hamper the ability of property owners to meet their commitments to the banks, Dr Juma added.

In similar statements, Omar Najm, CEO of Mudon Ahlia Real Estate Company, expected the various sectors of the market to grow but at variant rates according to the nature of supply and demand. "The projected boom in major areas such as the capital city and Hawally is attributable to the rise of oil prices and the growth of the GDP to 3.5 percent on an annual basis after a 1.1 percent shrinkage last year," he argued.

Najm affirmed that this is the best time for investors to do business in the property market since the prices went down to encouraging levels, noting that demand for private housing and government spending on infrastructure projects are on the rise. He expected momentum in government and private tendering for property projects and resumption of exhibition activities after the issuance of a decree by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to regulate the tenant-landlord relationship late last year. Meanwhile, Director of Athra Real Estate Company Maytham Al-Shakhs said the new residential areas accounted for the lion's share of transactions in the first quarter. The investment sector in the capital city, Hawally, Ahmadi and Jahra remained composed amid the declines of the last three quarters, he added. — KUNA

Kuwait now accepts the United States emergency passport

KUWAIT: The US embassy in Kuwait sent the following message to US citizens in the country about the illegibility to use US emergency passports:

Kuwait accepts US emergency passports for entry and exit to Kuwait as of May 1, 2018. The following conditions apply to US citizens intending to enter or exit with a US emergency passport:

- The bearer of a US emergency passport will be admitted only as a visitor.
- The US emergency passport must have at least 6-months' validity.
- The bearer of a US emergency passport is eligible to receive a temporary residency (Article 14) or exit permit (Article 1) only.
- The bearer of a US emergency passport shall not receive residency or transfer of residency upon arrival in the country.

For US citizens who are full-time residents of Kuwait and enter on the US emergency passport, you will be admitted to Kuwait as a visitor, whether you obtain a visa on arrival or an e-visa prior to arrival. You will have 30 days from your date of entry to obtain a new regular US passport. Please note that the US Embassy in Kuwait requires two weeks to process your new passport application from the date of your application appointment.

After you obtain a new regular US passport, please report your prior residence permit as lost or stolen and obtain a No Objection Certificate from the Ministry of Interior's (MOI) Criminal Investigations Division (CID) - Residency Affairs (RA). You can then apply for a new residence permit in your new, full-validity regular US passport at the MOI RA office covering your residence in Kuwait.

Though the emergency passport may now be accepted for entry to Kuwait under these conditions, the Department of State strongly recommends all US citizen travelers to be in possession of a regular full-validity passport before they travel, and US citizens must still comply fully with Kuwait's laws, including regulations on entry and exit to and from Kuwait. US citizens may still be denied entry or exit by Kuwait immigration authorities under these regulations and outside of US Embassy control.

Students demonstrate 'injustice' outside minister's office

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Following a meeting with his assistant undersecretary for public education and educational zone directors, Education Minister Hamed Al-Azmi said the ministry will proceed with its recent decisions concerning cheating and reshuffling school principals for grade 12 final exams. He urged zone directors to make sure any cheating citation is fully documented.

Speaking to a number of students and political activists holding a sit-in outside his office yesterday, the minister assured the students that reshuffling school principals had nothing to do with them and that the new cheating regulations will only

affect those who actually cheat. "I myself will undo any injustice done to any of you," he stressed.

The minister earlier received four of the demonstrating students in his office to discuss their demands and asked them to file their complaints in their respective educational zones. A number of the demonstrating students expressed their complete rejection of reshuffling school principals two days before the final exams start, justifying it with fears that the new principal might be unfair with them. Notably, demonstrators refused to leave until police patrols were summoned and forced them to leave, amidst shouts demanding cancelling the reshuffling decision.

Local

Kafala system outdated, modern scheme needed: Rights advocates

All expats fall into kafala trap: Sheikha Bibi

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The 'kafala' labor sponsorship system is outdated, and while it was relevant previously, today it is creating problems and difficulties for both employers and employees, especially domestic helpers, human rights advocates said. Sheikha Bibi Nasser Al-Sabah, founder of the Social Work Society (SWS), a non-government organization helping the most vulnerable people in Kuwait, said the system's failures are visible, as all expatriates who come to Kuwait fall into the trap of the kafala system. The discussion about the kafala system was held at the Center for Gulf Studies at the American University of Kuwait (AUK) in Salmiya.

"I am not here to criticize the kafala system, but to discuss it. In the kafala system, the majority of powers are in the hands of employers - the employer gives the residency visa (iqama), the employer has the power to cancel your iqama at any given time, and transferring to another sponsor is not an easy choice, especially for domestic helpers," Bibi said.

Rawan Al-Ghazali from the Legal Aid Department explained that the kafala system has been used since 1959. "After almost 60 years, the system needs attention to monitor the movement of migrant laborers working primarily in the construction and domestic sectors." She said the

system requires all unskilled laborers to have an in-country sponsor, usually their employer, who is responsible for their visa and legal status. This practice has been criticized by human rights organizations for creating easy opportunities for the exploitation of workers, as many employers take away passports and abuse their workers with little chance of legal repercussions. "If you are an employer, you want to have as much power as possible, but you are taking away the human rights of the workers," Ghazali added.

Kuwait's foreign worker sponsorship system mandates that expatriates must be sponsored by a local employer to get a work permit. In Aug 2008, MP Abdullah Al-Roumi declared that he was going to draft a law to scrap Kuwait's 'kafala' foreign worker sponsorship system. Till now, there has been no news about it and how lawmakers are going to proceed with the plan. Kuwait has been criticized for not doing enough over the issue of the kafala system. Qatar has become the first of the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states to end the kafala system.

Among the panelists yesterday were Amal Al-Awadhi from the Ministry of Interior, Eman Erekat from the International Organization for Migration and moderator Lulu Al-Rodaini. Dr Sharifa Al-Adwani, Acting Director of the Center for Gulf Studies and Assistant Professor of the Faculty of Political Science at AUK, introduced the panelists.



KUWAIT: Human rights advocates attend a discussion about the kafala system at the American University of Kuwait yesterday. —Photo by Joseph Shagra

1965 census does not guarantee citizenship

KUWAIT: Director of the Central Department for Correcting the Status of Illegal Residents Saleh Al-Fadhlah said Kuwait is keen on presenting all possible humanitarian assistance to illegal residents (bedoons), adding that claims of injustice are untrue and baseless. Fadhlah spoke to Al-Anbaa daily about the department's efforts and its work, which has reached the final stages, and procedures that were taken in this regard.

Fadhlah spoke about cases of several persons who led demonstrations with evidence and documentation, adding that several of them are of known nationalities and were dealt with as per evidence available at the department. He said he is ready to receive all bedoons who have grievances every Thursday. He added that emergency medical treatment is given to any person in need of it.

Fadhlah said the department was established with the support of the political leadership and government, adding that those who believe "we will not solve the bedoon issue completely are wrong," noting that the 1965 census proves precedence but does not grant nationality. Fadhlah said the era of green security IDs is over, and "cheaters" have to correct their status or return to their countries, adding that if the original passport is presented, all facilities will be provided.

He said the state offers education to bedoons in government schools free of charge, while a charity fund pays for educating this group in private schools, and the government pays the full costs. He said 34,000 persons out of 92,000 had their files transferred to the higher committee for study and evaluation, adding that this does not mean nationality will be given, because there are restrictions.

Fadhlah said Kuwait has provided many advantages to Kuwaiti women's children and enabled them to study at universities and obtain employment in both government and private sectors according to rules and regulations, pointing out that 93,000 bedoons are under the care of the central department. He said the department submitted a list of various groups to the defense minister through which some can be enlisted in the army, provided that the department checks on the applicant before being accepted. He said bedoons are treated at health centers and hospitals free of charge like citizens.

Meanwhile, Fadhlah discussed at the department with representatives from the social affairs ministry and manpower authority issues related to the employment of bedoons. The department said issues related to employing bedoons in the private and cooperative sectors were discussed, along with those already employed. He asked those present at the meeting to deal with holders of IDs issued by the department and accept more of them according to their legal status.

Teen suffers broken skull in Oyoun fight

KUWAIT: Jahra detectives arrested two bedoons for smashing a juvenile's skull and beating his father in Oyoun, then damaging four vehicles that belong to them. The two claimed the victim broke the window of a car that belongs to one of them. Police and paramedics responded to a call about a fight in Oyoun and found a 17-year-old citizen in critical condition with a fractured skull. The victim's father told police a dispute took place with their neighbors, followed by the two attacking them. Detectives found a video clip of the fight, then went to the suspect's house and arrested them.

Thieves arrested

A gang of seven was busted at Kuwait airport for stealing from the luggage of passengers and stashing it in a Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh apartment. The eight work for a ground services company, and were digging into passengers' luggage and removing valuable items. Following passengers' complaints, four airlines informed concerned authorities about the missing items, including jewelry and cash. Police and detectives kept an eye and identified the suspects, who when questioned, revealed that an Indian man among them is involved in the thefts. He informed police about his accomplices, who were all arrested. They said that when the stolen material became too vast, they rented an apartment in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh to stash the goods. Authorities raided the apartment and found the missing items, including jewelry hidden in a drum full of rice.

—Translated from Al-Rai and Al-Anbaa

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Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: People going out on picnics at a beach near Kuwait City. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Zain volunteers deliver 'Machla Boxes' to disadvantaged families

Company distributes essential food supplies

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading telecommunications company in Kuwait, announced that its team of volunteers packed and delivered essential food supplies 'Machla Boxes' to disadvantaged families in Kuwait throughout four days. The initiative came as part of the company's intensive preparations to welcome the Holy Month of Ramadan.

Distributing 'Machla boxes' is one of the main pillars of Zain's annual Ramadan campaign, which comes in line with the company's Corporate Social

Responsibly and Sustainability strategy. Zain's own team of volunteers packed the boxes - containing essential food supplies - at the company's main headquarters and delivered them to underprivileged families who are in need of support during the month of fasting. The distribution covered multiple

areas of Al-Jahra governorate throughout four days. Zain's distribution plan assured the delivery of essential food supplies to those in need before the arrival of the Holy Month in order to ensure disadvantaged families have enough quantities of the most basic supplies. This initiative is part of a series of programs the company is planning to conduct throughout the Holy Month of Ramadan with the aim of having a deep positive impact on the community's various segments, especially the most vulnerable ones.

In time for Ramadan's arrival

Zain affirmed that its social and CSSR campaign during the upcoming Holy Month of Ramadan will include an extensive array of initiatives and programs that will focus on helping less fortunate people to enjoy Ramadan happily, as well as celebrating the true

spirit the Holy month brings. Zain's solid Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy primarily focuses on the well-being of the entire nation. For this reason, the company has maintained its support of numerous initiatives that spread awareness and help make a difference to people's everyday lives.



KIB sponsors graduation ceremony

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) sponsored the annual graduation ceremony for students from the College of Social Sciences at Kuwait University for the academic year 2017-2018. Held at Jumeirah Messilah Beach Hotel and Spa, the ceremony took place in the presence of a number of academic leaders and faculty members, as well as a group of graduates and their parents.

On this occasion, Manager of the

Corporate Communications Unit at KIB, Nawaf Najia, said: "Our sponsorship of this ceremony came as part of our ongoing support of student-based activities and local educational institutions. Our unwavering social commitment stems from our deep-rooted belief in the important role students play in nation building and future development."

Najia congratulated the new graduates and wished them best of luck in their future careers. He also noted that talented, knowledgeable and ambitious youth continuously make a difference in the development of all fields of work, particularly in the financial and banking sector. KIB always strives to participate in a diverse number of events and activities that serve different segments of the local community, especially youth and students.

World Migratory Bird Day celebrates healthy environment



KUWAIT: The World Migratory Bird Day, which falls on May 12, is an occasion dedicated to the celebration of a healthy global environment. In Kuwait, several migratory birds make a stop in the country on their continuous journey to other parts of the globe. — KUNA photos



Local

Startups in Kuwait

Tech startups in Kuwait



By Attorney Fajer Ahmed

We have seen a rise in Kuwait entrepreneurship and creative commercial activity over the past few years. One topic that has been of interest in Kuwait and the region recently is technology startups and finance technology innovations. With the rise of technology startups in the region and internationally, lawyers and legislators have had to discuss many issues that weren't of concern previously - issues such as data privacy, source-code copyrighting, blockchain technologies, IP rights concerning artificial intelligence and so on.

One topic that many people have been discussing lately is data privacy and the regulations concerning our data that is held by companies. You would be surprised at the amount of data that companies hold about their users from our ad clicks to what we search for to our location, or (in Kuwait) how many times we order food. There is so much to discuss when it comes to technology and data, but today I will be answering the two most common questions. Next week I will follow up with more legal info on data and privacy. If you have any questions please email me on info@ftl-legal.com

Regulations

Question: Are there any laws or regulations in Kuwait which we need to focus on for data collection of clients through our mobile application?

Fajer: There are no specific laws in Kuwait for data collection or privacy. With that said, it is important for startups to self-regulate themselves and to make sure that the data received is secure at all times. It is also important to have terms of service and privacy policies that are easily understood by the users of the mobile application and that they have agreed to these terms of service and privacy policies.

Question: What is the best commercial license to operate with as a technology startup?

Fajer: This question is asked very often by my clients. As there is no commercial license for mobile applications, most clients opt for a general trading license, which gives them a wide range of commercial activities to engage in. I also see a lot of clients that come to me with a commercial license to operate a web development company, thinking that it is the best option for running a mobile application, but my opinion is that a general trading license would be the best option out of the options currently available, as it gives you more flexibility, especially if the company plans a physical presence.

If you have a concern, please email us at info@ftl-legal.com

Jazeera Airways reveals new dedicated terminal at Kuwait International Airport

First terminal owned by a non-government airline

KUWAIT: In a press tour held at its soon-to-open terminal, Jazeera Airways, Kuwait's leading low cost airline, operating regionally and internationally, revealed a state-of-the-art terminal and parking structure ready to welcome passengers in a new travel experience that provides them with improved, fast and customer-centric services.

Leading the tour, Jazeera Airways Chairman, Marwan Boodai, said: "The new Jazeera Airways terminal marks a significant milestone in the development of the aviation industry in Kuwait and the Middle East. It is the first terminal owned by a non-government airline, and a testament to the Government of Kuwait's belief in empowering the private sector to have an active role in the Kuwait Vision 2035. We thank the government of Kuwait and the Directorate General for Civil Aviation for their continued support to our endeavors for advancing the local aviation sector."

Constructed in a record period of 11 months, the Jazeera Airways terminal is located at the Kuwait International Airport and is scheduled to receive its first passengers by end of May 2018. The terminal covers a total area of 4,750 square meters, accommodating close to 2.5 million passengers annually and handling an average of 1,200 bags per hour. The new terminal was designed with passengers in mind, aiming to provide them with a seamless experience from parking, checking-in to boarding.

Three check-in alternatives are made available to serve every segment of passengers. Eleven check-in counters are located at the ground floor level, of which two are dedicated to business travelers and baggage drop-offs for passengers who have checked-in online. A check-in counter enables passengers to check-in large baggage items. Additional check-in alternatives will be made available in the months following the opening. A baggage drop-off counter will be added at the upper floor level, while six self-check-in kiosks will enable passengers to check-in and emigrate within moments.

Boodai added: "In the near future, Jazeera Airways will introduce fully-integrated self-service check-in kiosks where passengers can self-check-in their baggage, scan their passport, print their boarding pass and baggage tags, then drop-off their baggage at a dedicated counter. Our objective is to improve the travel process and automate it to reduce waiting time and serve our fast-paced business and young travellers as well as those travelling with their family or in large groups."

The Jazeera Airways terminal is accessible through a separate entrance located next to the Kuwait International Airport VIP entrance. The parking structure accommodates 350 cars, and gives passengers access to the terminal through a connecting tunnel. The terminal has its own immigration counters at departure and arrival,



KUWAIT: Jazeera Airways officials pose for a group photo at the new terminal. —Photos by Joseph Shagra



and connects directly to the Jazeera Airways dedicated gates B1, B2 and B3 at the Kuwait International Airport. Two baggage belts will serve arriving passengers. Retailers and a duty free will also be revealed soon after the terminal is operational. Key to the terminal is its dedicated VIP service which will enable passengers to take advantage of premium services, in particular business travelers.

Complementing the customer-centric terminal, Jazeera Airways' Park and Fly service will connect passengers to the new terminal. Located at the Jazeera Airways head-

quarters opposite the Amiri Terminal, Park and Fly is ideal for passengers who opt to leaving their car at the Airport for a nominal fee of KD2,500 per day. Passengers can park their car, check-in, drop-off their baggage and enjoy a shuttle transport to the new terminal.

Boodai concluded: "Today, our passengers can enjoy competitive rates, a convenient schedule and a high on-time performance to 26 destinations in the Middle East, West Asia and East Europe, book and check-in online, as well as enjoy self-services and a state-of-the-art terminal that enhances their travel experience."

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Putin reviews Russia 'invincible weapons'

Trump's CIA pick promises no more harsh interrogation

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DEPOK: Indonesian policemen patrol next to a barbed wire fence outside of the mobile brigade headquarter that houses the prison where clashes occurred in Depok, West Java. Five Indonesian police officers and a prisoner were killed in clashes at a high security jail that saw Islamist inmates take an officer hostage. —AFP

Islamist prisoners kill five Indonesian police

One inmate also killed; Jail holds 130 convicted terrorists

DEPOK: Islamist militant prisoners have killed five members of an elite Indonesian counter-terrorism force at a high-security jail and were holding one of them hostage yesterday, police said. One convicted terrorist had also been killed in clashes at the jail in Depok, on the outskirts of the capital Jakarta, national police spokesman Muhammad Iqbal told reporters. Authorities were unsure how many people remained inside the prison complex.

"Five of our colleagues died ... one of our colleagues is still inside and being held hostage," Iqbal said, adding that the hostage was reported to be safe. It was the highest death toll suffered by the counter-terrorism police force, known as Detachment, or

'Densus', 88, which was set up in 2003 and received training and funding from Australia and the United States. The squad largely broke up militant cells in the world's largest Muslim-majority country. But a recent spate of low-level attacks inspired by Islamic State prompted authorities to more than double its force to 1,300 late last year.

Chief security minister Wiranto said the incident was being treated "very carefully because it concerns national security". Police spokesman Iqbal said the prison, at the Mobile Police Brigade headquarters, held about 130 convicted terrorists, but it was unclear how many were involved in the clashes, which broke out late on Tuesday. The prisoners are

suspected of having taken weapons from the police who were killed. Police said four officers were negotiating with the prisoners. "If they surrender, it will be a non-violent process. But if there is a threat to officers or others, we will take very strong action," Iqbal said.

In a message carried on its Amaq news agency, Islamic State claimed responsibility and said 10 counter-terrorism officers had been killed. Iqbal denied that Islamic State was involved. He said a dispute had broken out over checks by prison authorities of prisoners' food. But another police spokesman, Setyo Wasisto, said some of the prisoners had recently met Aman Abdurrahman, who is

believed to be the ideological leader of IS sympathizers in Indonesia. He is on trial for terrorism and is held at the same prison.

Police maintained tight security around the jail and kept onlookers away. Islamic State sympathizers have carried out a series of mostly low-level attacks in Indonesia over the past few years. Last year, an attack by two suicide bombers, using pressure cookers packed with explosives, killed three police and wounded 12 people at a Jakarta bus terminal. In January 2016, four Islamic State-linked militants mounted a gun-and-bomb attack at an intersection outside a Starbucks cafe in central Jakarta, killing themselves and four others.—Reuters

Israeli leader sees victory over Iran deal; dangers lurk

JERUSALEM: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has gained a long-sought personal victory with US President Donald Trump's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, but the move could further ramp up tensions between his country and Tehran. Netanyahu gave a televised address minutes after Trump's announcement on Tuesday to express his strong backing for the "historic" decision, announced in a speech in Washington that reflected many of the Israeli premier's positions. The announcement came after Netanyahu's elaborate unveiling of tens of thousands of intelligence documents on Iran's alleged nuclear ambitions last week, which Trump mentioned in his speech.

Supporters of the nuclear deal say there was little new information in the intelligence documents and that they in fact illustrated the importance of the accord—points that Netanyahu disputes. Within Israel, Trump's decision won enthusiastic support. Many Israelis are concerned over Iran and its threats against their country, frequently highlighted by Netanyahu. "US President Donald Trump read out a synopsis of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech. Word for word, and with no mistakes," Israeli analyst Ben Caspit wrote in Maariv newspaper.

"Every rational Israeli should today cheer Trump and admit honestly, with no relation to political affiliation, that this is also Benjamin Netanyahu's resounding victory." With that victory in hand and heavy sanctions set to be reinstated against his country's main enemy, Netanyahu got down to tough diplomacy Wednesday, travelling to Moscow to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin, who supports the nuclear deal. His talks were likely to centre on Syria and by extension, Iran. Netanyahu could call on Moscow to use its relative influence to try to curb Tehran, said

Emily Landau of Israel's Institute for National Security Studies think tank.

'Irregular activity'

Beyond the nuclear deal, Israelis are deeply concerned over Iran's presence in neighboring Syria. Iran, like Russia, backs Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in his country's seven-year civil war. Israel has pledged not to allow Iran to entrench itself militarily next door and has been accused of carrying out a series of air strikes there that have killed Iranians. The latest came on Tuesday night, when a suspected Israeli strike hit an alleged Iranian weapons depot on the outskirts of Damascus. Eight Iranians were among those killed, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group.

The strikes have raised fears in Israel of potential Iranian retaliation, and on Tuesday—just before Trump's speech—Israel's military asked authorities in the occupied Golan Heights to open and prepare missile shelters. The notice was due to "irregular activity by Iranian forces" over the demarcation line in Syria, the military said. Netanyahu and Putin have held a series of meetings and phone conversations in recent months, particularly related to Syria. The two countries have established a hotline to avoid accidental clashes in the war-torn country. Israel has not acknowledged the recent strikes that have killed Iranians, but it does admit to carrying out dozens of other raids in Syria to stop what it says are advanced arms deliveries to Iran-backed Hezbollah, another of its enemies. It hopes to maintain the ability to do so.

'A better agreement'

Netanyahu has long made it his personal quest to change or cancel the nuclear deal, going as far as to defy then-president Barack Obama and address the US Congress in 2015 to lobby against the accord, which was still being negotiated. Israel will now be closely watching Iran's response to Trump's decision, particularly over uranium enrichment, which was constrained under the deal. "The policymakers in Jerusalem and in Washington must prepare and plan strategy for far more problematic Iranian responses," Amos Yadlin,



MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin (left) and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu arrive to watch the Victory Day military parade at Red Square in Moscow yesterday. —AFP

director of the Institute for National Security Studies, wrote in the Yedioth Ahronoth newspaper. "A likely Iranian response, even if not an immediate one, would be a return to the enrichment policy that was in place before 2013."

All other parties to the agreement—Russia, France, Britain, Germany and China—still support it and say it is the best way to keep Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. Trump and his allies in the Middle East, particularly Israel, argue the agreement was too weak and needs to be replaced with a more permanent arrangement supplemented by controls on Iran's missile program. For Yaakov Nagel, Netanyahu's former national security adviser, "no agreement is better than a bad agreement". On a scale of one to 10, he told journalists, he rated Trump's decision "a little bit more than 10". —AFP

Israeli-Palestinian Mideast peace deal

JERUSALEM: The US decision to move its embassy to Jerusalem has damaged President Donald Trump's push for what he calls the "ultimate deal"—a lasting peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. Here is a look at the state of talks between the two sides:

What are the negotiations?

Seventy years after the creation of Israel, peace with the Palestinians remains elusive. Israel has occupied Palestinian territory since 1967 and the Jewish state has fought three wars with Palestinian militants in Gaza since 2008. Decades of diplomatic efforts have failed to find a solution to one of the world's longest-running conflicts.

How are talks going?

In short, they aren't. There have been no formal peace talks since 2014, following the collapse of efforts by the previous US administration to broker a deal. Since then the two sides have discussed new talks multiple times but have never agreed. Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas accuses Israel of failing to fulfil previous promises, while Israel says Abbas is not ready to make the tough choices needed for peace.

What are the issues?

The toughest issues remain the same as they have been for decades—settlements, refugees and Jerusalem. Israel has occupied the Palestinian territories for more than 50 years, building homes for more than 600,000 Israelis in the West Bank and east Jerusalem. Such settlements are considered illegal under international law. The Palestinian government exercises

limited self-government in Palestinian cities in the West Bank.

Millions of Palestinian refugees live in Gaza, the West Bank and countries surrounding Israel and demand the right to return to the land their families fled from during the war surrounding Israel's creation. Israel rejects this so-called right of return out of hand, saying it would mean the end of the Jewish state. Both the Palestinians and Israelis see Jerusalem, holy to Jews, Christians and Muslims, as their capital. Israel seized control of east Jerusalem in a 1967 war, but its control over the area and its mostly Palestinian population is considered illegal under international law. In December Trump declared Jerusalem as Israel's capital and announced the embassy move, prompting the Palestinians to cut ties with his administration.

What is Trump's plan?

Nothing has been released yet officially but indications are that Trump's plan will be more favorable to Israel than previous peace proposals by US administrations. The White House has yet to commit itself to the two-state solution and Trump's ambassador to Israel has been a supporter of settlements. Abbas continues to refuse to talk with the Trump administration and has said the US can no longer be the sole mediator between Israel and the Palestinians. Relations are close to rock bottom. Abbas recently called Trump's ambassador to Israel a "son of a dog". Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has accused Abbas of walking away from a chance for peace, but has focused more heavily on the threat of Iran when addressing American officials. —AFP

International

Five more Australian MPs leave the parliament after citizenship ruling

Court orders 11th dual-national lawmaker to leave parliament

SYDNEY: Australia faces a series of by-elections after the High Court ruled yesterday an 11th lawmaker must leave parliament in a test-case decision that prompted four more lawmakers to quit amid a widening citizenship crisis. The court found unanimously that opposition Labor Party Senator Katy Gallagher was a British citizen at the time of her election, despite her attempts to renounce it, and so ineligible to be elected to the federal parliament.

Dual citizens are blocked from national elected office under Australia's 117-year-old constitution. The decision prompted four other lawmakers in similar predicaments to Gallagher to resign, triggering by-elections for their lower-house seats. Gallagher and the other four are not members of Australia's ruling centre-right coalition, keeping its slender majority safe, but the resulting polls will be a litmus test of the public mood and Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's popularity ahead of a general election due next year. "By-elections are notoriously difficult things," Nick Economou, a political scientist at Monash University in Melbourne, told Reuters.

He said the Queensland state seat of Longman, held by Labor's Susan Lamb on a knife-edge margin until her resignation yesterday, was a bellwether contest. "If Labor was to lose that, it'd be a huge fillip for Turnbull," Economou said. "On the other hand, if Labor was to win with an increased majority, that would be a sign that there's a problem for the government," he said. Lamb said she intended to recontest her seat and Labor MPs Josh Wilson and Justine Keay, who also resigned on Wednesday, and independent member Rebekha Sharkie, said they would do likewise in their separate electorates. Dates for the by-elections have not been set officially but could be as early as mid-June.

Gallagher, who said she was disappointed but accepted the court ruling, will be replaced by another Labor politician in the Senate. "The High Court has adopted the strictest possible reading," George Williams, professor and Dean of Law at the University of New South Wales in Sydney said. "I'm surprised by the result. I think it delivers a proposition that is unworkable ... because of how hard it will be to comply with these requirements now," he said. In a nation in which half the population were either born overseas or have parents who were, the dual citizenship rule has cut a swath through the national parliament.

It has prompted the departure of 15 lawmakers and last year briefly left Turnbull's Liberal-National coalition clinging to a minority government. Gallagher, who was born in Ecuador to British parents and was conferred British citizenship, filed paperwork and paid processing fees to renounce it more than two months before being elected in July 2016. However, she did not get confirmation from the British Home Office that her renunciation had been processed until after she was elected, according to documents she disclosed to parliament last year. —Reuters

Ultra-Orthodox population grows in Israeli settlements

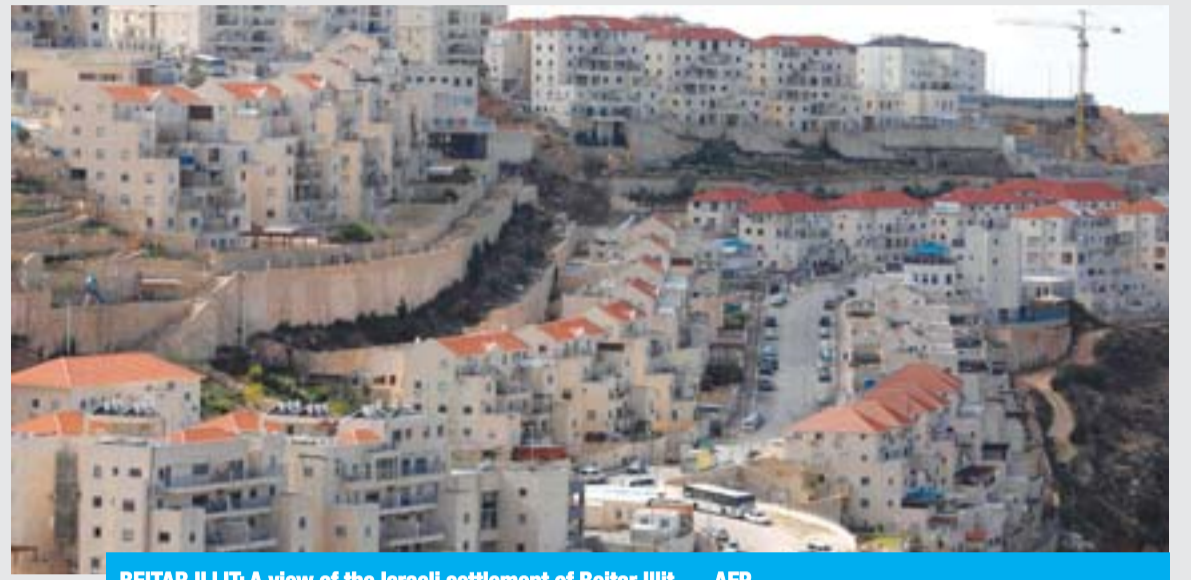
BEITAR ILLIT: In the streets of the Israeli settlement of Beitar Illit, most men wear the traditional black suits of the ultra-Orthodox, a familiar sight in the strictly religious Jewish neighborhoods of nearby Jerusalem. The ultra-Orthodox make up a growing percentage of Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank, a sign of the rapidly expanding population of strictly religious Jews as Israel approaches the 70th anniversary of its founding on May 14.

With more than 56,000 residents, Beitar Illit is one of the most populated settlements in the West Bank, the Palestinian territory under Israeli occupation for more than half a century. Most residents are ultra-Orthodox and strictly observe Jewish law in all aspects of daily life. Men dress in black suits while women wear long dresses and cover their heads. There are no movie theatres, and traffic comes to a halt for 24 hours from Friday evening to mark Shabbat, the weekly day of rest. During the week, young children are easy to spot, reflecting ultra-Orthodox preferences for large families.

Beitar Illit, established in the 1980s on the land of a former Palestinian village, is different from most settlements in the West Bank, which tend to be more secular and politically right-wing. Along with Modiin Illit, another West Bank settlement with 70,000 mainly ultra-Orthodox residents, it illustrates a key demographic change taking place in Israel and its settlements. While the ultra-Orthodox make up around 10 percent of the population among all Israelis, they now count for a third of those in the West Bank, which many Israelis refer to by its biblical name, Judea and Samaria. "Despite our geographic situation, the population of Beitar Illit keeps going up," the municipality's website says.

'Housing crisis'

It adds that there are around 40 births per week, or around 2,000 yearly, well over the Israeli average. At that rate, Jerusalem risks becoming a suburb of Beitar Illit. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu joked during a



BEITAR ILLIT: A view of the Israeli settlement of Beitar Illit. — AFP

visit in 2017. But 50 years after the planting of the first Israeli settlements in the West Bank, the ultra-Orthodox are not choosing to live in Beitar Illit for ideological reasons, unlike many other settlers. "The reason why people live here is the housing crisis," said city hall spokesman Moshe Glasner. "An ultra-Orthodox family would not live here as a first choice if they could live elsewhere."

Economic considerations are accompanied by community and religious concerns. Binyamin Kluger, 45, a community worker who has lived in Beitar Illit for seven years, said he wanted to "live in the midst of the Torah." "It is the ideal area to live as a religious Jew," he said. Israeli settlements are viewed as illegal under international law and a major obstacle to peace as they are built on land the Palestinians see as part of their future state. Israel's government disputes that. More than 600,000 Israeli settlers live in the West Bank and east Jerusalem in near constant conflict with some three million Palestinians there.

'Motivations are different'

Beitar Illit's residents say they have a peaceful relationship with the Palestinians surrounding them—though the Palestinians see all settlements as theft of their land. Israeli cars in the area surrounding the settlement are sometimes targeted by Palestinians throwing stones.

Residents point out that some 1,500 Palestinians work daily in the settlement without incident, though Palestinians have few other options for solid employment in the economically struggling West Bank.

"All you have to do is come here to see how we work together to understand that it is different from the usual image of settlements," said Yoram Cohen, who works in a grocery store and has lived in Beitar Illit for 18 years. Nadav Shragai of the Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs said the increase in the West Bank's ultra-Orthodox population would be welcomed by those in favour of settlement building. "When the ideologues founded communities in the territories, they hoped that the population that came to live there would represent all segments of society, and that is what is happening," he said.

Due to its location, Beitar Illit may be among the settlements that would remain in place in a peace deal with the Palestinians. Hagit Ofran of the Peace Now settlement watchdog said the ultra-Orthodox are among the least likely to oppose a peace deal with the Palestinians. "Their motivations are different and there is a strong possibility that in the event of a peace deal, they would remain in place," she said. "As a result, they are not concerned with territorial matters, unlike the more ideological settlers." — AFP

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International

China, Japan, S Korea highlight unity amid North Korea moves

East Asian powers back North Korea denuclearization

TOKYO: China, Japan and South Korea agreed yesterday to cooperate in seeking the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe saying recent positive momentum must be matched by "concrete action" by North Korea. North Korea, which has been pursuing nuclear and missile programs in defiance of UN Security Council resolutions, figured prominently in talks between the three leaders in Tokyo after South Korean President Moon Jae-in's historic meeting last month with the North's Kim Jong Un.

Kim is expected to have a summit soon with US President Donald Trump. Leaders of the three Asian powers, whose ties have been strained by territorial and historical disputes, also touched on economics in the face of US trade pressure on China and Japan. Abe praised efforts by Moon and China to engage North Korea and said further efforts on denuclearisation were essential.

"We must take the recent momentum towards denuclearisation on the Korean peninsula and towards peace and security in Northeast Asia, and cooperating even further with international society, make sure this is linked to concrete action by North Korea," Abe told a news conference after the meeting. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang also attended the three-way summit, which was last held in Seoul in 2015. Moon said the three countries agreed to highlight unity as the two Koreas moved towards a permanent peace settlement. "Above all, we reached the consensus that complete denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, a permanent peace settlement and improvement of South-North relations is very important for peace and prosperity of Northeast Asia," Moon said.

North and South Korea are technically still at war because their 1950-53 conflict ended in a truce, not a treaty. In talks with Moon later on, Abe expressed Japan's concern that pressure on North Korea might be lifted too early as a "reward" for its shutting down its nuclear test site or halting missile launches. Abe called for additional, specific action, a spokesman for South Korea's presidential office said in a Tokyo briefing. Moon assured Abe that no such steps would be taken without conferring with the United Nations, the United States and others.

Trade pressure and deals

Trump's trade pressure on China and Japan, the world's second and third-largest economies, appeared to have had an impact as Li urged swifter discussions on regional free trade deals, such as a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership backed by Beijing. "We are all beneficiaries of free trade and even though various issues have emerged, these should not stand in the way," Li said. "Through actual behavior, let's show that we three

nations support engaging in free trade." Before a meeting as part of Li's state visit to Japan - the first such visit by a Chinese premier since 2010 - Abe said he wanted to raise bilateral ties to a new level and visit China later this year. After their talk, Abe and Li oversaw the signing of an agreement to set up a security hotline to defuse possible maritime incidents that could spark tensions.

The pact, a decade in the making, also provides for regular meetings between defense officials and a mechanism for their naval vessels to communicate at sea to avert maritime incidents. In remarks to journal-



TOKYO: China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi (front-left) and Japan's Foreign Minister Taro Kono (front-right) exchange signed documents while China's Premier Li Keqiang (back-left) and Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (back-center) look on during a signing ceremony in Tokyo yesterday. East Asian powers throw their weight behind breakneck diplomacy to rid North Korea of nuclear weapons, setting aside their differences on the process to endorse an intra-Korean deal. —AFP



China, Japan sign pact to set up security hotline

Air Force Un: Personal jet for N Korea's Kim

SEOUL: The plane that flew Kim Jong Un to China this week is officially known as "Chammae-1", or Goshawk-1, after the national bird of North Korea-but the leader's personal jet is perhaps more memorably dubbed "Air Force Un". North Korea's official name and flag appear on the ageing Soviet-made aircraft, which first emerged four years ago and has carried Kim on various trips across his country in the past.

Glimpses of the jet's interior are rare, but

images carried by the official Rodong Sinmun newspaper yesterday showed Kim seated in a plush leather armchair, looking out of the window and waving at his Chinese hosts. The Cold War-era Ilyushin-62 is adorned with a red-and-yellow national emblem, ringed with the phrase "Chairman of the State Affairs Commission", a lengthy moniker that is Kim's main political title.

Kim, who is in his 30s, is not president of the reclusive state as the role is still filled by his grandfather Kim Il Sung, despite his death in 1994. This week's China visit was Kim's first overseas trip by air since inheriting power in 2011 - he took the train to Beijing in March when he made his international debut. But despite its comfortable furnishings, analysts have raised doubts about the aircraft's reliability due to its age and questions over its maintenance. —AFP

Putin reviews Russia 'invincible weapons' on the Red Square

MOSCOW: Russia's Vladimir Putin watched advanced jets carrying a hypersonic missile he has touted as invincible scream over Red Square yesterday, days after the start of his fourth presidential term. Part of an annual event marking the Soviet Union's World War Two victory over the Nazis, Putin looked on as thousands of troops marched past him and columns of tanks rumbled across the famous square in a show of military might reminiscent of those displayed during the Cold War.

Putin reviewed the parade from a tribune packed with Soviet war veterans, some of whom wore rows of campaign medals and clutched red roses. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in Moscow for talks on Syria, was also present, as was Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic. The authorities, backed by state media, use the event to boost patriotic feeling and show the world and potential buyers of military hardware how a multi-billion dollar modernization program is changing the face of the Russian military.

Putin, whose relations with the West are on a hostile trajectory, has said he does not want an arms race while warning potential enemies that his country has developed a new generation of invincible weapons to protect itself just in case. "We remember the tragedies of the two world wars, about the lessons of history which do not allow us to become blind. The same old ugly traits are appearing along with new threats: egoism, intolerance, aggressive nationalism and claims to exceptionalism," Putin said, addressing the parade.

"We understand the full seriousness of those threats," added Putin, who complained about what he said were unacceptable attempts to rewrite history while saying Russia was open to talks on global security if it helped ensure peace in the world. Weapons displayed on Red Square included Russia's Yars mobile intercontinental nuclear missile launcher, its Iskander-M ballistic missile launchers, and its advanced S-400 air defense missile system, which Moscow has deployed in Syria to protect its forces.

Putin has sharply increased military spending over the 18 years he has dominated Russian politics, handed the Russian military significant policy-making clout, and deployed Russian forces in Ukraine and Syria, stoking tensions with the West. As commander-in-chief, he has also at times donned military uniform himself and been filmed at the controls of a strategic bomber and on the conning tower of a submarine in photo opportunities designed to boost his man of action image.

ists, both men hailed warming ties between their countries with Li saying better relations between them was contributing to global stability and development. Diplomatic relations between the two nations, clouded by Japan's occupation of parts of China before and during World War Two, have gradually improved after deteriorating sharply in 2012, when Tokyo nationalized a cluster of disputed East China Sea islets that China also claims.

As the meeting's host, Abe has won an opportunity

News in brief

Quake rocks Afghanistan

KABUL: A strong 6.2-magnitude earthquake rocked northern Afghanistan yesterday, the US Geological Survey said, creating tremors felt as far away as Pakistan's capital Islamabad. The quake struck at 10:41 GMT near Afghanistan's border with Tajikistan in the Hindu Kush mountains at a depth of 111 kilometers, the USGS said. It was the second earthquake to shake the country yesterday. AFP correspondents in Kabul felt the ground move for at least a minute in the second quake. There were no immediate reports of damage or casualties in the north-eastern province of Badakhshan where the earthquake was centered. Kabul was already on edge after a series of explosions rocked the city earlier in the day. —AFP

Buhari 'unwell' to govern

ABUJA: Nigeria's main opposition party has said President Muhammadu Buhari is unfit to run the country after he again left for London on medical grounds. The 75-year-old former military ruler last year spent five months in London seeking treatment for an undisclosed illness that he said required multiple blood transfusions. He flew out again on Tuesday, citing a request from his doctor, and pledged to be back in Nigeria on Saturday. But the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) said in a statement on Tuesday evening it was an admission that he was "unwell, ailing and unfit to attend to state matters". —AFP

Italian 'strangled to death'

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani police yesterday said an Italian woman who died under suspicious circumstances last month was strangled to death, in a case that made headlines in Italy over claims she was murdered in a so-called honor killing. Police in the eastern city of Gujrat launched an investigation into the death of Sana Cheema-of Pakistani origin and believed to have been in her mid-twenties-after allegations she had been murdered by relatives spread online. Her body was later exhumed and an autopsy performed, leading to the discovery she had been brutally assaulted. "It has now been confirmed that she was strangled to death. And according to the report, her neck was also broken," Irfan Sulehri, a senior police officer in Gujrat said. A second police officer from Gujrat, Waqar Gujjar, confirmed the findings of the forensics report. —AFP

Two Indian guards killed

NEW DELHI: Militants exploded a bomb yesterday outside an Indian paramilitary headquarters in the restive northeastern state of Manipur killing two soldiers, a force spokesman said. No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack on the Border Security Force (BSF) base in the state capital of Imphal. But dozens of tribal, nationalist and small rebel groups operate in the remote region near the Myanmar border. About a dozen paramilitaries were taking part in an operation to check roads outside the base when the improvised explosive device went off, a force spokesman said. "Two of our soldiers were killed in the IED blast. The area has been cordoned off and investigations are on," the spokesman added. Two civilians were injured in the explosion. Two paramilitaries were injured on Tuesday after militants hurled grenades at another base in the city. —AFP



MOSCOW: Russia's MiG-29 jet fighters of the Strizhi aerobatic team and Su-30 jet fighters of the Russkiye Vityazi aerobatic team fly over Red Square during the Victory Day military parade in Moscow yesterday. —AFP

'Invincible missile'

The first public outing of the Kinjal (Dagger) hypersonic missile, carried by advanced MiG-31K interceptor jets, was one of several world premieres for Russian weapons. Putin disclosed the Kinjal's existence in March along with other missile systems he touted as unbeatable, describing how it could evade any enemy defenses. Russian media have said it can hit targets up to 2,000 km (1,250 miles) distant with nuclear or conventional warheads and that the missiles have already been deployed in Russia's southern military district.

Russia's most advanced fifth generation Su-57 stealth fighter, which has undergone testing in Syria, also took part in the parade for the first time, as did an unmanned armored reconnaissance and infantry support vehicle, the Uran-9. Armed with a 30mm automatic cannon, a machine gun, anti-tank missiles and a rocket launcher, it looks like something out of a Hollywood science fiction film. An unmanned de-mining vehicle, the Uran-6, was also put on show, as were Russia's latest military drones and an armored vehicle designed to support tanks on the battlefield dubbed "The Terminator" by its maker.

An advanced Russian military snowmobile fitted with a machine gun, the Berkut, built to bolster Moscow's Arctic ambitions, also traversed the cobbled square. The Moscow parade was one of many which took place across Russia yesterday involving a total of 55,000 troops, 1,200 weapons systems and 150 war planes in 28 Russian cities. Some politicians in former Soviet republics and satellite states regard the parade as crude sabre-rattling by a resurgent Russia they say poses a threat to Europe's security. Russia dismisses such allegations as nonsense. —Reuters

**Announcement from Ministry of Commerce & Industry
Consumer Protection Department**

Ministry of Commerce & Industry
Consumer Protection Department, in accordance with Law No. 39/2014, and in cooperation with Mohamed Naser Al Sayer & Sons Est. Co.

Toyota Motor Corporation announces recall on Toyota Camry 2018 Model to inspect and reprogram the software for Navigation Unit.

Models & Production dates:

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International

Fear, loathing and dismay in Iran as US exits nuclear deal

Jubilation gives way to gloom as renewed sanctions loom

ANKARA: Morad Sabzevari was among thousands of jubilant Iranians who took to the streets to celebrate a nuclear deal with major powers in 2015. He expected it to end his country's isolation, and even bring prosperity one day. Sabzevari's hopes were dashed on Tuesday, when President Donald Trump announced the United States was withdrawing from "a horrible, one-sided deal" and reimposing sanctions on Iran.

His tougher-than-expected tone rattled Sabzevari, 47, a school teacher in central city of Isfahan, criticized Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, a pragmatist who overcame fierce opposition from hardliners to secure the deal. "I am scared. I listened to Trump's speech on English news channels last night ... It was a declaration of war against Iran. It means pressure. It means dark days and months are ahead of us," Sabzevari said by telephone.

"What should I do? I have two children. Mr. President you failed." The nuclear pact, designed to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear bomb, was thrashed out by the United States, five other world powers and Iran and traded a lifting of sanctions in exchange for curbs on Tehran's nuclear program. Trump said the accord, the signature foreign policy achievement of his predecessor Barack Obama, failed to address Iran's ballistic missile program, its nuclear activities beyond 2025 and its role in conflicts in the Middle East, where it is involved in proxy wars with US ally Saudi Arabia.

Rouhani has sought to reassure ordinary Iranians, already deeply frustrated by high unemployment and low living standards, that Iran's oil-reliant economy could withstand a return to the economic pressures that will follow Trump's decision. But Fariba Saravi, 26-year-old PhD student at Tehran Azad University, was pessimistic. "I am tired of empty words, promises, lies ... Trump's message was clear. We will be squeezed.

We will be isolated again but this time with a crazy person like Trump, it will be worse than before (the deal)," she said.

Fearing sanctions

Iran's economy has continued to struggle despite the easing of sanctions from 2016. Average unemployment of 12 percent rises close to 30 percent among Iran's restless youth - more than 30 percent of Iran's 80 million population are aged 18 to 30. In late December, Iranians staged nationwide demonstrations over poor living standards, calling on Rouhani as well as top clerical leaders to step down. For many, the picture looks even grimmer after Trump's decision and there is a risk the deal will collapse entirely even though European signatories are trying to hold it together. "You know what? They did not have money to pay our salaries. Now it will be even worse ... God help us," said factory worker Mostafa, 38, in the northern city of Noshahr. "I have not got my wage in the past two months. Mr Rouhani promised more jobs ... but now I will be jobless." Pressure will mount on the Iranian leadership when US restrictions cut its oil exports that are the engine of Iran's economy, raising the prospect of

further unrest.

"Why should foreigners invest in Iran when we are trying to move our businesses to another country," said a businessman, who asked not to be named, in the holy Shiite city of Mashhad. "I am in the dried fruit export business. Since last night, I have been seriously thinking of moving to a neighboring country like Turkey." More Iranians could come to the same conclusion as sanctions bite. Many foreign firms have shunned Iran, in part due to the remaining sanctions unilaterally imposed by the United States over what it says are human rights violations, terrorism, and the dominant role of the Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in Iran's economy.



TEHRAN: Iranians burn print-outs of US flags during an anti-US demonstration outside the former US embassy headquarters in the capital Tehran yesterday. —AFP



Deep frustrations over economic hardship

Trump's CIA pick promises no more harsh interrogation

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump's nominee to head the CIA promised lawmakers yesterday she would never resume a program of harsh interrogations, often denounced as torture, that has been the major issue complicating her confirmation. Gina Haspel, currently the spy agency's acting director, also told her Senate confirmation hearing she would not carry out any order from Trump that she found morally objectionable.

"My moral compass is strong. I would not allow CIA to undertake activity that I thought was immoral, even if it was technically legal. I would absolutely not permit it," Haspel told the Senate Intelligence Committee. Haspel also faced questions during the hearing about her role in the use of harsh interrogation methods during former President George W. Bush's administration, as well as the destruction of videotapes documenting the questioning.

"Having served in that tumultuous time, I can offer you my personal commitment, clearly and without reservation, that under my leadership, on my watch, CIA will not restart such a detention and interrogation program," Haspel testified. Haspel said US law now clearly prohibits such interrogation methods, and "I fully support the detainee treatment required by law." Public questioning of Haspel on issues such as the effectiveness of the interrogations, CIA drone strikes and agency

"renditions" of suspected militants to third countries may be limited because the operations remain classified.

"CIA has learned some tough lessons, especially when asked to tackle missions that fall outside our expertise," Haspel said, explaining that in retrospect the agency was not prepared to conduct the detention and interrogation program employed after the Sept 11, 2001, attacks on the United States by Al-Qaeda militants. Haspel needs 51 votes to be confirmed as the first woman director of the CIA in the 100-seat Senate, where Trump's fellow Republicans hold a 51-49 majority. The agency's former deputy director, she would succeed Mike Pompeo, a Republican former congressman confirmed last month as secretary of state.

Haspel already has the strong support of many Republicans. As he opened the hearing, the panel's Republican chairman, Richard Burr, praised Haspel. "I believe your intellectual rigor, honorable service and outstanding judgment make you a natural fit to lead the CIA," he said, urging that the hearing not be made "a trial about a long-shuttered program." But Haspel could face a difficult time being confirmed. At least one Republican, Senator Rand Paul, has said he opposes her, and others have said they will wait to see how she does at yesterday's hearing. No Democrat has yet expressed support for Haspel.

'Morally questionable behavior'

Senator Mark Warner, the committee's top Democrat, said his vote on Haspel's confirmation will largely depend on how she expresses her current views on the harsh techniques and a 2005 decision to destroy tapes of interrogations. "We must hear how you would react if the president asks you to carry out some morally questionable behavior that might seem to violate a



WASHINGTON: Gina Haspel testifies before the Senate Intelligence Committee on her nomination to be the next CIA director in the Hart Senate Office Building on Capitol Hill yesterday. —AFP

law or treaty," Warner said in his opening statement.

Warner also said he would want Haspel's commitment to cooperate in investigations into Russia's role in the 2016 US election. Trump has called those investigations a "witch hunt." Before the hearing, a small group of protesters started shouting, "Say no to torture." They were forcibly removed by the Capitol police. Haspel described what she called the complex challenges her agency must confront, including terrorist groups, a nuclear threat against the continental United States by North Korea, "destabilizing Iranian adventurism," China's ambitions on the global

stage and "an aggressive and sometimes brutal Russia."

An undercover officer for most of her more than 30-year career, Haspel in 2002 served as CIA station chief in Thailand, where the agency ran one of the secret prisons where suspected al Qaeda extremists were interrogated using procedures that included waterboarding, which simulates drowning. A 2014 Senate Intelligence Committee investigation concluded that harsh intelligence methods during Bush's presidency were "not an effective way of obtaining accurate information or gaining detainee cooperation." —Reuters

News in brief

Volcano erupts again

PAHOA: The Kilauea volcano erupted again on Tuesday, spewing toxic gases out of two new vents and prompting authorities to call for an immediate evacuation of residents from a second neighborhood on the Big Island. The County of Hawaii Civil Defense Agency issued an emergency bulletin ordering residents of the Lanipuna Gardens area on the east side of the island to leave their homes. "Hawaiian Volcano Observatory confirms 2 new vents. All Lanipuna residents must evacuate now," the agency said in its bulletin, adding that the two vents had opened near two road intersections and were "actively erupting". —Reuters

Turkey coup 'ringleaders'

ANKARA: Turkish prosecutors yesterday demanded that former generals suspected of being the ringleaders of a failed 2016 coup be handed 252 life sentences. The trial in Ankara is the most significant in a series being held across the country to bring to justice tens of thousands of people charged over the coup aimed at ousting President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Several of the suspects on trial are accused of leading the so-called "Peace At Home Council", the name the plotters are said to have given themselves the night of the failed overthrow. They include ex-air force commander Akin Ozturk, Mehmet Disli, the brother of senior ruling party figure Saban Disli and colonel Ali Yazici, Erdogan's former military aide. —AFP

Don't 'abandon' S Sudan

JUBA: South Sudan's government urged the United States yesterday not to "abandon" the country after Washington said it would review its assistance programs because it could not continue a partnership with leaders perpetuating "endless war". "We are asking the United States not to abandon this country (South Sudan) because we need them - their role to assist the population of South Sudan is crucial and cannot be ignored", said foreign affairs ministry spokesman Mawien Makol Ariik. The United States is the largest donor of humanitarian assistance to South Sudan, which has been in the throes of a civil war since late 2013 that has displaced around a third of the 12 million-strong population and killed tens of thousands of people. —Reuters

Stowaway rats eradicated

LONDON: Two centuries after rats first landed on the British overseas territory of South Georgia on board sealing and whaling ships, a team of conservationists yesterday declared the island rodent-free. British and US scientists used poisoned bait in the largest rat eradication project of its kind, which cost 10 million pounds (11 million euros, \$14 million), lasted a decade and covered 1,087 square kilometers. "Invasive rodents have been successfully eradicated from the island," Mike Richardson, head of the South Georgia Heritage Trust project, said in a statement. Rats and mice arrived with the first humans starting in the late 18th century and had "a devastating effect" on the local bird population, the statement said. The rodents threatened the survival of two species found nowhere else on Earth—the South Georgia pipit and pin-tail, the conservationists said. —AFP

IAA unveils new identity on its 80th anniversary

NEW YORK: The International Advertising Association (IAA) has unveiled a new identity and mission, symbolized by the introduction of a new logo that signifies its transformation and culture of thought leadership built over the association's 80-year history. Since its founding, IAA's mission has been based on the belief in the powerful role communications can play, if properly directed, in the lives of consumers and in the world.

Over the years, IAA has embraced the changes and indeed guided the industry through the disruption caused product innovations, changing consumers' preferences, proliferation of media choices, and new and innovative modes of product delivery. It supports the cause of advertising self-regulation with the strong belief, that if we don't regulate ourselves, someone else will. The association's new identity and logo is centered on a twenty-first century compass, that guidemarketers, agencies, media - and now digi-

tal, interactive and e-commerce companies - to deepen the relevance of marketing communications in today's multi-faceted global marketplace.

"From the beginning, our aspiration was to be the pre-eminent organization, unified across borders, to embrace opportunities and confront challenges of an ever-evolving marketing landscape," said IAA Chairman and Global President, Felix Tataru. Solidifying its new mission, the IAA will be hosting its Global Marketing Summit on April 27 at Time Warner Center in New York. The annual conference brings together more than 200 of the world's leading members of the international advertising community to share best practices and share industry challenges.

"Each year we strive to bring speakers to our Global Marketing Summit who will stimulate discussion and offer solutions to issues facing the global advertising industry," said Tataru. "This year's programming will not only debate the industry's most

pressing issues, but bring our new mission into focus." Kicking off the Summit is a morning keynote delivered by Antonio Lucio, CMO of HP Inc, who will be addressing the current renaissance of marketing, where traditional advertising matters less, and creating impactful consumer experiences, jaw dropping design, convenient utilities and satisfying services matter more.

Additionally, the Global Marketing Summit will discuss the following topics with senior marketing executives from American Express, Chase, Diageo, Flipboard, Google, Mastercard, SAP, SSGA, Verizon, The Washington Post and Zenith Worldwide: Best practices in artificial intelligence and cognitive computing and how it is revolutionizing marketing; How brands can gain trust in an era of fake news and consumer mistrust; Brand safety and how marketers can properly break through to earn consumers' time and attention.

Analysis

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US pullout a blow to North Korea hopes

US President Donald Trump's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal is a major setback to US negotiating credibility and will complicate efforts to reach an agreement with Pyongyang over its own more advanced weapons program, analysts say. Trump is set to hold a much-anticipated and unprecedented summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in the coming weeks to negotiate over Pyongyang's arsenal, after it last year carried out by far its most powerful nuclear test to date and launched missiles capable of reaching the US mainland.

But the US president Tuesday pulled Washington out of the 2015 accord with Tehran, pouring scorn on the "disastrous" agreement and describing it an "embarrassment" to the United States - although European signatories and the IAEA say Iran has complied with its obligations. Antony Blinken, who was deputy secretary of state under Barack Obama, said the White House move "makes getting to yes with North Korea that much more challenging". "Why would Kim ... believe any commitments President Trump makes when he arbitrarily tears up an agreement with which the other party is complying?" he asked on Twitter.

MIT political science professor Vipin Narang added: "Today is a stark reminder across the world: Deals are reversible and can have expiration dates, while nuclear weapons can offer lifetime insurance." North Korea remains technically at war after the 1950-53 Korean War ended with a ceasefire rather than an armistice, and Pyongyang has long insisted that it needs nuclear weapons to defend itself from a possible US invasion.

Two weeks ago Trump's new national security advisor John Bolton said "We have very much in mind the Libya model," for the denuclearization of North Korea. Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi agreed to abandon his pursuit of nuclear weapons in the early 2000s, but his government was later overthrown by rebel forces supported by Western air strikes, and he was killed. Pyongyang regularly cites the fates of Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein in Iraq - whose government was overthrown in a US-led invasion - as evidence of the need for nuclear arms.

Former CIA director John Brennan said Trump's "madness" had "undermined global confidence in US commitments, alienated our closest allies, strengthened Iranian hawks, and gave North Korea more reason to keep its nukes". Some were more sanguine. Pyongyang was concerned about the sustainability of a deal and sees democratic changes of government as a "structural weakness that imperils agreements by any one White House", said Yonsei University professor John Delury. But he added: "They'd be worried less about Trump pulling out of a deal than his successor."

Security guarantee

The unilateral nature of Trump's move is also likely to worry officials at the Blue House in Seoul. The decision was made despite repeated personal pleas by European leaders and cast aside more than a decade and a half of careful diplomacy by Britain, China, France, Germany, Iran, Russia and past US administrations. South Korean President Moon Jae-in has been widely praised for seizing the opportunity presented by the Winter Olympics to broker talks between Trump and Kim - two leaders who were at loggerheads just months before, and threatening to wage a war which would inevitably devastate the South.

But the fate of the Iran deal suggests Trump could also dismiss pleas from Seoul - a treaty ally - in future. Analysts pointed to Kim's repeated trips to China as evidence Pyongyang was looking for support from its longstanding diplomatic protector and provider of trade and aid. Kim met President Xi Jinping this week for the second time in little more than a month, after not paying his respects to him for six years after taking power as their relationship frayed.

"North Korea has been fully aware of the risks of the US walking away from any deal whenever its government changes hands," said Koh Yu-hwan of Dongguk University told AFP. "In order to hedge against this eventuality, Kim Jong Un met Xi Jinping twice to obtain a firmer security guarantee from China before he enters a deal with the US." And Pyongyang wanted wider assurances, he added.

According to China's official Xinhua news agency, Kim told Xi that "relevant parties" should "abolish their hostile policies and remove security threats against the DPRK". "This means the North is seeking a global commitment to a deal with the US to prevent the US from unilaterally rolling it back," Koh said. —AFP

INFINITY TRADE WAR



Russia played silent kingmaker in Armenia

In the days before protesters overthrew Armenia's veteran leader, Russian officials had high-level phone contacts with the protest leaders and the ruling elite that was clinging to power, according to three people briefed on the discussions. Weeks of protests against corruption and cronyism culminated on Tuesday in Nikol Pashinyan, the protest leader, becoming prime minister, in a dramatic rupture with the cadre of officials who have run this ex-Soviet state since the late 1990s.

Breaking the mould of previous ex-Soviet popular revolts, especially a bloody uprising in Ukraine in 2014, Moscow did not back the ruling elite or their right to use force to crush the protest movement. Unlike his counterparts in Ukraine, Pashinyan said he had no plans to pull Armenia out of Moscow's orbit, and he took steps to reassure Moscow on that score, including via direct contacts, two of the sources said.

During the protests, Pashinyan spoke to the Russian embassy in Yerevan, and to an official in the Russian foreign ministry in Moscow, according to one of the protest leaders, Armen Grigoryan, and a businessman close to Pashinyan's circle who did not want to be identified. "We worked with them," said Grigoryan, referring to Russian officials. He said protest leaders explained to Moscow the nature of their movement and that Russia's interests would not be served by blocking them. Russia's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment on any contacts it had with people in Yerevan during the crisis.

In the streets, Pashinyan's supporters were encouraged to display only Armenian national symbols - a conscious break from the Ukraine revolt which angered Moscow by adopting the European Union flag. On the other side of the standoff, Serzh Sargsyan, Armenia's ruler for a decade, was in touch with Russian officials as he fought for survival, according to a diplomatic source who spoke on condition of anonymity. In the 24 hours before Sargsyan quit as prime minister on April 23, he had telephone calls with officials in Moscow, the diplomatic source said. He did not reveal the content of the calls.

Russia's influence was not the only factor in Armenia's revolution. Missteps by Sargsyan and the energy of the protest movement

played critical roles. But the contacts with Russia help explain how Armenia was able to sweep its rulers away without violence or a prolonged standoff with the police. Reuters has found no evidence that Russia actively intervened in the events in Armenia. Indeed, Moscow's decision not to do so could have been enough to tilt the balance in favor of the protesters.

The contacts also underline how President Vladimir Putin's foreign policy, focused on stopping the West encroaching on Russia's sphere of influence, has turned the Kremlin into de facto kingmaker in parts of the former Soviet Union. Moments after he was installed

social media to organize. It attracted young people, many not previously involved in politics.

It used humor and satire. For example, the movement organized a spoof fundraising campaign to create a retirement fund for Sargsyan. It circulated a caricature of Sargsyan photo-shopped to look like a dim-witted character from a Soviet-era children's cartoon. It also used direct action. "You don't need many people to block a road, and that's how we started," said Grigoryan.

Crucially, it kept the focus on domestic concerns and steered away from the kind of geopolitical themes that dominated Ukraine's "Euromaidan" anti-Moscow uprising in 2014. "We learned from Euromaidan that a revolution should not have an international agenda," said Grigoryan. He said no explicit instructions were given to supporters not to wave the EU or U.S. flags at rallies, but he said: "It was generally understood that it would be just Armenian flags at our protests."

Phone calls with Moscow

By April 22, the protests had snowballed, driven by public anger that Sargsyan was switching from the presidency to the job of prime minister to get around constitutional term limits and extend his grip on power. Tens of thousands of people marched through Yerevan, blocking streets and staging sit-ins. Sargsyan had no plans to quit at that point. He walked out of talks with Pashinyan after a few minutes, saying he would not give in to "blackmail." The same day, police detained three opposition leaders, including Pashinyan, along with nearly 200 protesters.

Yet the next day, Sargsyan changed direction, and resigned as prime minister. In the intervening 24 hours, Sargsyan had intensive discussions with his own allies and officials. They discussed the possibility of implementing a state of emergency, which would give security agencies greater powers to use force against the protesters. "We had two options: Parliament could introduce a state of emergency in the country or Serzh Sargsyan could resign," said Eduard Sharmazanov, a lawmaker with the ruling Republican Party and deputy speaker of parliament. "Introducing a state of emergency would not solve the problem, but postpone it." —Reuters

Moscow did not back ruling elite



as prime minister, Pashinyan said he hoped to meet Putin for talks soon, and he was sent a telegram from the Russian leader congratulating him on his appointment, the Kremlin said.

No EU flags

Sitting in an art cafe in central Yerevan, Pashinyan associate Grigoryan recalled how, when the protests started, few imagined they would lead to a revolution. Not more than 150 people showed up for the first rally against Sargsyan in Yerevan, on March 21, he said. The movement adopted some innovative approaches. It was not tied explicitly to a political party. It used

Who needs Chavez? Maduro pushes own image in campaign

During his 2013 presidential campaign, Nicolas Maduro opened rallies with an emotional recording of Venezuela's national anthem sung by the recently-deceased Hugo Chavez. In a strategy that earned him a narrow victory, Maduro surrounded himself with images of the popular former president, played footage of his socialist mentor anointing him as successor, and proclaimed himself "the son of Chavez". This time around, in a strangely unopposed presidential race boycotted by the mainstream opposition, Maduro has deliberately relegated the Chavez props.

Ignoring his personal unpopularity, fueled by rising hunger and violent crime as the oil-reliant economy implodes, the 55-year-old former bus driver and foreign minister has placed himself front-and-center of the campaign for the May 20 vote. At rallies, he dances to a catchy reggaeton tune "Todos con Maduro" (Everyone with Maduro), amid huge 'M' banners on stage. Crowds wave pictures of his beaming mustachioed visage, albeit sometimes with Chavez's face floating above him.

"Our commander (Chavez) left us, but we must carry on the fight, don't leave me alone!" Maduro implored at a recent rally. "Five years ago, I was a novice candidate. No more. Now I am a mature president, ready, experienced, with the balls to confront the oligarchy and imperialism." Maduro's approach seems a bold one. Polls show the defunct Chavez is still the most popular political figure by far, while the incumbent president's own ratings have sunk - along with Venezuela's economy.

Yet the strategy reflects Maduro's absolute confidence of winning a new six-year term. And why not? The two most popular opposition figures are barred from the election, state resources are at his service, loyalists control potentially pesky bodies like the judiciary and election board, and the opposition has split bitterly over whether to abstain from the vote. Furthermore, within the ruling "Chavismo" movement, Maduro outmaneu-

vered would-be rivals, such as powerful party No. 2 Diosdado Cabello, to make his candidacy a fait accompli. Maduro's consolidation of power began with the 2017 defeat of opposition protests, then a purge this year of former Chavez loyalists critical of him, like former oil czar Rafael Ramirez. Now Maduro wants to drive home the advantage, trying to establish his own brand above government power struggles.

Options limited

"For good or for bad, Maduro is the only major political figure on the scene right now," said Hebert Garcia, a former general and minister who split with Maduro several years ago. "So this election is like putting an image in front of someone and saying 'choose' - but there's no one else to choose from!" he said from the United States, where he works as a consultant, evading corruption charges by the Maduro government. There are several other names on the ballot sheet - former state governor Henri Falcon and evangelical Christian pastor Javier Bertucci being the most prominent. But many opposition supporters see them as stooges and "collaborators" participating in a sham to legitimize Maduro's "dictatorship". Some polls actually give a lead to Falcon, who broke with the mainstream opposition's boycott of the vote.

But the widespread abstention anticipated, Maduro's formidable political machinery, the vote-winning power of state handouts, coercion of government employees, and the pro-Maduro makeup of the election board make Falcon's task Herculean.

As confident as Maduro may appear right now on the political stage, his Achilles Heel remains the economy. Venezuela is suffering a fifth year of recession with a double-digit contraction expected for 2018, inflation is the highest in the world, and the minimum monthly salary is worth barely \$2 at the black market exchange rate. Scarcity of food and medicines is widespread, and hundreds of thousands have left the

country in recent years - increasingly by foot, bus and even bicycle.

Crisis may deepen

So Maduro will still have a crisis on his hands even if he wins. Washington is threatening to add oil sanctions to existing measures to stop Venezuela from issuing new debt, while restive creditors are considering more aggressive tactics. There are no signs of reforms to the failing state-led economic model. Maduro's campaign mantra is to blame everyone from US President Donald Trump to the local business community for the economic mess, ignoring the damage caused by botched nationalizations and dysfunctional currency controls.

Apart from promising a Utopian economic "rebirth", he has given few details on his post-election plans. Many fear further retrenchment and moves against business such as last week's 90-day seizure of the nation's largest private bank. Maduro's election rallies around the country are notably smaller, more strictly corralled and shorter than in 2013. Away from the obediently ecstatic front rows, there is plenty of grumbling by unhappy Venezuelans. "It's the most flavorless and colorless campaign for at least 20 years," scoffed former oil minister Ramirez, who had wanted to stand as the candidate of "Chavismo" but is instead in exile in an undisclosed foreign location.

At one recent campaign rally in Barinas state, flustered organizers hit the phones to try to boost numbers. A visibly irritated Maduro blamed poor turnout on rain - even though it only started falling after the event, witnesses said. "I came to see what he would say about fixing the economy," said Aparicio Teran, a 49-year-old peasant farmer, who like many in the agricultural savannah state is struggling for lack of bank loans, pesticides and cattle feed. "I'm leaving without hearing anything about credits, fertilizers, herbicides, fungicides, food for the cows. We can't go on like this. All we can look forward to is hunger."

Though food has become Venezuelans' No. 1 worry, many see no option but to vote for Maduro - in part to guarantee receiving state-subsidized food bags that millions depend on. And Maduro still has core support among about one-fifth of Venezuelans, who swear loyalty to Chavez's legacy come what may. "The entire people is fighting for its future, against the destructive policies of US imperialism and its European allies, against the blockade (sanctions) and against the economic war," said Carlos Marquez, 24, in Barinas, wearing the red cap and T-shirt associated with diehard "Chavistas". —Reuters



News

North Korea frees US detainees ahead of Trump summit

WASHINGTON: North Korea has freed three American detainees, President Donald Trump announced yesterday, hailing a diplomatic victory ahead of a planned summit with Kim Jong Un. Pyongyang granted the three men "amnesty," a US official said, and they were on their way back to the United States with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Two of the men, agricultural expert Kim Hak-sung and former professor Tony Kim were arrested in 2017, while Kim Dong-chul, a South Korea-born American businessman and pastor in his 60s, was sentenced to 10 years' hard labor in 2016.

"I am pleased to inform you that Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is in the air and on his way back from North Korea with the 3 wonderful gentlemen that everyone is looking so forward to meeting. They seem to be in good health," Trump tweeted. The White House said all three men were able to walk unassisted onto a US Air Force plane that carried them and the secretary of state out of North Korea. A second plane, with more robust medical equipment, waited for them at Yokota Air Force Base, just outside Tokyo. "All indications are their health is as good as could be given they been through," said Pompeo.

The family of Tony Kim voiced their gratitude to "all of those who have worked toward and contributed to his return home" - and specifically thanking Trump for "engaging directly with North Korea". "Mostly, we thank God for Tony's safe return," the family said in a statement. "We ask that you continue to pray for the people of North Korea and for the release of all who are still being held."

Trump meanwhile described the release as "a gesture of good will" and said he would be on hand when Pompeo's three "guests" land at Andrews Air Force Base outside Washington at 2:00 am (0600 GMT) today. Trump acolytes declared the release an unbridled political victory, evidence, Vice President Mike Pence said, that "strong leadership and our America First policies are paying dividends".

The men's release appears to pave the way for a much-anticipated summit between Trump and North Korean leader Kim, scheduled to take place within weeks. Trump spoke with his South Korean counterpart Moon Jae-in following the release, telling him he expected it would positively affect the summit, according to the Blue House. Seoul echoed that sentiment, with Moon's press secretary predicting it would be a "very positive factor" for the talks' success, according to a statement cited by Yonhap news agency.

Summit details to follow

Trump says a time, date and location have been decided for that historic summit, although US officials say it



PYONGYANG: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo exits his plane on arrival in the North Korean capital yesterday. — AFP

still some fine-tuning to be done. The president told reporters the administration would announce the details "within three days" but said it would not be at the Demilitarized Zone that separates North and South Korea. Other possible locations include Singapore. The meeting will discuss North Korea's nuclear and ballistic weapons program, which may soon give Pyongyang the capability of striking the continental United States.

Trump has demanded that North Korea give up its nukes, while Kim has offered few indications about what he is willing to concede or what he will demand in return. North Korea has often insisted that the United States withdraw support for South Korea, where 30,000-plus US military personnel are stationed. Since coming to office Trump has embarked on a campaign of "maximum pressure" on the North Korean regime.

A series of provocative North Korean missile tests have been met with US sanctions and a tougher Chinese stance on cross border trade. Officials in Washington believe the punitive economic measures have prompted fuel shortages in North Korea and increased tension inside the regime. North Korea official Kim Yong Chul, who met Pompeo in Pyongyang, insisted the country's openness to talks was "not the result of sanctions that have been imposed from outside," but a change in regime focus. "We have perfected our nuclear capability. It is our policy to concentrate all efforts into economic progress in country," he said. —AFP

the Kuwaiti government. "We are bringing home initially, on our flight back to Manila, 150 of these runaways. Of the more than 600 runaway housemaids, I think only 62 will be left behind in the shelter, since they have cases to be resolved. The rest will be sent back to Manila at the Kuwaiti government's expense, and we are really grateful for this gesture," he said.

With regards to four Filipinos who were arrested at the height of the diplomatic crisis for allegedly rescuing housemaids, Roque said they were all freed. But three diplomats sought for questioning by Kuwait for their role in the rescues remain holed up at the Philippine Embassy. "The three diplomats will also be allowed to leave soon pending an interior ministry clearance. They said they are coordinating with the ministry, and we are very positive that perhaps in two to three days, there will be good news too for the diplomats," Roque added.

With regards to the lifting of the ban on deploying workers to Kuwait, Bello said he will recommend a partial lifting of the ban to the president soon. "This will allow the deployment of skilled and professional workers for now. Housemaids will follow, but we want to see the immediate effect of the agreement which we are going to sign on Friday," he said.

During their visit to Kuwait, the two Filipino officials will meet members of the Filipino community and runaway housemaids at the embassy shelter. They will also be taken on a tour of the model shelter of the Kuwaiti government for runaway housemaids in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh.

MPs to vote on two motions...

Continued from Page 1

In another development, head of the Assembly's foreign relations committee MP Hamad Al-Harashani said

Kuwait cautious as nations vow...

Continued from Page 1

Trump dealt a hammer blow to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Tuesday, removing key sanctions relief for Tehran and casting its future into doubt. "We will be instituting the highest level of economic sanction," Trump said, warning that any nation could suffer American economic wrath for aiding the Islamic republic. Oil prices rose after Trump's announcement, prompting Saudi Arabia to pledge it would work to prevent supply shortages.

US Treasury sanctions on Iran's petroleum exports are to snap back in November, just weeks before the expiry of a deal between Saudi Arabia and other major oil producers to cut output. While Gulf petro-states stand to benefit from a rise in prices, the US move could mean new fissures in the region. In remarks an hour before Trump's declaration, senior Kuwaiti diplomat Khaled Al-Jarallah said his country stood by the JCPOA as the best option for "stability" in the region.

Qatar, alienated by a Saudi-led boycott, said priority must be given to non-proliferation and preventing a nuclear arms race. "All parties have an interest to act with restraint and wisdom in the face of this situation and to try to resolve conflicts through dialogue," its foreign ministry said. Dubai, whose volume of trade with Iran is in the billions of dollars, saw its stock market dip a noteworthy two percent. Oman, the back-channel for US-Iran talks that paved the way for the 2015 accord, said yesterday "the option of confrontation is not in the interest of any party".

Anxious Gulf states will be closely monitoring the Russian, Chinese and European response to the US financial gauntlet in the coming weeks and months. Middle East analyst James Dorsey, a senior fellow at Singapore's S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, said any economic showdown will force Gulf states to weigh their responses. Saudi Arabia, whose heir to the throne Mohammed bin Salman is seeking foreign investment for his "Vision 2030" program of reforms for a post-oil era, may not put all his eggs in Trump's basket.

Washington's allies may find formulas to avoid sanctions exposure. Oman has plans in the works for a sea pipeline that will import Iranian natural gas. "The deal has been structured in a way that it is shielded from any potential liability or prosecution under the American sanctions," said an Omani analyst, who declined to be named due to the sensitivity of the subject.

The analyst told AFP the sultanate has drawn up contingency plans for various scenarios, even an economic boycott by hawkish Gulf neighbors. He said the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have recently imposed barriers on movement of people and goods "on and off". While Muscat is skeptical its neighbors would resort to a total embargo, "everything is possible". Should new cracks emerge in the region, ambitious economies, namely China, could seek zones of influence. The concern, the analyst said, is the Gulf becoming "the new playground for a revived Cold War".

Europeans work to save deal

Meanwhile, world powers vowed yesterday to uphold the landmark deal curbing Iran's nuclear program. Trump's decision to ditch the accord and re-impose sanctions on the Islamic republic risks overturning years of painstaking diplomacy, worsening instability in the Middle East and threatens foreign companies' business in Iran worth billions of dollars. "The risks of confrontation are real," warned France's Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, adding that Europe would act to "avoid

yesterday that the panel will meet today to discuss the latest domestic and regional developments. He did not say who will attend the meeting from the government. Harshani called on the Assembly, the government and the people of Kuwait to shoulder their responsibility amid fast-paced and dangerous developments in the region. He urged lawmakers to stay away from "manipulated" grillings that destabilize the country. He claimed that the aims of the latest grillings are to make electoral and personal gains at the expense of national interests.

the explosion (of conflict) that risks happening if... no measures are taken."

Iran reacted furiously to Trump's decision, with lawmakers burning a US flag and chanting "Death to America" in the Iranian parliament. But its regional rivals Saudi Arabia and Israel applauded the US move. Trump's advisor John Bolton said earlier that European firms doing business in Iran have a six-month deadline to wind up investments or risk US sanctions. European governments are going "to do everything to protect the interests" of their companies, said an official in the French presidency, who asked not to be named.

But Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said Iran too should quit the nuclear deal unless Europeans offer solid guarantees that trade relations would continue. "If you don't succeed in obtaining a definitive guarantee - and I really doubt that you can - at that moment, we cannot continue like this," he told Iran's government in a televised speech. China said it will maintain "normal economic and trade exchanges" with Iran despite Trump's decision. Beijing will "remain in dialogue with all parties and continue to devote itself to safeguard and implement the deal," a spokesman said.

Britain, a signatory to the 2015 deal, said it remained committed, with Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson urging Washington "to avoid taking action that would hinder other parties from continuing to make the agreement work". Slapping aside more than a decade and a half of diplomacy by Britain, China, France, Germany, Iran, Russia and past US administrations, Trump called Tuesday for a "new and lasting deal". He described the accord as an "embarrassment" to the United States that did nothing to contain Iran's nuclear ambitions.

But the UN's nuclear watchdog, which is charged with ensuring Iran abides by the terms of the deal, said yesterday Tehran was upholding its "nuclear-related commitments". "Iran is subject to the world's most robust nuclear verification regime," said International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) director-general Yukiya Amano. The French, British and German foreign ministers will meet Iranian representatives on Monday, Le Drian told RTL radio.

French President Emmanuel Macron and Iran's Hassan Rouhani agreed yesterday to work toward the continued implementation of the nuclear deal despite the US decision, which Macron called "a mistake". Earlier, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said European signatories would "do everything" to ensure the agreement's parameters remain in place.

Trump's decision marked a stark diplomatic defeat for Europe, whose leaders begged the US leader to think again. Bolton insisted that cooperation with Europe on Iran was not over. The US will "work with the Europeans and others not only on the nuclear issue but on Iran's ballistic missile development, its continuing support for terrorism and its military activities that jeopardize our friends," he told Fox News.

The move offers Trump a domestic victory, fulfilling a longstanding campaign promise. But the long-term impact for US foreign policy and for the Middle East was less clear. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said the United States will "lose in the end" from his decision, which Ankara has warned could provoke "new conflicts" in the region. Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed his country's "deep concern" over the US withdrawal.

Middle East specialist Denis Bauchard of the French international relations institute IFRI told AFP Trump's move aimed "to cause the fall of a regime that he considers a threat to the security of the United States and Israel". Some analysts warned the move would also complicate US efforts to reach an agreement with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un over his country's own more advanced weapons program. Former CIA director John Brennan said Trump's move "gave North Korea more reason to keep its nukes". — Agencies

Manila to sign labor deal with Kuwait...

Continued from Page 1

A special hotline will also be set up in case of any emergency, accessible to the embassy and the interior ministry," Roque stated.

According to him, the Philippines ranks fourth in the list of countries sending domestic helpers to Kuwait. India is first, Bangladesh second (with mostly male drivers, gardeners and cooks) and Sri Lanka third. Currently, there are around 150,000 Filipino domestic helpers in Kuwait. "They said if the terms of employment are implemented, it will be applied to all nationalities," Roque reiterated.

Bello noted that recently, the affairs of domestic helpers were placed under the ministry of social affairs and labor. "According to the Kuwaiti government, the move was made because they want all the workers to be protected under the ministry of social affairs and labor," he noted.

The two officials were also surprised by an announcement by Jarallah that the more than 600 remaining runaway housemaids currently housed at the embassy shelter will be sent back to the Philippines at the expense of

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Sports

Hamilton will need to get back on pole in Spanish Grand Prix

Vettel is going for his fourth pole position in a row

BARCELONA: Lewis Hamilton is back on top of the world championship as Formula One returns to Europe but the Mercedes driver faces a big battle to stay ahead of Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel in Sunday's Spanish Grand Prix.

Vettel is going for his fourth pole position in a row, and at a circuit that should be a proper benchmark of performance after a thrilling and sometimes chaotic first four races of the season. The German has never before started from the top slot in Barcelona, however, whereas Hamilton—with more poles than anyone in the history of the sport (73) — has done so in three of the last four years and won twice.

Pole matters because only three of the last 17 races at the Circuit de Catalunya, albeit also three of the last seven, have been won from anywhere else on the grid. Past performance may provide some comfort to Hamilton but he knows his four-point advantage over fellow four times world champion Vettel owes a lot to luck and that Ferrari have true pace.

"There's two weird races which have kept us within the mix but you can't rely on those for the 17 or however many are left," Hamilton said after being gifted the win in Azerbaijan two weeks ago. "We need ultimate performance and confidence in the car," added the reigning champion.

"I've got the pace within me, the car has got the pace within it but we're not unlocking it...we've definitely got to improve in lots of areas." Barcelona, resurfaced with

smoother asphalt but holding no surprises after weeks of pre-season testing there, could come as something of a relief to Vettel after two chaotic races off the podium following two wins.

It is also where the technical battle between the teams, now within easy reach of their factories and enjoying the first use of their palatial paddock 'motorhomes' this season, really starts to heat up.

"It's the first step of the development race that looks like it could run to the very end of the season," commented Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff.

"It will be interesting to see how much performance the teams can find with their upgrades and what impact those upgrades will have on the team ranking—both at the front and in the midfield."

Spain is also no stranger to drama, with the two Mercedes drivers colliding in 2016 in a race that saw Dutch teenager Max Verstappen win on his Red Bull debut. Verstappen arrives this time after being cast in the doghouse along with Australian team mate Daniel Ricciardo for a collision in Baku.

Barcelona, with good memories for both, offers a chance to hit the reset button. "We have many updates coming, hopefully they will be positive and we can be even closer to the front, but of course everybody else will also bring new parts," said Verstappen, whose team mate won in China. "It could be quite a defining moment for the season and I'm interested to see how everyone will perform." — Reuters



BAKU: File photo shows winner Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton (R) shakes hands with second placed Ferrari's Finnish driver Kimi Raikkonen as they celebrate on the podium of the Formula One Azerbaijan Grand Prix at the Baku City Circuit in Baku on April 29, 2018. — AFP

“

I've got the pace within me

”

Ooredoo concludes baseball and softball season

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait participated in the final event of the Kuwait Baseball and Softball Committee, which took place last week in Sheikh Fahad Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah fields in the Kuwait Equestrian Club. The event saw the attendance of hundreds of baseball and softball enthusiasts and professionals from all age groups. Among the guests of the final event were Minister of Information Mohammad Al-Jabri, the Ambassador of Kuwait to Japan Takashi Ashiki, in addition to representatives of this season's sponsors. The Kuwait Baseball and Softball Committee was represented by committee president Mazen Al Essa, committee vice president Ahmed Al Majed, and committee secretary Saud Alayoub.

The event included several activities by baseball and softball players, in addition to a special awarding ceremony for the distinguished players of the season, which will commence a new edition next fall. The event also included an awarding ceremony for the sponsors of the league, for their support of one of the region's oldest baseball and softball leagues, which started its activities during the seventies.

Commenting on this, Ooredoo Kuwait reiterated in a press statement that its support for this event stems from its corporate social responsibility strategy, which is based on its values of caring, connecting, and challenging. Ooredoo is keen on supporting different segments of society and helping them real-



ize their ambitions in various fields. The Kuwait Baseball and Softball Committee offers a variety of activities targeting different age groups, including

children and adults. Players of the league participate in a number of activities regionally and globally around the year.

Folau's religious beliefs complicate contract negotiations

SYDNEY: Israel Folau's negotiation over a new Rugby Australia contract looks like being a protracted process accompanied by the usual interest from other quarters but complicated this time by his insistence on standing by his religious beliefs.

As a former rugby league international who spent a couple of years playing top flight Australian Rules, the 29-year-old outside back is by far the best known rugby union player in a country where the other two football codes rule the roost.

After five successful seasons, though, Folau's contract will be up at the end of the year and Rugby Australia will be desperate to get him to extend at least through next year's Rugby World Cup in Japan. The rugby league media pack has never fathomed why Folau, or anyone, would turn his back on their game so he is linked to a return to the National Rugby League at every contract renegotiation.

Wealthy European and Japanese union clubs are always circling, while on Tuesday there was a report in the Daily Telegraph that Folau had discussed a move back to Brisbane, where he grew up, with the coach of the Queensland Reds.

The New South Wales Waratahs will be hoping that report was a false lead as they look to secure the services of a player whose athletic ability is most often described as "freakish". His social media postings have brought wider issues into the equation, though—the latest coming on Twitter on Tuesday which linked to an 11-minute sermon from the late Christian evangelist David Wilkerson.

It included a warning from the American against young people being "seduced" into "tolerance"



BRISBANE: File photo taken on September 10, 2016 shows Australia's fullback Israel Folau (L) running with the ball during the Rugby Championship match between Australia and South Africa at Suncorp Stadium in Brisbane. — AFP

towards same-sex marriage, recalling for some Folau's comment on Instagram last month that homosexuals were destined for "hell" unless they repented.

Folau's remark caused outrage in some quarters but Rugby Australia declined to censure him despite pressure from key sponsors such as airline Qantas, who the cash-strapped governing body can barely afford to lose. Folau, a former Mormon who now attends a church allied to the Pentecostal Assemblies

of God, said last year that he would not support legislation allowing gay marriage during nationwide plebiscite over the issue.

Australia's parliament voted to legalise same-sex marriage in December after the vote returned an overwhelming majority in favour of same sex unions.

Folau said in a post on the PlayersVoice website last month that he had offered to walk away from his Rugby Australia contract immediately if the position became "untenable" for the sport. — Reuters

India leaving no stone unturned in Tokyo preparation

NEW DELHI: A former champion shooter himself, Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore knows how lack of infrastructure can scuttle Olympic dreams and the Indian sports minister is determined to ensure his athletes get the best possible preparation for the Tokyo Games.

In an interview with Reuters, Rathore said the government was "leaving no stone unturned" to train 200 elite athletes for the 2020 Olympics and beyond under its Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) programme.

"With just one and half to two years left for the Tokyo Games, we are not only focusing on their training but also rehab if any athlete is injured," Rathore said, sitting on a Swiss exercise ball which he uses as a chair in his office.

TOPS was rolled out in 2014 to identify elite athletes and provide them with world-class coaching and training facilities. "From selection to funding, everything is managed by a set of people whom we have put under the TOPS," said Rathore, who won the double-trap silver at the 2004 Athens Games.

"This team has high performance directors, CEOs, athlete relationship managers, researchers who are finding details about athletes' toughest opponents in the top international circuit." More encouraging is the emergence of a bunch of young champions.

A 16-year old Manu Bhaker shot down the 10m air pistol gold at the ISSF Mexico World Cup in March, 20-year old Neeraj Chopra won the javelin gold in the last Commonwealth Games and 15-year-old Anish Bhanwala became the youngest Indian to win a Commonwealth gold in the 25m rapid fire pistol event.

Long a laggard at multi-sports Games, India finished third at the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games ahead of more traditional sporting powers Canada, New Zealand and South Africa. "I think the self-confidence is building up. A sense of self-belief is building up. The athletes are feeding off each other and the whole environment in India is now feeding off itself," said Rathore.

The Indian shooters have been performing exceptionally well at the world stage in recent times, which has been especially pleasing to former marksman Rathore. "This excellence is largely driven by individuals but it's also due to funding that is coming to them.

"The shooting federation is the highest funded federation. Among the 200 elite athletes, about 200 crore rupees (\$29.70 million) have been provided to shooters alone, much more than any other federation. So, we are investing into it."

Apart from shooting, India have made long strides in disciplines such as badminton, wrestling, boxing and archery. "We have identified the events that we will do well in and also the athletes who we are hoping will do well. I leave this job of identifying to the super professionals of the TOPS team and I have great respect for the work they are doing," said Rathore.

"It's my job to ensure that the best professional people are into my TOPS team and they will continuously analyse which events, depending on who are the athletes competing there, how they compare with the world standard and fund those athletes.

"Closer to the (Tokyo) Games they (will) keep giving me an account as to which athlete is moving closer and who is likely to win," he said. India has been here before of course and the only true test of the TOPS programme will come in August 2020.

After all, India were second in the medals table at the 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi but returned home from the subsequent London Olympics without a single gold medal. — Reuters

Sports

Halep sails past Mertens at Madrid Open, Del Potro wins on return

Kvitova beats Monica Puig to register her seventh consecutive win

MADRID: Reigning champion Simona Halep edged closer to a third consecutive Madrid Open title by beating Belgium's Elise Mertens in the second round yesterday.

Halep, the winner here in 2016 and 2017, was made to work harder in the second set on Manolo Santana but the world number one's 6-0, 6-3 victory was never in doubt. Kristyna Pliskova of the Czech Republic will now await Halep in the last 16 as the Romanian continues to prepare for the French Open, where she has twice gone the distance only to finish runner-up.

Halep won the first eight games in a row to lead 6-0, 2-0, with her clay-court counter-attacking too strong for the 22-year-old Mertens to handle. Mertens offered some late resistance as her opponent's concentration wavered, but a double fault confirmed Halep's victory in a brief one hour and 11 minutes.

"I think I played well again," Halep said. "It is the second match of the tournament. I have a great feeling." Earlier, Petra Kvitova battled to a 6-3, 7-6 (10/8) victory over Puerto Rico's Monica Puig to register her seventh consecutive win. Kvitova's hard-hitting game lends itself more to the faster surfaces but after lifting the title on clay in Prague at the weekend, she has maintained her momentum here and will meet Estonia's Anett Kontaveit in round three. Home favourite Garbine Muguruza staged a comeback from a set and a break down to beat Donna Vekic 2-6, 6-4, 6-1 and

reach the third round for the first time in her career.

The two-time Grand Slam champion was in trouble when she dropped serve in the fifth game of the second set, but won 10 of the next 12 games to race to victory.

Dangerous Russian Daria Kasatkina awaits the world number three in the last 16 after a comfortable win over Sorana Cirstea. Fourth seed and reigning Italian Open champion Elina Svitolina slumped to a surprise 6-2, 6-7 (3/7), 6-4 loss to Spaniard Carla Suarez Navarro in the second round.

The Ukrainian world number four will now prepare for the defence of her title in Rome next week, while Suarez Navarro will face Bernarda Pera, after the American brushed aside Johanna Konta 6-4, 6-3.

Juan Martin del Potro made a winning start to his clay-court season by seeing off Damir Dzumhur in his first match since losing in the Miami Open semi-finals to John Isner in March.

The former US Open champion, who has won two titles this year including at Indian Wells, had far too much for his Bosnian opponent in a comfortable 6-3, 6-3 win. Del Potro admitted that his persistent wrist injuries make clay more difficult for him than other surfaces.

"On clay you can't use the slice much, which is a blow because I've been using it more for my wrist problems," he said. "For now my wrist is responding well, I'm still having treatment every day. I'm calm, because I've been doing well." The



Petra Kvitova

Argentinian, twice a semi-finalist in Madrid, will take on Dusan Lajovic in the last 16 after the Serbian edged out Richard Gasquet 7-6 (7/1), 7-6 (7/1).

World number four Grigor Dimitrov was beaten in a tight second-round encounter by former Wimbledon runner-up Milos Raonic, who is playing his first tournament since withdrawing from the Monte Carlo Masters with injury. The big-serving Canadian grabbed the first

break of the match in the 11th game, and despite seeing Dimitrov fight back to force a decider, he closed out a 7-5, 3-6, 6-3 win.

Elsewhere, South Korean rising star Chung Hyeon suffered a shock 6-0, 6-2 first-round thrashing at the hands of Dutchman Robin Haase. Chung's fellow Australian Open semi-finalist Kyle Edmund beat Daniil. — AFP



Muguruza stages a comeback to beat Vekic

Woods' best golf will never be repeated: Mickelson

PONTE VEDRA BEACH: Tiger Woods in his prime played the best golf ever seen and it is highly unlikely those heights will ever be reached again, Phil Mickelson said yesterday ahead of this week's Players Championship.

Mickelson traded friendly barbs with his old rival during their respective press conference at TPC Sawgrass, their relaxed demeanour a far cry from the days when, as the older American admitted, "it sucked" to have to face Woods on the course.

"I don't think (we) will ever see that level of play again," 47-year-old Mickelson said. "It was the most remarkable golf in the history of the game and I think unrepeatable. I think it was that good." The once icy relationship between the multiple major winners has thawed since they hit their 40s, and they appeared genuinely pleased to be grouped together for the first two rounds here on Thursday and Friday. They have played together only once at the Players Championship-in the third round in 2001 — when Woods was at the peak of the powers that brought him 14 major championships in barely a decade.

It was the era when Woods won the 2000 U.S. Open at Pebble Beach by 15 strokes, a record performance Mickelson suspects some younger players do not fully appreciate. "I look at 2000 as being kind of the benchmark at the U.S. Open as being the greatest golf I've ever witnessed and I believe has ever been played," said Mickelson.

"And it sucked to have to play against him," Mickelson continued. "You look at it and say 'how am I going to beat this?'. There was a stretch there that it was hard to imagine that it was actu-



PONTE VEDRA BEACH: Tiger Woods of the United States plays a shot from a bunker during practice rounds prior to THE PLAYERS Championship on the Stadium Course at TPC Sawgrass yesterday in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida. — AFP

ally happening, that he was hitting some of the shots that he was hitting."

The hype over their grouping this week—they will play with another American in Rickie Fowler-promoted Mickelson to playfully suggest sidelining the other 142 players and deciding the title in a head-to-head winner-takes-all match.

"Fifteen years ago my record against him sucked, and now it's okay," Mickelson said, giving a bit of needle. "I'm doing better as time has gone on." Mickelson has won five majors but also recorded 18 runner-up or third place finishes.

Asked about their rivalry, Woods smiled and suggested reporters kept an eye on the "big picture." "How many times have we won on tour?" the 42-year-old said, fully aware of the answer. Woods has won 79 times on the PGA Tour, second only to Sam Snead's 82 but well clear of Mickelson's none-too-shabby 42 victories.

Chances are neither will add to those tallies this week, but for two days at least they will hog the limelight, two aging heavyweights trying to keep pace with younger rivals who carry less baggage—and a lot less major silverware. — Reuters

England's Wood ends IPL stint to boost Test prospects

LONDON: England fast bowler Mark Wood has returned home from the ongoing Indian Premier League (IPL) to play for Durham in a bid to keep his place in the Test side, the 28-year-old has said. Wood played for the Chennai Super Kings in their opening win against champions Mumbai Indians but was not picked in their next nine matches.

"The decision has been made for me to return home to England to prepare for the English summer," Wood wrote in an Instagram post. "Having worked so hard to get back in the Test team, and because I'm not currently in the CSK side, I am coming home to play for Durham to hopefully put my name in the hat for test match selection."

Wood has played 11 Tests for England, the last against New Zealand at Christchurch from March 30-April 3, and has taken 28 wickets. He will be available for Durham's County Championship match against Derbyshire this week and will hope to make the England squad for the two-test series against Pakistan starting later this month.

"It's a massive boost to have Mark available for Friday. On the occasions we've had him available to play for us over the last few years, he's made some great contributions," Durham head coach Jon Lewis said in a statement.

"He comes back to us with a big point to prove and is eager to nail down his spot in the England test side. "The IPL didn't give him the playing opportunities he would have liked but he has still learnt from great players and this is a move which suits all parties." — Reuters

Pakistan's Malik wants to play on until 2020 World T20

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan all-rounder Shoaib Malik has set his sights on playing at least until the 2020 World Twenty20 and the 36-year-old is aware that he will have to perform consistently to achieve that goal.

The former Pakistan captain retired from test cricket at the end of 2015, three tests after earning a shock return to the side after a gap of five years. He has, however, been a regular member of Pakistan's limited-overs side.

"The 2019 World Cup, 50-over cricket, is my last World Cup, but I want to play in the World T20 in 2020, that is my goal for Twenty20 cricket," Malik said in a statement from the Caribbean Premier League T20 tournament.

"These are the two big goals which I'm looking at — let's see how it goes. If I'm consistently performing then I want to play these two World Cups." A middle order batsman and also bowls off-spin, Malik played 35 tests for Pakistan and has represented the team in 261 one-day internationals and 95 Twenty20 matches.

He played for the Barbados Tridents in the CPL for the last five years but has now joined



Shoaib Malik

the Guyana Amazon Warriors for the 2018 edition, which will run from Aug. 8-Sept. 16. "Guyana is more like you're playing in the sub-continent I think," said Malik, who has also played in the Indian Premier League and Australia's Big Bash League.

"But on that particular day performance is the key of any cricketer and that's what I'm looking for. "Obviously, if you're playing for a new team the expectations are a lot from you. When they have seen someone that did well for a longer run the expectations are obviously high." — Reuters

Struggling Chinese football club offers \$1.5m cash per win

SHANGHAI: A struggling Chinese football club will dish out more than \$1.5 million in cash per game to inspire its demoralised players to victory—but they'll be docked money if they lose. The carrot-and-stick approach is being applied at Guizhou Hengfeng, who are bottom of the Chinese Super League (CSL) after losing eight of their first nine games, including five on the bounce.

Club boss Wen Wei treated the team and staff to a lavish dinner on Tuesday, two days after they were thrashed 5-1 at Tianjin Teda, and proposed an eye-watering victory bonus of 10 million yuan (\$1.5 million) for each of the next two games in a desperate effort to stop the rot, local media said. In the event of a long-awaited win, the cash will be waiting in the dressing room after the games, the Guizhou Metropolitan Daily cited Wen as saying.

The team will earn two million yuan for a draw, but be fined a collective one million if they lose, or about 33,000 yuan apiece. Guizhou's 30 players as well as staff at the dinner accepted Wen's proposal, the newspaper said, but they face a tough test at home to CSL leaders Shanghai SIPG on Saturday followed by a trip to fellow strugglers Dalian Yifang the following weekend.

Property magnate Wen said he was trying to "unite the team" coached by Spaniard Gregorio Manzano. "I want my team to forget all the losses and think about hard-won victories," Wen told the newspaper. Club officials could not be reached for comment. Chinese football has in recent years made headlines with a series of expensive big-name foreign signings, with SIPG shelling out an Asian-record 60 million euros last year to buy Brazilian attacking midfielder Oscar from Chelsea. — AFP

Sports

Canadian pitcher James Paxton throws no-hitter against Blue Jays

Aaron's career-high 12 batters lead Philadelphia past San Francisco

TORONTO: Left-hander James Paxton became the second Canadian to pitch a no-hitter, the first to do so in his native land, leading the visiting Seattle Mariners to a 5-0 win over the Toronto Blue Jays on Tuesday.

It was the sixth no-hitter pitched by a Mariner in the franchise's history that started in 1977, the same season the Blue Jays began. Seattle's first five no-hitters all came at home. Paxton, who was born in Ladner, British Columbia, joins a Canadian no-hit club that previously included only Toronto native Dick Fowler, who threw his gem for the Philadelphia A's in 1945. Paxton (2-1) struck out seven. He allowed the Blue Jays three walks-two in the third inning and another in the fourth.

ROYALS 15, ORIOLES 7

Mike Moustakas homered twice and drove in five runs, and visiting Kansas City homered four times and scored 10 runs in the first inning, finishing with five homers overall in a rout of Baltimore. Moustakas hit a solo home run in the first and added a two-run double later that inning. He belted a two-run homer in the fifth and finished the night 3-for-6. The four homers in the first inning-all off Baltimore starter Dylan Bundy — tied a Kansas City record. Bundy, who didn't retire any of the seven batters he faced, became the first pitcher in modern major league history to give up four home runs without recording an out, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

YANKEES 3, RED SOX 2

Aaron Judge delivered the tiebreaking RBI single with one out in the bottom of the seventh inning off Joe Kelly as New York edged visiting Boston. Judge untied the game by lacing a 1-1 slider to left field, scoring Neil Walker, who started the rally with a double off Heath Hembree (2-1). Judge's hit helped the Yankees win for the 16th time in 17 games. It is their best 17-game run since also going 16-1 from June 3-18, 1953. Giancarlo Stanton hit solo homers in consecutive at-bats for his third multi-homer game of the season and the 31st of his career.

PHILLIES 4, GIANTS 2

Aaron Nola struck out a career-high 12 batters in seven solid innings, leading Philadelphia past visiting San Francisco. Nola allowed only five hits and one run. He didn't walk a batter. Aaron Altherr, Jorge Alfaro and Carlos Santana each ripped a solo home run for the Phillies, who have won the first two games in this four-game series. Tommy Hunter got the last out in the eighth and the first out in the ninth. Hector Neris then recorded the final two outs to earn his seventh save of the season.

BRAVES 1, RAYS 0

Sean Newcomb recorded his second consecutive scoreless outing while making a solo home run from rookie Ronald Acuna Jr. stand up in Atlanta's win over Tampa Bay in St. Petersburg, Fla. Newcomb (3-1)

pitched six innings and allowed two hits and three walks. He struck out six. Atlanta scored the only run in the third inning when Acuna hit his third home run of the season, a long solo shot to left-center field. The Braves bullpen of Shane Carle, A.J. Minter, Dan Winkler and Arodys Vizcaino (fifth save) combined to work three scoreless innings to preserve the win.

DIAMONDBACKS 8, DODGERS 5 (12 INNINGS)

Daniel Descalso hit a three-run home run in the 12th inning to give Arizona a victory at Los Angeles. A.J. Pollock, Chris Owings and John Ryan Murphy added home runs for Arizona on a night when Diamondbacks closer Brad Boxberger blew his first save chance in 12 tries this season. Enrique Hernandez hit a ninth-inning home run off Boxberger to tie the score 5-5 and force extra innings. Yasmani Grandal also went deep for the Dodgers.

TWINS 7, CARDINALS 1

Eddie Rosario had two hits and scored three runs to back five strong innings by Jake Odorizzi as Minnesota rolled to a victory at St. Louis, sweeping the two-game interleague series. The win was the fifth straight for the Twins, who outscored St. Louis 13-1 in the series and pounded out 21 hits over the two games while limiting the Cardinals to just six. St. Louis, which has lost two straight after winning five in a row, hurt its cause with three errors. Odorizzi (3-2) surrendered a run on two hits and two walks while striking out three. He left with a 5-1 lead after throwing 93 pitches.

REDS 7, METS 2

Eugenio Suarez had three hits and four RBIs, and his two-run single in the first inning gave Cincinnati a lead it never relinquished in a win over visiting New York. The Reds won for just the second time in eight games. The Mets have lost 15 of 22 since an 11-1 start. Reds starter Luis Castillo retired the first 14 batters and carried a one-hitter into the sixth, when the Mets scored both their runs via a Wilmer Flores homer and a bases-loaded walk drawn by Adrian Gonzalez. Castillo (2-4) struck out seven over 5 2/3 innings.

BREWERS 3, INDIANS 2

Reliever Brent Suter became the first opposing pitcher to hit a home run off Cleveland ace Corey Kluber, and Milwaukee held off the visiting Indians. Travis Shaw hit a two-run home run in the first inning to give the Brewers an early 2-0 lead. Suter (2-2) pitched 4 2/3 innings, surrendering two runs on five hits and a walk while striking out five. Jose Ramirez and Francisco Lindor each hit solo home runs for the Indians, who have lost four of five.

CUBS 4, MARLINS 3

Kris Bryant scored the winning run in the eighth inning, leading host Chicago to a win over Miami. Bryant led off the eighth by drawing a nine-pitch walk



TORONTO: James Paxton #65 of the Seattle Mariners celebrates his no-hitter with Mike Zunino #3 as Jean Segura #2 runs to greet them during MLB game action against the Toronto Blue Jays at Rogers Centre on Tuesday in Toronto, Canada.— AFP

against reliever Kyle Barraclough (0-2). Bryant advanced to second when Barraclough bounced a pitch into the dirt and moved to third on a groundout by Anthony Rizzo. With the infield in, Victor Caratini hit a grounder at Marlins second baseman Starlin Castro, who took too long to get the ball out of his glove, allowing Bryant to narrowly beat the throw home. It was the first run allowed by Barraclough since April 23, a span of six relief outings.

TIGERS 7, RANGERS 4

Victor Martinez and Jose Iglesias hit two-run homers in the early going, and visiting Detroit held on for a victory over Texas. Jeimer Candelario also homered for the Tigers, while Iglesias and Nicholas Castellanos scored two runs apiece. Mike Fiers (3-2) collected the win, allowing two runs on six hits while striking out five in 5 2/3 innings. He didn't issue a walk. Shane Greene got the last four outs, including three strikeouts, for his seventh save.

ROCKIES 4, ANGELS 2

Jon Gray tossed seven shutout innings to extend Colorado's dominant stretch of starts, Trevor Story doubled and tripled, and the Rockies beat Los Angeles in Denver. Gray (4-4) allowed four hits, walked one and struck out eight to help Colorado win its sixth straight. His outing was the ninth consecutive quality start for the Rockies, a franchise record. Wade Davis worked the ninth inning for his major-league-leading 14th save. Justin Upton homered for the Angels, and Andrew Healey (1-2) allowed two runs in six innings.

NATIONALS 4, PADRES 0

Jeremy Hellickson took a perfect game into the sev-

enth inning and doubled home a run as Washington won at San Diego. Hellickson (1-0), Ryan Madson, Brandon Kintzler and Wander Suero combined on a three-hit shutout of the Padres, who were no-hit last Friday night by four Los Angeles Dodgers pitchers in Monterrey, Mexico. Tuesday marked the fifth time this season that the Padres were shut out. Travis Jankowski opened the seventh by grounding a single to center past Washington second baseman Howie Kendrick for the Padres' first hit and baserunner. Kendrick, Ryan Zimmerman and Pedro Severino each had two hits for the Nationals.

ASTROS 4, A'S 2

George Springer had two hits and two RBIs, and Alex Bregman homered as Houston won at Oakland. Springer hit a two-out, two-run double for a 3-2 lead in the fifth inning to continue his hot series. He is 8-for-10 with a walk, four runs and five RBIs in the first two games in Oakland. His batting average, which was .264 through the weekend, is up to .297. Marcus Semien had two hits and scored twice, and Khris Davis had his 31st RBI on a sacrifice fly for Oakland, which had won three of four.

PIRATES 10, WHITE SOX 6

Pittsburgh erased an early four-run deficit by pounding out 16 hits in a win at Chicago. The Pirates, who have won three of their past four games, scored three runs in the fifth off reliever Chris Volstad (0-2) to take the lead for good, 7-5. Corey Dickerson was 4-for-5 with two RBIs and Starling Marte was 3-for-5 with an RBI for the Pirates. Wellington Castillo hit two homers and knocked in three runs for Chicago, which lost its fourth straight and eighth in nine games. — Reuters



Reds win second time in 8 games

Toure hails eclipsing of Man Utd as City exit looms

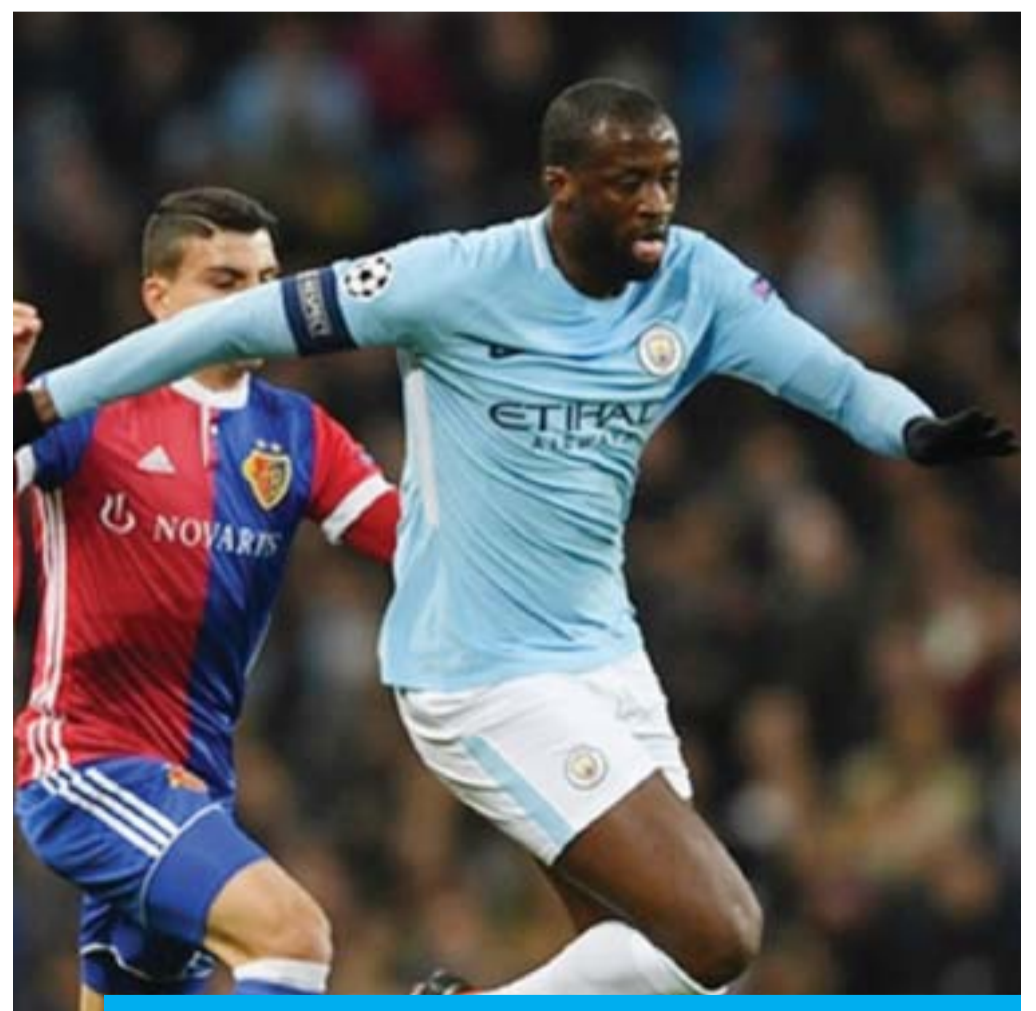
LONDON: Yaya Toure ranks deposing bitter rivals Manchester United as one of the greatest achievements during his time at Manchester City as he prepares to leave the Premier League champions. City have won the league three times during the Ivorian's eight-year stint at the club as well as four domestic cups and have become one of the highest-profile clubs in the game.

"When I came to City, we could not compare, they (United) had so many trophies, so many Champions League finals," said the 34-year-old, who is leaving the Etihad at the end of the season.

"But that was the purpose-to come to City, to put United in the shadow, although that would be difficult. The semi-final was a big part of it." The semi-final referred to was in the FA Cup in 2011, a tense derby against United which Toure settled with the only goal early in the second half. City went on to win the final and end a 35-year wait for a trophy, validating the vast expenditure lavished on the club since Sheikh Mansour's takeover in 2008. "United were in our way," said the midfielder. "We had to remove them, they were such a force.

"Coming into the game they had such confidence, they thought they were going to beat us. I'll never forget it, they missed big chances. At half-time we were nearly fighting in the dressing room.

"We said 'go out and play like men-or we go home again and say to (chairman) Khaldoon, 'thank you, we've eaten the money but we move on because this club will never achieve'.



Yaya Toure

"We had that chat and you saw a different City in the second half. That's why we won the game. It was brilliant, awesome." Toure is set for a huge ovation as he plays his final home game for City against Brighton at the Etihad.

The Ivorian has been one of the club's most influential players since his arrival from Barcelona in 2010 and was a driving force in the Premier League successes of 2012 and 2014. His influence has decreased since and

he made only nine appearances, all off the bench, in this season's title win. "I am very sad about it," said Toure, who is not planning to retire. "I wanted to be more part of it on the field, not out of the field. "But look in our dressing room and they are all competitors now, with the will to win and to achieve. It's a great ability, and I love it."

Manager Pep Guardiola has assured Toure of a starting spot on Wednesday and a number of tributes are being planned. — AFP

Guardiola yet to conclude talks over new City deal

MANCHESTER: Pep Guardiola has yet to conclude contract negotiations over a new deal with Premier League champions Manchester City but said there is no urgency to do so. The Catalan has led City to the title in his second season in charge at the Etihad and is now two-thirds of the way through the initial three-year contract he signed when he moved to Manchester in the summer of 2016. It means Guardiola, 47, has now won the league title in all three of the major European countries in which he has managed, following success in Spain with Barcelona and in Germany with Bayern Munich. But he has also established a habit of short spells with those clubs, having spent four seasons managing his hometown club Barca and three in the Bundesliga.

Guardiola, talking ahead of City's final home game of the season against Brighton, remained relaxed about the situation, not least because club chairman Khaldoon Al Mubarak, plus chief executive Ferran Soriano and director of football Txiki Begiristain are all personal friends. But he was also in no rush to look beyond next season in terms of pledging where his future lies and declined the opportunity to answer directly when asked if he

would definitely sign a new deal. "I have one more year and next year I will be here," said Guardiola.

"Now it's time to finish well and then start to talk about what we have to do next season, who is staying and who we have to buy. "I'm not finishing in two weeks or one month-I have one more year. In football one more year is a lot and we're going to talk to the club. "They are friends of mine-Ferran, Txiki, Khaldoon-and we have time to talk fluently about what is best for the club and us." Guardiola has made his home in Manchester City centre and has become a prominent figure in the area in his near two years in residence. And, as the anniversary approaches later this month of the Manchester bombing, in which 22 people were killed by a suicide bomber, Guardiola also reflected on a turbulent year in the city's history and his bond with its people.

"Always you think of the victims, the thoughts are always for them so in the winter we went to the hospitals and saw some of them and the families, and you can imagine how tough a moment it was especially for the families," said Guardiola.

"I was really impressed with the city... and your thoughts on the anniversary are with the people who died and the families who suffered in the moment.

"Of course when it happens, everyone wants to help and wants to be there and wants to be part of the situation, the families when they suffer this terrible painful situation. "And I saw because I live in the city how they reacted in the next days and weeks and it was top, hopefully the people will not forget the families." — AFP

Sports

Minnows Les Herbiers run PSG close in French Cup final

Les Herbiers captain Flochon invited to join PSG skipper Silva in lifting trophy

PARIS: Tiny Les Herbiers fell short of claiming one of the biggest upsets in football history but gave the mighty Paris Saint-Germain a game before losing 2-0 in Tuesday's French Cup final. Giovanni Lo Celso scored PSG's opener in the first half at the Stade de France, breaking the resistance of Les Herbiers after they had been saved three times by the woodwork early on.

PSG were then denied a second by a controversial call from the Video Assistant Referee, and they needed an Edinson Cavani penalty in the 74th minute to secure victory. It was a brave Les Herbiers performance, although it was never in any real doubt that PSG would win the trophy for the fourth year running and complete a clean sweep of France's domestic honours.

Their season will still arguably be best remembered for their Champions League exit to Real Madrid in the last 16, and for the never-ending soap opera that is Neymar. The world's most expensive player was in attendance at the final, watching on as he continues his recovery from foot surgery two months ago. He later joined in the post-match celebrations.

"I am happy with our season," coach Unai Emery, who is out of contract and will not stay on for a third campaign, told Eurosport. "We can also talk about the little negative things like the Champions League, but this year the team has played well, always trying to score goals." This was perhaps the greatest mismatch in any Cup final in modern times, with the Qatar-owned PSG's revenue last year around 500 million euros (\$596m) — coming up against a side from the lower reaches of France's third division.

Les Herbiers brought in the region of 15,000 fans-

around the same as the population of the small town in western France to enjoy themselves on a national holiday, and were greeted by scorching temperatures in Paris. They were not let down by their team, and Les Herbiers captain Sebastien Flochon was invited to join PSG skipper Thiago Silva in lifting the trophy at the end. "I am very proud of my team. We hung on in there and avoided a hammering, and we might even have scored a goal at the end," Les Herbiers coach Stephane Masala told France 2. "Paris are so strong, so fast, and they make all the right decisions. "We wanted to stay in the game for as long as possible. It was a great final and we are proud that it was a good match."

NO RECORD SCORELINE

Many PSG supporters spent their energy prior to kick-off whistling French President Emmanuel Macron—a supporter of their sworn enemies Marseille—as he greeted the teams on the pitch.

Even without Neymar, their starting line-up still cost close to 400 million euros. In contrast, Les Herbiers are a club with a budget of two million euros and who could yet be relegated to the fourth division. Paris recently beat Monaco 7-1, so there were fears that Les Herbiers could find themselves on the end of a record scoreline. They kept the score down, although PSG hit the woodwork three times in the opening 20 minutes, twice from Lo Celso and once from Kylian Mbappe. Lo Celso then got the breakthrough in the 26th minute with a fine left-foot strike from 25 yards, and Les Herbiers were lucky not to go further behind five minutes into the second half.

Mbappe followed in to score after Diaranke Fofana



SAINT-DENIS: Paris Saint-Germain's Brazilian defender Thiago Silva (C) and Les Herbiers' midfielder Sebastien Flochon (C,L) hold the trophy at the end of the French Cup final football match between Les Herbiers and Paris Saint-Germain (PSG), on Tuesday at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis, outside Paris. — AFP

had deflected the ball onto his own bar, and wheeled away in celebration. However, the goal was eventually ruled out following intervention from the VAR, with Marquinhos penalised for a handball when in fact he might have been fouled in the area.

The second goal eventually arrived in the 74th

minute, Cavani dispatching a penalty for his 40th of the season after he had been brought down by goalkeeper Matthieu Pichot. PSG took the trophy, but Les Herbiers took the plaudits, celebrating their remarkable achievement in reaching the final with their fans at the end. — AFP

“ I am happy with our season ”

Three-goal Kashima set sights on Asian quarter-finals

SINGAPORE: Kashima Antlers put one foot in the Asian Champions League quarter-finals as the former Japanese champions beat Shanghai SIPG 3-1 in the first leg of their last 16 clash yesterday. Shanghai's Brazilian striker Elkeson scored what could be a crucial away goal for Vitor Pereira's Chinese Super League leaders 14 minutes from time, but only after Yuma Suzuki, Daigo Nishi and a Yu Hai own goal gave the hosts a three-goal lead. The teams meet again next Wednesday, with Kashima on the brink of a last-eight place for the first time since 2008. "It's difficult to accept this result," said SIPG coach Pereira. "I'm very disappointed. We let them score too easily but when we are back at home I'm sure we can score twice and win the game. "We had a good second half but we only scored once. We have to make sure we don't repeat the mistakes we made today so we can perform better and qualify." SIPG's poor defending at corners allowed Antlers to take a two-goal lead, with Suzuki smashing the ball home from close range after the Chinese failed to clear in the 43rd minute.

Nishi added the second four minutes into the second half following another botched clearance. Yu then put the ball in his own net under pressure from Suzuki as he tried to clear Koki Anzai's cross to the far post.

Elkeson stroked home from close range in the 76th to give SIPG a lifeline ahead of the return leg at Shanghai Stadium. Ulsan Hyundai shaded their all-South Korea meeting against Suwon Bluewings 1-0 with Kim In-sung scoring the only goal midway through the second half when he slipped the ball past Shin Hwa-yong following Mislav Orsic's through pass.

Zob Ahan's Giorgi Gvlesiani converted a 93rd minute penalty for a 1-0 win over fellow Iranians Esteghlal in the



KASHIMA: Shanghai SIPG defender Wang Shenchao (R) heads the ball in front of forward Yuma Suzuki (L) during the AFC Champions League round of 16 football match between Japan's Kashima Antlers and China's Shinghai SIPJ at Kashima stadium in Kashima yesterday. — AFP

first leg of their tie, while former champions Al Ain of the United Arab Emirates lost 4-2 at home to Qatar's Al Duhail. It was Al Duhail's seventh win in a row in the competition this year and Djemal Belmadi's team held a four-goal lead following strikes by Youssef El Arabi, Nam Tae-hee,

Ismael Mohammed and Almoez Ali inside 55 minutes. But goals from Ahmed Khalil and Ibrahim Diaky in the final quarter of the game will give the 2003 champions and 2016 runners-up some hope ahead of the return in Doha next week. — Reuters

Season over at Bayern for Neuer, doubts over WCup

BERLIN: Manuel Neuer has poured serious doubt on his World Cup chances while his Bayern Munich coach yesterday says Germany's goalkeeper will not play again in the Bundesliga this season.

"I do not think it's imaginable that I go into such a tournament without match practice," Neuer said at an event on Tuesday night on his Russia 2018 chances. Neuer, 32, has been sidelined by a fractured foot since September and is running out of time to be fit for Germany's opening World Cup match against Mexico in Moscow on June 17.

Jupp Heynckes has ruled Neuer out of Bayern's final league game at home to Stuttgart on Saturday. Bayern's back-up goalkeeper Sven Ulreich is also expected to deputise in the German Cup final on May 19 against Eintracht Frankfurt in Berlin.

"Manuel will not be in the squad for Saturday's final home game against Stuttgart, for the cup final the decision is still open," said Heynckes on Bayern's website. If he misses the Berlin final, Neuer could only get the necessary match practice in two games before the World Cup—Germany's friendlies away to Austria in Klagenfurt on June 2 and at home against Saudi Arabia in Leverkusen on June 8. "There are still a few games," Neuer said, but added that he cannot give a date for his return. "There is no prognosis, I have to make the right decision for me, the team and Germany. "It does not help to get distracted."

Coach Joachim Loew is still expected to include Neuer in his provisional World Cup squad, which will be named next Tuesday and then trimmed down for the final 23-man list. The goalkeeper will have to work on his fitness at Germany's two-week training camp in northern Italy from May 23 to June 8 if he is to have any chance of playing at Russia 2018.

Neuer only recently returned to Bayern training. "I want to improve daily and try to get fit as quickly as possible, so far the steps have been very good and positive," he said. "I'm trying to continue and then we'll see if it's enough." Neuer is the main concern for Loew, who is also waiting on the fitness of Germany centre-back Jerome Boateng, who has a groin injury, and attacking midfielder Mesut Ozil, who is sidelined by a back complaint. Boateng says having Neuer in goal is key to Germany's hopes of retaining the title. "He's our captain and a strong personality, it just makes you feel good when 'Manu' is behind you," said the burly centre-back.

Debate is raging in Germany as to whether Neuer should play at the World Cup finals after so long on the sidelines. Oliver Schmidlein, a former physiotherapist with the German team, told magazine Sport Bild he believes Neuer will not be ready to play in the World Cup's group phase. "Manuel can't train more in his current situation, even though time is short, or he'll risk compromising his recovery, so I think Manuel could be involved at the earliest in the knockout games," said the former Bayern and Germany physio.—AFP

West Brom relegated from Premier League, Southampton win

LONDON: West Brom were relegated from the Premier League on Tuesday after Southampton took a huge step towards keeping their place in the English top flight by beating fellow strugglers Swansea. Darren Moore's West Brom needed a draw between the Saints and Swans in south Wales to take their fight to avoid relegation into the final day of the season on Sunday.

After more than 70 minutes of frenetic action, substitute Manolo Gabbiadini provided the decisive moment for Southampton when he reacted quickest to Charlie Austin's parried shot in a crowded goalmouth. Gabbiadini had only been on the pitch for four minutes and it was only his fifth goal of a difficult season for the Italian. The result means Southampton move up to 16th in the table, three points clear of 18th-place Swansea, who are favourites to joint West Brom and Stoke in the Championship.

Southampton's win confirmed West Brom's return to the English second tier after eight seasons in the top flight, with an eighth-place finish the best the Baggies managed during the 2012/13 season with Steve Clarke in charge. West Brom's season started well, with six points taken from a possible six after successive 1-0 wins at home to Bournemouth and away to Burnley.

However, after picking up just four points from a possible 30, Tony Pulis was sacked two days after losing 4-0 at home to Chelsea and was replaced by Gary Megson, who temporarily took charge of two games.

Alan Pardew was then named permanent manager but his arrival failed to deliver the improvement needed to guide the side away from relegation. Pardew, who led the Baggies to an FA Cup fourth-round victory at Liverpool, only had a 2-0 home win against Brighton to show for his efforts in the Premier League.

Problems off the pitch added to the disappointment on it when a mid-season trip to Barcelona made the headlines for the wrong reasons. Four senior players, including captain Jonny Evans and England midfielder Jake Livermore, were forced to apologise after a taxi was stolen from outside a fast-food restaurant.

On April 2, Pardew's time was up and he was replaced by Moore until the end of the season, becoming West Brom's fourth manager of the campaign. Since Moore's appointment, West Brom have taken 11 points from a possible 15 to keep alive the hope of a great escape.

Southampton had looked dead and buried when Mark Hughes came in to replace the sacked Mauricio Pellegrino in March. But seven points from three games have given Saints a huge opportunity to escape the drop on the final day this weekend, even if that match is a home date against the champions Manchester City.

Southampton now have 36 points—three more than Swansea, who entertain relegated Stoke on Sunday. The Saints' goal difference is also nine better than Swansea's, so they will be safe barring a significant turnaround.

Huddersfield also remain in the mix given the poor state of their goal difference, although one point from remaining games against Chelsea and Arsenal will ensure they finish above Swansea. — AFP



SOUTH WALES: Southampton's English striker Charlie Austin (bottom) and Southampton's English defender Ryan Bertrand celebrate following the English Premier League football match between Swansea City and Southampton. — AFP

Live Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE
West Ham United v Manchester United 21:45
beIN SPORTS HD 2

13 Halep sails past Mertens at Madrid Open, Del Potro wins on return



14 Canadian pitcher James Paxton throws no-hitter against Blue Jays



15 Minnows Les Herbiers run PSG close in French Cup final



Novak Djokovic

Djokovic dumped out of Madrid Open

Edmund's barnstorming forehand wreaks havoc throughout

MADRID: Novak Djokovic crashed out of the Madrid Open yesterday as the 12-time Grand Slam champion lost in three sets to Britain's Kyle Edmund.

Edmund had not taken a set off Djokovic in three previous meetings but the Serb is still feeling the effects of elbow surgery and his 23-year-old opponent took full advantage.

Djokovic stormed through the second set on the Manolo Santana court and, at his best, might never have looked back, but he spurned three break points early in the decider and Edmund pounced to win 6-3, 2-6, 6-3.

This was only the third time Edmund had beaten a player ranked as high as world number 12 and in terms of status, Djokovic is by far his biggest scalp yet.

"Kyle was just better in the decisive moments and I was a bit unlucky," Djokovic said afterwards. "Definitely Kyle is playing the best tennis of his life."

Edmund's barnstorming forehand wreaked havoc throughout and it was no surprise when the winners tally showed the Briton 30-11 ahead by the time Djokovic sent a final backhand long.

Belgium's David Goffin, whom Edmund lost to on clay during Britain's run to Davis Cup glory in 2015, now awaits in the last 16.

Djokovic, meanwhile, is left reviewing another early exit ahead of the French Open later this month. The 30-year-old has shown glimpses of his best this week but those moments have still been few and far between.

"It's not the end of the world," Djokovic said. "Obviously, I've played this sport for so many years and had a bunch of success. I try to always remind myself and be grateful for that."

"At the same time, nobody is forcing me to play this sport. I do it because I like it. That's where I draw my strength." Serving to stay in the opening set, Djokovic played a dreadful game and, with three set points, Edmund took the first when a driving return caught the line. Djokovic seemed hungrier in the second and was in charge from the moment he broke Edmund to lead 2-0. Another break at 4-2 meant the match would be settled in a third set.

Edmund came back from 0-40 down in the fourth

game and it proved a pivotal moment as he then broke himself for 5-3 when a Djokovic forehand looped long.

Djokovic was cursing his luck after a couple of awkward bounces but Edmund would not be distracted, serving out a superb victory after an hour and 42 minutes.

Earlier, Simona Halep maintained her charge towards a third consecutive Madrid Open title as she eased past Kristyna Pliskova 6-1 6-4. Halep will now play Pliskova's sister Karolina for a place in the last four. Caroline Wozniacki, however, is out. The Dane could have usurped Halep as world number one by winning the title this week but instead endured a shock 6-2 6-2 defeat to Kiki Bertens. — AFP

Warriors, Rockets advance to NBA finals

LOS ANGELES: Stephen Curry and the Golden State Warriors will face the Houston Rockets for a place in the NBA finals after the Western Conference heavyweights wrapped up series wins on Tuesday. Curry led the scoring for the reigning NBA champion Warriors in a 113-104 victory over the New Orleans Pelicans in Oakland, sealing the best-of-seven series 4-1.

The Warriors will now travel to top-seeded Houston for game one of the Western Conference finals on Monday. The Rockets had earlier booked their place in the conference finals with a 112-102 win over the Utah Jazz to take the series 4-1.

While Houston will have home court advantage after finishing the regular season on top of the Western Conference, the Warriors once again showed signs they are peaking at the right time.

The fit-again Curry played 37 minutes, and was heavily involved in a devastating burst of scoring in the third quarter which ultimately took the game away from the Pelicans. Curry finished with 28 points, seven rebounds and eight assists while Kevin Durant had 24 points and Klay Thompson added 23 points.

Draymond Green meanwhile produced another commanding all round performance, with 19 points, 14 rebounds and nine assists. After being restricted to a three-point lead at half-time, the Warriors outscored the Pelicans by 36-19 in the third quarter, giving them a 20-point cushion heading into the fourth.

There was a late scare for Steve Kerr's side however as the Pelicans staged a late rally, stitching together an 18-2 spurt to close within seven points at 107-100 with 1:43 left. But Green came up with two crucial late scores to see the Warriors home safely.

"We thought we had the game in hand," Kerr said. "We got a little tired and a little rattled and we didn't finish the game we wanted to," he added. "But our guys have reached the conference finals four years in a row now so they should be really proud of themselves."

Kerr meanwhile was happy with the form of Curry, who looks to be back to full fitness following his knee injury lay-off. "If he can play 37 minutes in a play-



OAKLAND: Anthony Davis #23 of the New Orleans Pelicans and Kevon Looney #5 of the Golden State Warriors go for a rebound during Game Five of the Western Conference Semifinals of the 2018 NBA Playoffs at ORACLE Arena in Oakland, California. — AFP

off game then I think he's okay," Kerr said. "It feels like he's back now."

Meanwhile in Texas, Chris Paul scored 41 points as Houston made sure of their place in the conference finals. Paul's haul

included 20 points in the fourth quarter. The 33-year-old's game-winning display left him contemplating his first career appearance in a Western Conference finals. — AFP

Battaglin wins Giro d'Italia fifth stage

SANTA NINFA: Italy's Enrico Battaglin, of the Lotto NL team, won the fifth stage of the Giro d'Italia yesterday after a 153km race from Agrigento to Santa Ninfa in Sicily.

Australia's Rohan Dennis (BMC) retained the overall leader's pink jersey on the second of three days on the Mediterranean island and on the eve of a tough sixth stage on the slopes of Mount Etna.

Battaglin dominated a sprint finish with compatriot Giovanni Visconti and Portugal's Jose Goncalves, who finished second and third respectively. It was the third Giro stage win for 28-year-old Battaglin, a specialist on uphill finishes, after 2013 and 2014.

But it was his first victory since 2014 and he said: "My last win was four years ago. It's been a while." Race leader Dennis, who holds a one-second advantage on Belgian Tom Dumoulin with Britain's Simon Yates third overall at 17 seconds, said he was "glad to be in the Maglia Rosa". His grip could be loosened by today's sixth stage, a 164km run between Caltanissetta and Etna which includes a gruelling 15km climb with a 6.5 percent gradient towards the Catania Astrophysical Observatory. — AFP

Business

THURSDAY, MAY 10, 2018

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TEHRAN: An Iranian displays the front page of a newspaper in Tehran yesterday a day after US President Donald Trump (portrait) announced the US is pulling out of the nuclear deal. — AFP

Oil soars as Trump dumps Iran nuke deal

Sanctions spell the end of OPEC output deal

LONDON: Oil prices rose more than 3 percent yesterday to 3-1/2 year highs, after US President Trump abandoned a nuclear deal with Iran and announced the "highest level" of sanctions against the OPEC member. Ignoring pleas by allies, Trump on Tuesday pulled out of an international deal with Iran that was agreed in 2015, a move that raises the risk of conflict in the Middle East and casts uncertainty over oil supplies in an already tight market. Brent crude oil touched its highest since November 2014 at \$77.20 a barrel. The benchmark contract was up \$1.90 a barrel, or more than 2.5 percent, at \$76.75 by 1335 GMT. US light crude was up \$1.70 a barrel, or almost 2.5 percent, at \$70.76, near highs also last seen in late 2014.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil exporter, has said it will take all necessary measures to prevent supply shortages following the US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal. "The kingdom will work with major oil producers within and outside OPEC, and with major consumers as well to limit the impact of any shortages in supplies," the Saudi energy ministry said in a statement late Tuesday.

The kingdom's assurance came just hours after US President Donald Trump announced the United States was withdrawing from the landmark nuclear deal between world powers and Iran. Trump also reinstated US sanctions which could curtail Iran's ability to export oil, its mainstay for public revenues. Before international sanctions were lifted following the nuclear deal in late 2015, Iran's crude exports stood at just one million barrels per day, mostly to Asia and European countries. That figure has since soared to 2.5 million bpd. Saudi Arabia currently pumps

around 10 million bpd, but has capacity of around 12 million bpd—a surplus of two million bpd. "The kingdom of Saudi Arabia is committed to support the stability of the global oil markets to serve the interests of both producers and consumers and also the sustainability of global economic growth," the ministry statement said.

Major oil producers from OPEC and non-OPEC members including Russia, the world's top producer, are linked to a deal until the end of the year to cut output by 1.8 million bpd to support prices. Trump's decision to withdraw from the nuclear agreement with Iran marks the end of the current output agreement between OPEC and its allies. OPEC is likely to insist the current agreement remains in effect, at least for now, but the prospective removal of several hundred thousand barrels per day of Iranian exports from the market will require a major adjustment.

Saudi Arabia has already promised to "mitigate" the impact of any potential supply shortages, in conjunction with other suppliers and consumer countries, in a statement released immediately after the sanctions decision. The kingdom is customarily coy about how it might respond but the prospective removal of Iranian crude from the market will send oil prices sharply higher unless other producers step up to fill the gap.

Spare capacity

As a practical matter, only Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Russia, and the United States have the ability to raise production

and exports in the short term. Saudi Arabia and its close allies Abu Dhabi and Kuwait hold almost all the spare capacity that could respond quickly to a reduction in Iranian exports.

US shale producers could also increase their output but it would take time and their light crude is not a good substitute for heavier Iranian oil. Russian firms may also hold spare capacity and could certainly increase output over a 12-month horizon. Their crude is a close equivalent to Iranian grades. The United States and Saudi

**Saudis ready to raise supply to meet shortfall**

Arabia appear to have reached a high-level political understanding in which the United States will intensify pressure on Iran in exchange for Saudi Arabia agreeing to help avoid a spike in oil prices.

The existence of an understanding was confirmed by the US Treasury Secretary who told reporters on Tuesday that "we have had conversations with various parties ... that would be willing to increase oil supply". In retrospect, the

president's tweet on April 20 blaming OPEC for high oil prices can be seen as part of the negotiating process to reach an understanding with Saudi Arabia. In effect, the United States agreed to implement tough sanctions, and Saudi Arabia agreed to limit the impact on oil prices. The outlines of that agreement remain unclear, and may not be entirely clear to Washington and Riyadh, but the understanding is vital to the successful implementation of sanctions. US gasoline prices are already averaging just under \$3 per gallon,

the highest level since late 2014, up from \$2.50 a year ago. US politicians will want to avoid being blamed for a further escalation in the run up to congressional elections in November. Assuming the US sanctions are effective in curbing Iran's crude exports, Saudi Arabia and its OPEC allies will have to raise their production to make up the shortfall, or risk being blamed for a further rise in motor-ing costs.

Updated deal

The original agreement between the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, led by Saudi Arabia, and other oil exporters, led by Russia, set output levels in December 2016. The output agreement has already been extended twice, in May and December 2017, and is now scheduled to run until at least December 2018. Even before the United States decided to withdraw from the Iran nuclear agreement, OPEC's output agreement was in danger of being overtaken by events. The collapse in Venezuelan output has reduced production much more than intended and caused global

oil inventories to draw down much faster than OPEC predicted at the end of last year. The result has been a sharp increase in prices, which has been broadly welcomed by OPEC members, especially Saudi Arabia, which needs the revenues to pay for its ambitious transformation program. Losing significant volumes of Iranian exports as a result of sanctions will worsen the existing under-supply in the market and cause inventories to decline even faster and prices to rise even higher. But further significant price increases threaten to complicate OPEC's strategy by accelerating the upturn in shale drilling, as well as denting the growth in oil consumption.

They also pose a political problem since neither the Trump administration nor Saudi Arabia will want to be blamed for pushing up prices for motorists in the United States and elsewhere.

For all these reasons, Saudi Arabia and other OPEC members will come under intense pressure to raise their output to make up for any loss of Iranian barrels. In theory, US sanctions on Iran's oil industry will not be re-imposed for six months to give customers, traders and banks time to wind down their relationships in an orderly fashion. In theory, too, the United States is open to granting waivers to importers of Iranian crude, provided they show some willingness to reduce their purchases. But the US Treasury has already made clear it expects importers to start cutting purchases of Iranian crude immediately if they want to obtain a waiver later, according to a briefing note issued by the Treasury on Tuesday. The result is that sanctions will start to phase in quickly and could start to progressively cut Iranian exports within the next few months, assuming the sanctions are effective. — Agencies

Walmart buys 77% of India's Flipkart for \$16 billion

BANGALORE: US retail behemoth Walmart said yesterday it will buy a 77 percent stake in Indian online sales giant Flipkart for \$16 billion in the world's biggest e-commerce deal. The blockbuster takeover, which is also Walmart's most expensive acquisition, threatens a major blow to rival Amazon's lofty ambitions in India. Flipkart and Amazon have been going head-to-head in a costly battle for domination of one of the fastest growing online retail markets since 2013.

The deal, announced in a joint statement, values Flipkart, India's largest e-tailer by sales, at just over \$20 billion. "India is one of the most attractive retail markets in the world, given its size and growth rate, and our investment is an opportunity to partner with the company that is leading transformation of e-commerce in the market," Walmart president Doug McMillon said.

The announcement ended months of speculation that Walmart, the world's biggest retailer, was preparing to take over Flipkart. Both had repeatedly declined to comment on the talks. Walmart said it would pump \$2 billion of new equity into Flipkart, giving the Indian e-tailer a bigger war chest to fight off a huge challenge from Amazon, which is rapidly expanding its reach. Binny Bansal, Flipkart's co-founder and group chief executive officer, said the deal "is of immense importance for India and will help fuel our ambition to deepen our connection with buyers and sellers and to create the next wave

of retail in India". The announcement came a day after Amazon said it was injecting an extra 26 billion rupees (\$386 million) into its Indian subsidiary. Boss Jeff Bezos has committed more than \$5 billion after grabbing a big slice of India's e-commerce pie after failing to make inroads in China. E-commerce sales in India hit \$21 billion last year according to market research company Forrester, and are expected to soar as its population of 1.25 billion people make greater use of internet access. Flipkart was founded in 2007 by former Amazon employees Sachin Bansal and Binny Bansal, who are not related. Like Amazon, it started as an online bookstore. Flipkart now sells everything from mobile phones, televisions and juicers to running shoes, sofas and beauty products.

'Unable to compete'

Masayoshi Son, chief executive of Japan's SoftBank, had earlier confirmed to reporters in

Tokyo that the Walmart-Flipkart deal had been agreed. He said SoftBank's \$2.5 billion stake in the company would be worth \$4 billion with the acquisition. Small stakes will be held by existing Flipkart shareholders, including Binny Bansal, Tencent Holdings, Tiger Global Management and Microsoft. The companies said the board makeup was yet to be decided but that Flipkart and Walmart would remain distinct brands. They added that the deal is expected to be completed by the end of the year, subject to regulatory approval. Venture capitalists have pumped billions of dollars into Flipkart over the past few years but the company is still posting massive losses. Flipkart saw losses rise 68 percent to 87.71 billion rupees (\$1.31 billion) in the financial year that ended 31 March 2017.

Analysts said the deal helps Walmart gain a foothold in Indian retail without having to open commercial stores which is problematic under Indian foreign direct investment rules. — AFP



BANGALORE: This handout photo taken and released by the US retailer Walmart yesterday shows Walmart CEO Doug McMillon (left) and Flipkart co-founder and CEO Binny Bansal shaking hands at an event in Bangalore, as a deal was announced for Walmart to buy a stake in Flipkart. — AFP

Boubyan Bank launches AI-based 'Msa3ed' service to all its clients

Al-Tuwaijri: Service is for the first time in Kuwait



KUWAIT: In continuation of its distinction in presenting new and remarkable services and products in the banking services' market in Kuwait, Boubyan Bank has launched "Msa3ed" service as a part of AI-based conversation management technology, simply known as "Chatbot". This service is introduced for the first time in Kuwait by Boubyan Bank.

In a press conference held yesterday, Abdulla Al-Najran Al-Tuwaijri, Boubyan Bank's Deputy CEO, said that Chatbot is a new technology for managing the relationship between any organization and clients or consumers who would be willing to conduct their transactions or obtain information without missing a beat and at any moment whether when they are inside or outside the country.

He added: "With the recent developments in the communications' field and digital technology, the outcome has been in favor of the organizations which became capable of providing distinctive and unique services to their clients. Boubyan Bank has always been in the right direction towards providing the best for its clients."

"The phrase "For the first time in Kuwait" has become a synonym of Boubyan Bank and this did not just come out of thin air, rather, everyone realized the steps made by Boubyan Bank towards giving its clients unique experiences in application of our slogan "Towards Perfection" and in an attempt to provide a different lifestyle to customers", Al-Tuwaijri added.



AI is used to facilitate banking services and customer service



service launched by the bank under the name "Msa3ed" would be available on Boubyan App. The service employs AI technology and would be available around the clock.

Clients may complete several banking transactions and find responses to many questions and queries related to their bank account such as inquiring about account balances, credit cards' balance and making various types of transfers and many other banking services. Al-Hasawi added: "The idea came as a part of the bank's drive to provide the best banking services and solutions to its clients by allocating a special staff for each Boubyan customer to help him and answer his queries anytime, anywhere. This is why we called the service "Msa3ed", i.e. assistant, since the service will be serving as the customer's personal assistant."

Msa3ed will be able to answer customers' queries and



complete their banking transactions as per their instructions whether in Arabic or in English.

"This is just the first stage; in the future, many other features will be added such as Msa3ed's recognition of the customer and taking voice queries and requests from him. Also, several other banking transactions available in Boubyan App will be added in addition to adding interactive video calls," Al-Hasawi added.

"The new service is just the beginning. The future has a lot to offer towards the development of this service in order keep up with banks, companies and international organizations," Al-Tuwaijri stressed again.

Digital banking services

Al-Tuwaijri also stated that the bank devised its strategies towards expansion of the use of new technologies in order to give clients banking services and products which would keep up with this age and the modern developments.

He added: "Customer service has been the main pillar of the bank's success throughout the past years, where we managed to distinguish our clients by providing them with services that make their banking experience unique." Boubyan Bank has been awarded the Best

Islamic Bank in Customer Service by Service Hero, the international consumer-driven customer satisfaction index, for the eighth year in a row in addition to being awarded the First Place Award in Customer Service as a Country Winner atop all economic sectors in Kuwait, for the third time

Chatbot numbers and facts

As per Gartner, a world leading research and advisory company, Virtual Customer Assistants "VCA" used in conducting conversations and managing chats, Chatbots, will be responsible for 25 percent of customer service operations at organizations and companies around the world by 2020. VCAs are a bundle of conversation programs operated via PCs, which may conduct conversations or chats with similar programs or humans. They simulate the conversation between the human employee and the customer with regard to a service provided by a company or an establishment online or via a digital department or a mobile App interface.

This bundle includes technologies to process natural languages, manage conversations and understand the context in addition to other visual features such as picture and animated drawings.

Hot US jobs market spurs push to reach those left behind

CLEVELAND: In Cleveland, a new road meant to cut commute times between the suburbs and a downtown medical hub has been redesigned as an "Opportunity Corridor" to bring businesses and jobs to poor neighborhoods along its way.

In St Louis, development officials are repurposing a century-old hat factory into a space for small manufacturers to bring jobs back downtown, while Baltimore has committed \$500 million to a private-led overhaul of an old industrial zone. The efforts reflect a growing consensus among economists and policymakers that keep-

ing the overall economy on track will not be enough to help areas left behind by a decade-long recovery.

The current expansion is among the longest ever and brought national unemployment to an 18-year low. Yet over 6.3 million are still out of work, many of them clustered in cities with chronic, high unemployment. A Reuters review of federal data shows that out of those unemployed about a quarter live in 50 urban counties with above-average unemployment, and a third in just 100. Often with large minority populations, those areas include cities like St. Louis, Cleveland and Baltimore - 20th century industrial powerhouses hit hard by globalization, demographic changes, and the shift to a service-based economy.

Amid the tightest labor markets in two decades and labor force growth the slowest in half a century, local and national officials are turning to targeted training schemes, new investment incentives, and other strategies to bring jobs closer to the unemployed. "We definitely need to be thinking in terms of place as an

important component...Increasing the number of people who are connected to the economy is fundamental to the maximum employment goal," Atlanta Federal Reserve bank president Raphael Bostic told Reuters in an interview. "What counts as success? Is it two million people? Five million people?" Bostic said, referring to the number of jobless. "We can get to maximum employment and still have a lot of distress."

Pile of cash

While monetary policy works on the national level, the Fed under former chair Janet Yellen and now under chairman Jerome Powell has been only gently raising interest rates in part to see if it can help lagging areas join the recovery.

However, a consensus is building among economists and politicians that the persistence of unemployment and poverty in certain areas needs to be addressed with direct, "place-based" policies. The tax code approved by the Republican congress in

December included a bipartisan-backed measure to support such locally-directed efforts, granting a capital gains waiver for those who invest in locations included on a list of distressed census tracts being chosen by state governors.

Advocates, who include Donald Trump's Council of Economic Advisors Chair Kevin Hassett and Jared Bernstein, a former Obama administration adviser, hope it shifts capital from buoyant stock markets and high-value real estate to blighted rural pockets, struggling suburbs, or ailing inner city neighborhoods.

"Investors are sitting on a large pile of (unrealized) capital gains," said John Lettieri, president of the Economic Innovation Group, a think tank that sponsored a 2015 paper by Hassett and Bernstein outlining the idea. "We think the scale is likely to be measured certainly in the tens of billions of dollars." Lettieri said about how much of an estimated \$1 trillion in unrealized capital gains could make its way to neglected areas. — Reuters

EXCHANGE RATES

AL-MUZAINI EXCHANGE CO.		DOLLARCO EXCHANGE CO. LTD		BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY		
ASIAN COUNTRIES		Canadian dollar	238.080	CURRENCY		
Japanese Yen	2.806	Turkish lira	74.520			
Indian Rupees	4.630	Swiss Franc	315.860	BUY	SELL	
Pakistani Rupees	2.602	Australian Dollar	234.090	British Pound	0.404068	0.411568
Srilankan Rupees	1.933	US Dollar Buying	299.500	Czech Korune	0.006199	0.015499
Nepali Rupees	2.902	GOLD		Danish Krone	0.044544	0.049544
Singapore Dollar	230.250	20 Gram	260.520	Euro	0.356348	0.363848
Hongkong Dollar	38.311	10 Gram	133.180	Georgian Lari	0.138280	0.138280
Bangladesh Taka	3.593	5 Gram	67.430	Hungarian	0.001138	0.001328
Philippine Peso	5.793	Rate for Transfer		Norwegian Krone	0.033498	0.038698
Thai Baht	9.679	US Dollar	302.190	Romanian Leu	0.064623	0.081473
GCC COUNTRIES		Canadian Dollar	233.955	Russian ruble	0.004785	0.004785
Saudi Riyal	80.210	Sterling Pound	410.280	Slovakia	0.008995	0.018995
Qatari Riyal	82.644	Euro	359.600	Swedish Krona	0.030317	0.035317
Omani Riyal	781.445	Swiss Frank	305.900	Swiss Franc	0.296206	0.307206
Bahraini Dinar	798.990	Bahrain Dinar	803.635	Australasia		
UAE Dirham	81.946	UAE Dirhams	82.680	Australian Dollar	0.220198	0.232198
ARAB COUNTRIES		Jordanian Dinar	427.500	New Zealand Dollar	0.206221	0.215721
Egyptian Pound - Cash	0.000	Egyptian Pound	17.133	America		
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	17.039	Sri Lankan Rupees	1.918	Canadian Dollar	0.230049	0.239049
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.208	Indian Rupees	4.496	US Dollars	0.298050	0.302450
Tunisian Dinar	126.080	Pakistani Rupees	2.611	US Dollars Mint	0.298550	0.302450
Jordanian Dinar	423.910	Bangladesh Taka	3.619	Asia		
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	2.005	Philippines Peso	5.817	Bangladesh Taka	0.003002	0.003784
Syrian Lira	0.000	Cyprus pound	17.985	Chinese Yuan	0.046047	0.049547
Morocco Dirham	33.227	Japanese Yen	3.755	Hong Kong Dollar	0.036747	0.039497
EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES		Syrian Pound	1.590	Indian Rupee	0.003930	0.004657
US Dollar Transfer	300.700			Indonesian Rupiah	0.000017	0.000023
Euro	371.670			Japanese Yen	0.002695	0.002875
Sterling Pound	426.390			Korean Won	0.000270	0.000285

Business

Toyota launches production model 'Sora' fuel cell bus

First fuel cell bus in Japan to receive vehicle type certification



KUWAIT: Toyota expects to introduce over 100 fuel cell buses, mainly within the Tokyo metropolitan area, ahead of the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020. As the number of FC buses in operation within the metropolitan area increases, Toyota anticipates greater awareness of the vehicle among the public.

Last year, Toyota launched the "Start Your Impossible" global corporate initiative to transform the company from an automobile company to a mobility service company. This was guided by the company's desire to contribute to the improvement and enhancement of customers' lives and society as a whole through support of the creation of a more inclusive and sustainable society in which everyone feels inspired to challenge his or her impossible. In developing the Sora, Toyota has sought to design buses that provide customers with freedom of mobility and become enduring town icons.

Toyota aims to create a bus that works for and supports society, so the Toyota Fuel Cell System (TFCS) has been leveraged in the Sora for its environmental friendliness and ability to serve as a power source in the event of a disaster. The Sora

features human-centric universal design and functions, reflecting Toyota's desire that when riding the Sora, mobility no longer presents an impediment to customers challenging the impossible, which helps enable them to achieve their dreams.

Specific features

High environmental performance and the



Over 100 buses expected to be introduced by 2020

joy that is derived from FC technology

The Toyota Fuel Cell System (TFCS), which was developed for the Mirai fuel cell electric vehicle (FCEV), has been leveraged to realize high environmental performance with no CO2 emissions or Substances of Concern (SoC) emitted when in operation,

as well as quiet comfort with minimal vibration.

The Sora is equipped with a high-capacity external power output device, which can provide high output and a large capacity of electricity supply (9 kW maximum output, and electricity supply of 235 kWh*2) and has potential use as an emergency power source following disasters.

Universal design and function that provides everyone with greater freedom of movement. Horizontal seats with an automatic storage mechanism (first in Japan*3)

The Sora's seats are automatically stored when not in use, improving comfort and convenience for passengers with strollers and wheelchairs as well as other passengers.

Field of vision support camera system (bus peripheral monitoring function) (first in Japan*3)

Eight high-definition cameras fitted inside and outside the vehicle detect pedestrians and bicyclists around the bus providing a field of vision support camera system. When at bus stops, the system warns the driver of surrounding pedestrians and bicyclists through sound notifications and images thereby improving safety.

Acceleration control function delivers



improved safety (first in Japan 3)

The acceleration control function suppresses sudden acceleration and enables smooth acceleration from complete stops in consideration of the safety of standing passengers. Also, as the bus is not motor operated, there is no gear shifting, resulting in minimal lurching.

Design

The design pursues stereoscopic shaping that significantly differs from the hexahedron (box shape) of conventional buses. It also uses LED technology for the front and rear lights. Such design features make the FC bus instantly recognizable.

Dutch eye Air France woes fearing KLM headwinds

THE HAGUE: Dutch politicians and unions are watching the unfolding crisis at Air France with increasing concern, amid fears the turbulence at the French company will sideswipe its Dutch partner KLM-another chapter in an already stormy union.

Air France-KLM boss Jean-Marc Janaillac abruptly announced his resignation Friday after staff at the French carrier rejected a pay deal, which had been aimed at ending months of costly walkouts.

Staff and unions at KLM, which merged with the French company in 2004 to create Europe's biggest airline, have however been left helplessly on the sidelines, angered by the drama across the border. Once again, the crisis has helped to highlight sharp cultural and social differences between the two countries, with Dutch workers rarely resorting to bitter conflicts with employers.

"Asking for a raise from the top of the barricade and waving a flag is absurd," said Robert Swankhuizen, head of the Dutch Association of Aviation Technicians (NVLIT). In line with the Dutch approach to labour relations, he backs "compromise" and told AFP he believes "things can always be resolved by discussing them calmly". He qualified Janaillac's departure as "stupid" in the eyes of KLM staff, adding under his stewardship the company "has prospered. He will be missed by the group. He was always very open".

'We're the fall guys'

Air France shares went into a tailspin on the Paris stock exchange Monday, closing 9.8 percent lower on the day. They lost another 0.7 percent on Tuesday. The chaos at Air France is a bitter pill for KLM, which has seen its own profits drained by its French partner. The group announced first quarter losses of 118 million euros, but that was entirely due to Air France which lost 178 million euros compared to KLM's profits of 60 million euros.



PARIS: Chief executive of Air France-KLM Jean-Marc Janaillac leaves after a press conference as he announced he resigned after employees rejected the company's latest offer on wages, following weeks of strikes by pilots and other workers in Paris. —AFP

Added to that, staff and management at Air France have been locked in the pay dispute since February—at a cost of another 75 million euros. The French government has steadfastly ruled out coming to the aid of the country's flagship carrier, but Transport Minister Elisabeth Borne did discuss the situation late Monday with her worried Dutch counterpart, Dutch media reported.

French unions are demanding a 5.1 percent wage increase in 2018, after a six-year salary freeze. The offer rejected by 55.44 percent of Air France workers was for a 7.0 percent pay rise, but spread over four years. "These demands are irresponsible. The unions have to shoulder their responsibilities," insisted Swankhuizen, adding the "strikes are weakening" the company's position.

"Gulf companies are just waiting to jump in and grab parts of the European market," he said, "so how far are we going to let the situation go?"

"We've been taken hostage, and have become the fall guys," he added.

Marriage of convenience

A leaked study in July of 50 managers carried out by French and Dutch unions revealed a deep distrust between the two airlines, fuelled by often petty grievances and

cultural differences.

Each side complained the other only looked after their own interests. But cultural differences "are common in any marriage, and even bigger when it's a union between two large international groups", said Leen van der List, head of the aviation section of the largest Dutch trade union FNV.

"Both workers and management have to put forward those people who know how to build bridges," he said, insisting "progress must be made". Even if the first flush of wedded bliss has faded, the Dutch are not planning to seek a divorce. "This union is necessary for both sides. We are annoyed, but without this marriage we would no longer be here," said van der List.

"We may complain and tap our feet, but our companies are completely linked. And we mustn't forget that KLM has become what it is, thanks to this merger," added Swankhuizen. Even if KLM did want to fly off alone into the sunset, it doesn't have that choice, said Jan-Willem van Dijk, head of the KLM work's committee. "The merger of the two groups in 2004, was in fact more of a buyout. Air France is the boss," he said, quoted by the leading Dutch daily De Volkskrant.

And for Swankhuizen it's clear. "The French state will never let go of the goose which lays the golden eggs." —AFP

AUB wins 'Best Private Banking in Kuwait' award for 2018

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank (AUB) announced that it has been awarded the prestigious 'Best Private Banking in Kuwait' award for 2018 from the Banker Middle East, one of the region's most influential financial magazines in the Middle East.

The award comes in recognition of AUB's continuous commitment towards providing excellent services to its private banking clientele, and its vision to implement international best practices to ensure the delivery of a trusted premium private banking service.

AUB's success was announced at the recent Banker Middle East awards ceremony in Dubai.

AUB was recognized for its private banking differentiated products, unique services provided to private banking customers and high net worth individuals, successful workshops to drive more customer awareness on a variety of topics, continuous development and process effectiveness, as well as inter-group services integration and higher quality of assets.

Richard Groves, AUB's CEO said:

"We are very pleased with our recent achievement of receiving this "Best Private Banking in Kuwait" award. I would like to thank our customers for their trust and our colleagues in Private Banking for this achievement."

Medhat Tawfik, AUB's Senior General Manager, Private Banking and Wealth Management also said, "We are extremely delighted to have won this "Best Private Banking in Kuwait" award. This recognition motivates us to enhance our private banking services to our clients, and one which brings more responsibility on myself and my colleagues at AUB as we are committed to further excel in our offerings to maintain our customers' valuable trust".

"Earlier in 2017, AUB won the 'Best Private Banking in Kuwait' award from the Banker Middle East, along with a number of other industry awards, including for Private Banking. This year's award is again, an additional recognition of our commitment to attain trust through excellence," added Tawfik



KUWAIT: Medhat Tawfik, AUB's Senior General Manager, Private Banking and Wealth Management receiving the award.

Business

KFH inaugurates Al-Dhahiya premium banking lounge

Al-Nahedh: Fostering Fintech as a major source for customer experience



Al-Nahedh and KFH officials cutting the ribbon



Al-Dhahiya premium banking lounge

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) inaugurated Al-Dhahiya new Premium Banking lounge for its Awlawyya, Nukhba and Ruwwad customers. This comes as part of KFH vision in offering its valued customers a superior service experience as per highest standards of quality, while strengthening ties and communication with its customers. The state-of-the-art branch introduces new generation of banking services that fulfill customers' aspirations and exceed their expectations.

Group CEO Mazin Saad Al-Nahedh, inaugurated the branch in the presence of VIP guests and a number of KFH senior officials. Al-Nahedh said that opening Al-Dhahiya Premium Banking Lounge for Awlawyya, Nukhba and Ruwwad Customers is a new milestone in KFH customer service strategy. KFH is continuously keen on providing the best innovative services and products to its customers as per highest technological development. KFH attaches great importance to fostering and promoting Fintech as it is a source of major support for superior customer experience.

He boasted the significant role of "KFH" in supporting and developing the national economy along with the distinctive banking and financial services offered to customers, indicating that the



Mazin Saad Al-Nahedh



The XTM



Tour at Lady's lounge

long track record of regional and global achievements of KFH confirms customers' trust and loyalty to the bank.

Al-Nahedh added that KFH uniquely offers branches dedicated for ladies as a privilege advantage, indicating the bank applies the best practices in banking as per highest international standards, in addition to the professionalism of innovation and customer services across huge network of branches spanning Kuwait. He underlined the full compliance of KFH with Sharia principles and the regulations of regulatory authorities.

KFH extensively focuses on upgrading the performance efficiency of its branches and staff to address the growing customer base while delivering on their high expectations.



KFH officials with VIP guests

KAMCO signs SPA with NCH Ventures to acquire 70% of Global

KUWAIT: KAMCO Investment Company ("KAMCO"), a leading investment company with one of the largest AUMs in the region, signed a Sale and Purchase Agreement (SPA) with NCH Ventures S.P.C ("NCH"), a Bahrain domiciled entity representing the interests of more than 50 financial institutions. KAMCO will acquire 396,426,434 shares amounting to a 69.528 percent stake in Global Investment House ("Global"), after due diligence and requisite formalities are completed and

agreed upon by both parties on all terms related to the acquisition.

KAMCO announced that signing the SPA is the first step towards completing the acquisition of the majority stake in Global. The next step will be fulfilling all regulatory requirements and completing requisite formalities set by various involved parties. The acquisition will include Global's headquarters located in Kuwait, in addition to the firm's offices in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan and Turkey.

Chief Executive Officer of KAMCO, Faisal Mansour Sarkhou said, "Signing this agreement is an important step in the acquisition process of what will be one of the largest acquisitions of its kind in



CEO of KAMCO Faisal Mansour Sarkhou

the recent history of Kuwait's investment sector and the region. We believe that this acquisition further solidifies our role in the market and demonstrates the scalability of our long-term business model." Sarkhou added, "Successfully concluding this transaction will strengthen KAMCO's human capital, along with the Firm's operational and financial profile. By combining the experience and expertise of both firms, we will evolve into a larger entity that can competitively operate on a global scale, capable of delivering more efficient results to the trusted shareholders and loyal clients from both sides. This transaction will also support and enhance the local economy, in line with the Amiri Vision to transform Kuwait into an international financial hub and trade center."

Sarkhou expressed his gratitude for the seamless cooperation during the negotiations period by both parties. He also commended the hard work and effort put forth by all who are involved to ensure the successful outcome of this transaction.

EQUATE Group announces financial results for Q1 2018

KUWAIT: The EQUATE Group, a global petrochemical producer, yesterday reported its Q1, 2018 financial results (unaudited), with EBITDA of \$577 million, up by 22 percent from Q1, 2017, net profit of \$435 million, up 41 percent from Q1, 2017 and NIAT of \$425 million, up from \$308 million in Q1, 2017. These were the EQUATE Group's best quarterly results since the Group's inception. The EQUATE Group combines the Kuwait-based EQUATE Petrochemical Company and its subsidiaries MEGlobal, Equipolymers and The Kuwait Olefins Company (TKOC).



EQUATE's performance was driven by a robust polyethylene (PE) market demand in all regions, a sharp price increase in Monoethylene Glycol (MEG) due to tight global supply conditions and excellent operational reliability in Kuwait, Canada and Germany.

"This remarkable achievement demonstrates the ability of EQUATE personnel across the globe to deliver operational excellence consistently," said the EQUATE Group's President & CEO, Dr Ramesh Ramachandran. "We have been able to deliver on the cost and growth synergies identified after the MEGlobal acquisition, and our shared strategies on innovation and optimization of the ethylene glycol plants enabled several operational breakthroughs in Q1. Our focus remains on safe and reliable operations as we head into the next quarter."

EQUATE's construction on its new world-scale MEGlobal ethylene glycol plant in Oyster Creek, TX, remains on track, with completion expected in the 2nd half of 2019.

The EQUATE Group* is a global producer of petrochemicals and the world's second largest producer of Ethylene Glycol (EG). The Group has industrial complexes in Kuwait, North America and Europe that annually produce over 5 million tons of Ethylene, EG, Polyethylene (PE) and Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET). The products are marketed throughout Asia, the Americas, Europe, the Middle East and Africa. The EQUATE Group's shareholders include Petrochemical Industries Company (PIC), The Dow Chemical Company (Dow), Boubyan Petrochemical Company (BPC) and Qurain Petrochemical Industries Company (QPIC). The Group is a leading enterprise that pursues sustainability wherever it operates through partnerships in fields that include the environment, economy and society.

Chevrolet Alghanim launches stunning offers ahead of holy Ramadan

KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing commitment to rewarding customers and following the great success of its offers launched ahead of the Holy month of Ramadan last year, Yusuf A Alghanim & Sons Automotive (Chevrolet Alghanim), the exclusive distributor of Chevrolet vehicles in Kuwait, launched the strongest deals yet for the year, starting May 01st, 2018 offering valuable gifts in which customers will get throughout the offer period.

In addition to the competitive prices Chevrolet Alghanim is offering, customers will receive an immediate and guaranteed cash prize of up to KD 1,200 by drawing up to three cash coupons, depending on the vehicle bought. Furthermore, Chevrolet owners will be entitled up to three-year or 60,000 kilometres service package, and window film provided by Kromozone, in order to ensure the highest level of customer satisfaction. A free third-party insurance and car registration will also be granted to ensure the best level of customer service.

Purchasing a vehicle from Chevrolet during the offer period is undoubtedly the best choice for all customers. The wide range of Chevrolet 2018 vehicles includes the king of the desert, Silverado, which comes in a 5.3L engine producing 355 horse power and is coupled with standard features such LED fog lamps, 17-inch wheels, 8-inch Chevrolet MyLink touchscreen display. The Chevrolet Tahoe is equipped with the best in class standard features



such as a 5.3-liter V8 engine with active fuel management, direct injection and variable valve timing, generating among the strongest horsepower in its class of 355 hp, and the 2018 Camaro, poised to challenge the sports coupes in the world with its 3.6-liter V6 engine that produces 335HP and 284 Nm of torque, as well as four BREMBO sports brakes, 20-inch wheels and an 8-inch MyLink touchscreen with Apple CarPlay feature.

Malibu

The Malibu, considered the most luxurious, connected and technologically advanced Malibu ever, packs a number of features tailored around customers' needs and desires such as an all-new 2.5L engine with best-in-class horsepower (186hp) and fuel efficiency (14.3km/l), Apple CarPlay system, Push Start Engine and Keyless Entry

Traverse

The all-new 2018 Chevrolet Traverse is for the go-getters, adventure seekers and the family that's always in motion. The midsize SUV comes with a standard 3.6L V6 engine for and impressive power, safety features such as the Adaptive Cruise Control,

Front Pedestrian Braking, Surround Vision, the Chevrolet MyLink system and Apple CarPlay.

Equinox

The All-New 2018 Equinox provides customers with great value of money with standard features that raise the bar for all entry models in the market. The car's 1.5-liter Turbo engine delivers 170 horsepower to compete in its segment of 2.0L cars with similar horsepower range. All-New 2018 Equinox is equipped with keyless entry, keyless engine start, LED tail lamps, 17-inch aluminum wheels, Chevrolet's MyLink system with a 7-inch touchscreen, as well as many enhanced safety features that include a rear sensor and four airbags.

All customers who purchase a Chevrolet from Yusuf A. Alghanim & Sons benefit of the Chevrolet Care Program, which entails new levels of post-sale support and trust. The Chevrolet Care is an exceptional customer service that is based on four main pillars: competitive and transparent service costs (especially for four-wheel drive vehicles), scheduled service appointment booking with same day delivery, quality service by certified technicians and 3yr/100,000km warranty with 24x7 roadside assistance for 4 years.

Technology

China moves to rope in tech unicorns, tech start-ups; battles for supremacy

Firms must show three years' profit before being listed

SHANGHAI: Having lost the likes of Alibaba and Baidu to Wall Street, China is hatching a plan to woo them back and make sure it keeps a new generation of technology titans closer to home as it battles the US for supremacy in the sector. New share offerings worth tens of billions of dollars are in the pipeline for 2018, setting it up as a blockbuster year with a number of so-called "unicorns"—tech start-ups valued at least \$1 billion—lining up to cash in.

China dominates the line-up of the world's biggest unicorns expected to list, including mobile-payments pioneer Ant Financial—valued at an estimated \$100 billion—as well as ride-sharing firm Didi Chuxing and online-services platform Meituan-Dianping, both put in the tens of billions. Strict rules essentially prevented the first wave from listing in mainland China, with Alibaba and Baidu instead opting for New York and Tencent heading to Hong Kong.

But authorities are now planning to ease those rules, which analysts say is part of Beijing's goal of developing domestic champions into global leaders in artificial intelligence, big data, and other sectors—with state support. And this comes at a time of heightened trade tensions with Washington, which already complains of a skewed playing field in China's domestic markets.

"This is absolutely part of China 2025," said Peking University economics professor Christopher Balding, using shorthand for China's tech-dominance plan. "One of the things that Beijing has made very clear is that they want to control and strengthen their tech companies. It has its thumb on the scale at every step."



Details and timing remain sketchy



Receipts (CDRs) — which are linked to their main shares. Details and timing remain sketchy, but authorities said in March the plan targets industries that are "in line with national strategies" in internet, big data, artificial intelligence and related industries.

The enticements fit with President Xi Jinping's desire to harness all facets of national power to compete with the United States, said analysts. "It does fit together broadly with China promoting high-tech and developing its financial markets," said Fraser Howie, author of "Red Capitalism", an analysis of China's economy. The benefits for China include allowing domestic investors to profit from unicorn success while enhancing Beijing's grip on a tech sector that is already "quasi-nationalized" through state-linked funding and other means, said Balding.

Such listings are expected to be vigorously embraced, potentially reinvigorating Chinese share markets dominated by financials or industrials. They will "increase the depth and activity of the market," said Jackson Wong of Huarong International Securities. "That's the (government's) main focus and they are trying to get that done quickly." Tech companies, meanwhile, could open a spigot of cash as their shares are typically priced much higher in China than elsewhere.



BEIJING: These file pictures show customers looking at Xiaomi smartphones in a shop in Beijing.—AFP photos

Relaxed rules

A Wall Street Journal report quoted sources who estimate Chinese tech IPOs could put new shares worth \$50 billion on markets, while Bloomberg News cited analyst estimates that companies eligible to issue CDRs could raise \$235 billion. Alibaba, Baidu, Tencent and JD.com have all expressed interest in listing CDRs in China. Chinese smartphone maker Xiaomi recently chose Hong Kong over New York for what could be the world's biggest IPO since Alibaba's \$25 billion coming-out in 2014, after the southern Chinese financial hub relaxed rules that had deterred some big IPOs.

As China increases its grip on Hong Kong, a listing there is just fine with Beijing, said Balding. US-China tensions may also further push Chinese tech companies to list at home, to curry favor with Beijing and avoid getting caught in the middle of the big-power tug-of-

war, analysts said. One such victim of the battle is Chinese telecom equipment ZTE, which has been banned from selling to US firms for seven years after falling foul of Washington over illegal sales to Iran and North Korea.

"The current Sino-US trade conflict has made up their minds to come back," said Liao Qun, chief economist with China's Citic Bank International. "We should begin to see action very soon." But greater shareholder control over tech firms by Beijing or its actors could exacerbate US tensions if state-backed Chinese unicorns seek to expand overseas with acquisitions, Balding said.

"When Beijing, through its tech companies, then goes out to buy firms and control their data while not allowing foreign competition in its own market, there is a very valid (US) concern both from competitiveness and a national security standpoint," he said.—AFP

Uber shows off its vision for future 'flying taxi'

LOS ANGELES: It's not a bird, nor a plane. But Uber's new prototype vehicle unveiled Tuesday shows off its vision of the future of transportation—a "flying taxi" that aims to alleviate urban congestion. A model of Uber's electric vertical take-off and landing vehicle concept (eVTOL) — a cross between a helicopter and a drone—was displayed at the second annual Uber Elevate Summit in Los Angeles.

"Our goal is to radically improve global mobility," said Uber Aviation product chief Nikhil Goel. Goel said the all-electric flyer can achieve speeds over 300 kilometers (200

miles) an hour with a range of 100 kilometers on a battery charge. "We fly a lot so we can prove to the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) and the public that these aircraft are safe," he said. Uber has become a global force in transportation with its ridesharing service, but is also working on autonomous vehicles and other forms of transport. Uber plans the first demonstration flights for Los Angeles in 2020 and commercialization of the flying taxi in 2023, saying these could be ordered on demand just like a ridesharing vehicle. Eric Allison, who heads Uber's Aviation programs, said the flying vehicles are part of an overall strategy allowing people to do without personal cars.

"The rational choice for transportation will be less and less to own and drive a car," Allison said. "We want to price it so low, it'll be irrational to drive your car." The first flying taxi will be designed with a pilot, according to Allison, but over time can be developed as autonomous vehicles.—AFP

Kuwait's CAIT, Kaspersky Lab, Diyar host 'Cyber Defense Conference'

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT), in partnership with cybersecurity specialists Kaspersky Lab and regional IT specialists Diyar, has hosted a cybersecurity conference, titled Cyber Defense Conference, at the Radisson Blu Hotel in the Kuwaiti capital. The inaugural conference aims to raise cybersecurity awareness in different industries in Kuwait and enhance preparedness and readiness across Government and private organizations.

According to the Kaspersky Security Network (KSN) statistics for the first quarter of 2018, 26.2 percent of users in Kuwait were affected by web threats while 50.5 percent of users were affected by local threats (malware spread in local networks, by USBs, CDs, and DVDs). The results also showed a 7.2 percent drop in Ransomware attacks in the country.

Khalied Al Hatem, Head of Prevention and Incident Response at CAIT said: "Raising cybersecurity awareness is a critical need across public and private sector organizations in the region, and we are encouraged by the support and participation of global and regional leaders such as Kaspersky Lab and Diyar. We strongly believe that,

when it comes to cybersecurity, awareness is the best prevention. Numerous groups and individuals look to the region as a target due to its enviable global position, and it requires a cross-industry approach to build the level of education needed to secure Kuwait, both today and in the future."

Amir Kanaan, Managing Director - Middle East, Turkey and Africa, Kaspersky Lab said: "We are honored to play a key role in this prestigious event, and this symbolizes our commitment to cybersecurity in Kuwait, an integral market for us. Raising cybersecurity consciousness and boosting technical know-how are essential pillars in remedying concerns at both the public and private sector levels. Kaspersky Lab is aligned with Kuwait's national vision and we look forward to introducing hands-on training, workshops, and next-generation solutions and services that will help keep the country safe from cyber threats."

Sammy Elyan, Cyber Security Principal Consultant at Diyar commented: "Diyar is proud to bring its regional knowledge and history to a forum such as this, to stand alongside CAIT and Kaspersky Lab to elevate the level of knowledge in IT and cyber security. We believe that government departments and businesses in Kuwait are quite advanced in terms of cybersecurity awareness, but for such as this are still essential to constantly elevate the level of readiness in the market."

A unique learning opportunity during the event was the Kaspersky Interactive Protection Simulation (KIPS) game. This exercise places business decision-makers and IT security teams in a simulated environment in which they face unforeseen cyber threats. The challenge is to build a cyber-defense strategy based on various features and capabilities covered during the event.



Huawei hosts its Annual Middle East Partner Summit

KUWAIT: Leading global ICT solutions provider Huawei hosted its annual Middle East Partner Summit in Dubai on 7 May. Taking place under the theme 'Leading New ICT, The Road to Win-win Ecosystem', the summit hosted participants from 12 countries across the Middle East who gathered to form a collaborative platform in order to explore the current requirements for a successful digital transformation and ushering in the Artificial Intelligence era, exchange ideas, share success stories and best practices, targeted at empowering Huawei's channel partners in order to increase their ability to cater to the region's increasingly demanding technology innovation needs, and to establish an open and collaborative ecosystem.

The full-day summit highlighted Huawei's latest partner programs and outlined the company's strategic plans for digitalization in the Middle East, in order to move on to next stage by adopting the latest AI technologies and cloud computing. Huawei's channel strategy for 2018 centers on the empowerment of its channel partners to deliver the latest, most comprehensive ICT solutions to their customers by embracing a collaborative, win-win approach to partners, competitors, and the industry as a whole.

In partnership with GAPP, a Diamond sponsor of the summit, Huawei launched their GTM ("Go To Market") Strategy, which focuses on catering to Middle East market requirements by building an enhanced service portfolio with GAPP serving as systems integrators. Other partners who supported the event were Diamond sponsor Redington, Platinum sponsors Microsoft and STME, Gold sponsors CNBM Technology, Enterprise Systems, net., SAP and Suse.

Huawei has updated some star products and solutions, including the Agile Campus 5.0 network solution, All-flash Storage Dorado product, Prefabricated Modular Data Center and all new M-Series Artificial Intelligence (AI) enabled video surveillance camera. Huawei also displayed its newest product portfolio, including the launch of its Fusion Server G5500 Heterogeneous Server. This new server is designed for data center deployment, and uses a fully modular design, with independent CPUs. It is a best-in-class heterogeneous computing platform for AI, HPC, intelligent cloud, and video analytics. The G5500 supports GPU Direct RDMA as well as P2P interconnect technologies. It supports one-click topology switching, which provides the optimal heterogeneous topology configurations for diverse workloads. A variety of senior executives from Huawei Enterprise Business Group shared their thoughts on the latest products and technologies, the broader trends in the industry, and business perspectives relating to their regional partners.

"We see our long-term enterprise strategy in the region centered around building an ecosystem through which Huawei can help our Middle East channel partners meet their customers' needs with enhanced connectivity and improved user experience, across different domains," said Alaa ElShimy, Vice President and Managing Director, Huawei Enterprise Middle East. "Huawei advocates openness, collaboration, and shared success."

Through joint innovation with our customers, partners, and peers, we are increasing the value of ICT in support of a more robust and mutually beneficial industry ecosystem. Our goal is a win-win situation for everyone, and we are dedicated to working together to establish mainstream standards and lay the foundations for this shared success." Bander Alfreih, Chairman and CEO of GAPP said: "Integrated, collaborative partnerships like the one we have announced with Huawei are exactly what we need to move the region forward on the path to digital transformation. We are incredibly excited to get to work on building this infrastructure together, and to see how quickly it will produce tangible results for the ecosystem writ large, as



Hazem Bazan



Alaa El Shimy

well as the individual end customer. This will be how we define our success."

Hazem Bazan, Vice President-Channel and Alliances, Huawei Enterprise Middle East: "Huawei is determined to build relationships that are both symbolic and practical with partners throughout the industry. Through a strategy of shared success, we will create together the platforms that will cultivate a fertile environment for an unrivaled digital ecosystem to grow." Huawei continues to establish a partner ecosystem that includes channel partners, solution partners, service partners, talent alliances, and investment and financing partners. Partners include many industry-leading companies such as SAP, Accenture, GE, Honeywell, Siemens, Alstom, Hexagon, Thales, VST ECS, Synnex, ALSO, and Redington. At the end of 2017, the company had more than 13,000 channel partners, 860 solution partners, and 2,900 service partners working around the world to deliver solutions to over 45,000 customers.

Health

New outbreak of Ebola kills 17 in northwest DR Congo

WHO releases \$1m from emergency contingency fund

KINSHASA: Seventeen people in northwest Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have died from Ebola, the health ministry said on Tuesday, describing the fresh outbreak as a "public health emergency with international impact." "Twenty-one cases of fever with hemorrhagic indications and 17 deaths" have been recorded in Equateur province, it said, citing a notification to the ministry as of May 3. It is the DRC's ninth known outbreak of Ebola since 1976, when the deadly viral disease was first identified in then-Zaire by a Belgian-led team.

In Geneva, the World Health Organization (WHO) said lab tests in the DRC confirmed the presence of Ebola virus in two out of five samples collected from patients. "WHO is working closely with the government of the DRC to rapidly scale up its operations and mobilize health partners, using the model of a successful response to a similar... outbreak in 2017," it said in a statement.

It said it had released \$1 million from an emergency contingency fund, set up a coordination group and deployed more than 50 experts to work with the DRC government and health agencies. "The action plan prepared by the health ministry has been approved," an official statement released after a cabinet meeting said.

No new deaths

"Since the notification of the cases on May 3, no deaths have been reported," it said, without specifying when the first case came to light. The outbreak occurred in Bikoro, on the shores of Lake Tumba. All the cases were reported from a clinic at Ilkoko Iponge, located about 30 kilometers from Bikoro, where treatment capacities are limited, the WHO said. A team of experts from the WHO, Doctors without Borders (DRC) and Equateur

province travelled to Bikoro on Tuesday to beef up coordination and carry out investigations, it said.

Ebola is one of the world's most notorious diseases, being both highly infectious and extremely lethal. It is caused by a virus that has a natural reservoir in the bat, which does not itself fall ill, but can pass the microbe on to humans who hunt it for "bushmeat". The virus is handed on by contact with bodily fluids—touching a sick or dead person is a well-known source of infection. Following an incubation period of between two and 21 days, Ebola develops into a high fever, weakness, intense muscle and joint pain, headaches and a sore throat.

That is often followed by vomiting and diarrhea, skin eruptions, kidney and liver failure, and internal and external bleeding. The worst-ever Ebola outbreak started in December 2013 in southern Guinea before spreading to two neighboring west African countries, Liberia and Sierra Leone. That outbreak killed more than 11,300 people out of nearly 29,000 registered cases, according to WHO estimates, although the real figure is thought to be significantly higher. More than 99 percent of victims were in the three West African countries, although cases occurred in other parts of the world, often stirring panic.

There is no current vaccine to prevent Ebola or licensed treatment for it, although a range of experimental drugs are in development. Early care with rehydration may boost the chance of survival. Given the lack of a pharmaceutical weapon against Ebola, health experts have responded with time-honored measures of control, prevention and containment. They use rigorous protocols to protect medical personnel with disposable full-body suits, masks, goggles and gloves and disinfecting sprays.—AFP

“ It is DRC’s ninth known outbreak ”



KINSHASA: In this file photo, a health worker sprays a colleague with disinfectant during a training session for Congolese health workers to deal with Ebola virus in Kinshasa.—Reuters

Genes linked with sunburn, skin cancer risk

PARIS: Certain genes can determine which people are more at risk of getting sunburnt, and possibly develop skin cancer as a result, scientists said Tuesday. In a trawl of the genetics of nearly 180,000 people of European ancestry in Britain, Australia, the Netherlands and United States, researchers found 20 sunburn genes. Eight of the genes had been associated with skin cancer in previous research, according to findings published in the journal Nature Communications.

And in at least one region of the genome, "we have found evidence to suggest that the gene involved in melanoma

risk... acts through increasing susceptibility to sunburns," co-author Mario Falchi of King's College London said. Sun exposure is critical for the body's production of vitamin D, which keeps bones, teeth, and muscles healthy, and which scientists say may help stave off chronic diseases, even cancer. But too much can be painful in the short-term, and dangerous for your health.

The new study, which claims to be the largest to date into the genetics of sunburn, helps explain why people with the same skin tone can have such different reactions to exposure to sunlight—some burn red while others tan brown. It may also begin to explain factors in skin cancer risk. "It is necessary to explore these genes in more detail, to understand the mechanism by which they contribute to propensity to burn," said Falchi. In future, the research may help identify people at risk, through genetic testing. "People tend to 'forget' that sunburns are quite dangerous," said Falchi.—AFP

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What's On

KCST participates in Kuwait Learning Forum

Dr. Khalid Al-Begain, President of Kuwait College of Science and Technology said that he is pleased with KCST's participation in Kuwait Education Forum (Q8EDU). NoufEXPO will organize the forum in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Studies, Kuwait University, and the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training. Dr. Al-Begain said, "Our participation as a Sponsor in Q8EDU reflects our genuine efforts towards contributing to building Kuwait's new generation. We believe that the technology based academic bachelor programs that KCST selected to embark on fulfill Kuwait's society's needs along its growth journey." Begain added, "We were definitely encouraged by the patronage of His Excellency the Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Studies Dr Hamed Mohammed Al-Azmi for the event. In addition, Q8EDU's motto of - Education is a Life Long Journey - perfectly coincides with our belief and vision of the role of educational institutions in our times. We are keen to implant the spirit of relentless and continuous learning within and outside the university campus."

About KCST, Begain said: "KCST launched its operations in Kuwait only two years ago. However, during this short period, we managed to attract the attention of the education officials in Kuwait, as well as, new secondary school graduates who are seeking to pursue their university bachelor studies. KCST provided the optimum alternative. We provide a much-needed technology based academic pro-



grams that the new generation looks for. Therefore, our youthful generation do not have to travel abroad to fulfill their educational ambitions. KCST will continue to add more academic programs according to the same principles of value and convenience."

Commenting on KCST's vision and objectives, Ibrahim Bader Al-Mutawa - KCST's Head of Public Relations and Marketing - said: "KCST focus on technology based programs are based on our deep understanding and observation of the trends that the youth con-

sider when traveling to continue their academic studies abroad. From day one, we decided to respond to the trends that shaped our vision and long-term strategy."

Adding, "It is a strategy, we believe, responds to Kuwait's needs while executing its ambitious development plans. We all realize that advanced technology plays the most important role in developing our society's sectors being social or economic including, but not limited to, infrastructure, education, health, etc. KCST campus has all the necessary elements



of success, such as the convenient location, facilities, labs, technical and administrative supporting staff, and the excellent academic team. We are capable of implementing our mission and the vision of our ambitious management."

In reference to KCST's participation in Q8EDU, Al-Mutawa said, "Participating as a Sponsor reflects our determination to have the best possible opportunity to get in touch, personally, with all those who are considering their future bachelor academic studies. We want to be able to respond to their queries, answer

their questions, and present to them the academic environment that KCST represents. We will also take part in Q8EDU's scientific program in order to present our vision for futuristic educational values that bring the spirit of scientific research, entrepreneurship, innovation, and continuous learning to Kuwait's educational system." Al-Mutawa concluded his statement by saying that we are extremely pleased with this fabulous contribution to Kuwait's educational market that NoufEXPO is providing through Q8EDU.

Copthorne Director of Sales wins award

Copthorne Al Jahra Hotel & Resort Director of Sales, Mahmoud Hussein won "Service Recognition Award 2017" at the 2018 Directors of Sales Conference gala held on April 27, 2018 at Millennium Hotel in Dubai. Mahmoud has succeeded through his commitment and persistence to place Copthorne Al Jahra among the big players of the hospitality business in Kuwait. He said, "I feel proud to win this award which comes as a culmination of the effort of years and I thank my team and management for their full support to me, which enabled us to achieve the best result."

2017 was a remarkable year by all means with all the performance indicators skyrocketing. Despite of the challenging location of the hotel being 50 km away from the city, Mahmoud and



his team managed this year to work against all odds and achieve the highest occupancy a hotel has seen in Kuwait in 2017. The hotel occupancy has grown by 30 percent and have been almost running full house for the last quarter of 2017.



Marriott International reveals seasonal experiences

Marriott International yesterday unveiled an array of exciting offers for the upcoming hot months so that guests across the Middle East and Africa can enjoy an unforgettable summer. With a mega 30 percent off available for Marriott International's loyalty members and 20 percent off for non-members, offers available across participating hotels, restaurants, lounges and

spas from a choice of over 200 hotels are not to be missed.

Whether guests are seeking extraordinary desert, resort or city experiences such as reliving the Bedouin way of life at the only resort in a Desert Conservation Reserve, Al Maha, a Luxury Collection Desert Resort and Spa, Dubai; to intimate views of the Pyramids at Marriott Mena House, Cairo; hopping onto the ski slopes in the midst of the summer heat when staying at the Sheraton Mall of the Emirates Hotel, Dubai; or simply lapping up the sun on the luxurious white sand beach at The St. Regis Mauritius Resort - Marriott international has an option suitable for all.

"Time is so valuable for busy people, and through our seasonal offers we are delighted to be able to provide guests with an exceptional opportunity to utilize their time to create memorable experiences at many of our amazing hotels," said Neal Jones, Chief Sales and Marketing Officer, Middle East and Africa,

Marriott International. The summer offers announcement comes hot on the heels of the company's new unified loyalty program across Marriott Rewards, The Ritz-Carlton Rewards and Starwood Preferred Guest (SPG) which will launch in August 2018. Members will earn more points faster than under the prior programs - on average 20% more points for every dollar spent.

"This year, we're recognizing our loyalty members with even better rewards as ongoing appreciation for their continued support - we aim to ensure that our loyal members always have an extraordinary experience beyond the norm and lifelong memories to boot," he concluded. Guests can book offers immediately for stays made from May 1, 2018 till September 30, 2018. Non-loyalty members are encouraged to join Marriott International's loyalty program to be able to enjoy a wide range of exclusive benefits and offers available at the company's properties.

CBK sponsors Jahra Teachers Orchestra's honoring ceremony



Commercial Bank of Kuwait sponsored the honoring ceremony of the Jahra Teachers Orchestra, which was organized in the presence of Jahra governor

Lt. General Fahad Al-Amir, and several music teachers from Jahra education zone. The governor thanked CBK for its support of NGOs and the governorates of Kuwait.

PSA holds Gala Presentation Evening at Millennium Hotel

The Premier Sport Academy (PSA) in association with Celtic F.C. and under the sponsorship of Porsche Centre Kuwait, Behbehani Motors Company, held their Gala Presentation Evening Season 2017-18 at the Millennium Hotel and Conference Centre this week. More than 500 players and guests filled the majestic Taj Hall at the Millennium Hotel in Salmiya for the celebratory gathering, which was attended by the Guest of Honor Group Captain Finlay McLean, MA, BA, RAF, Defense Attache, British Embassy.

The event convened with the playing of the national anthems of Kuwait and the United Kingdom. Several other prominent guests, sponsors and supporters were in attendance. During the evening, more than 250 prestigious awards were presented to players, coaches and sponsors at the end of a tremendously successful season of training courses, matches, festivals, tournaments and special events involving over 500 young players.

Over 200 of these players, aged from 6 to 18 years, were present to receive their end of season trophies, having demonstrated an abundance of hard work, dedication, commitment, high standards of performance and conduct over the course of the season. Further awards were given to players involved in the Basketball Centre of Excellence Program. All the players were presented with individual trophies by Group Captain McLean of the British Embassy.

Many surprise gifts including a return flight to Europe with KLM, a weekend for two in Dubai



courtesy of Ahmad Al-Bader Tourism, Dinners for two at the Millennium Hotel along with some amazing gifts from the awards sponsors, Porsche Centre Kuwait, Behbehani Motors Company. Individual gift bags containing exclusive Porsche model cars were also given to all award winners.

DJ Mary Po ensured all the tributes were accompanied by suitable musical soundtracks to

keep the event moving with a swing. Academy Director Mike Finn and Executive Director Baker Al-Nazer thanked the coaching and administration team, sponsors and supporters for all their assistance in making the season such an enjoyable and successful one for everyone involved with the PSA, before a sumptuous buffet dinner was enjoyed by all.

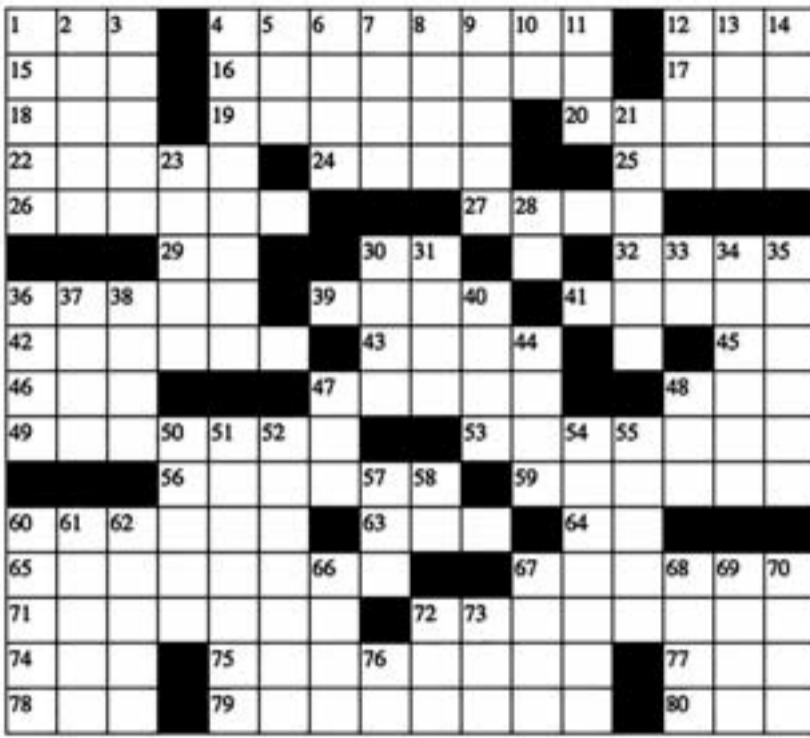
Minnesota State University celebrates 150th anniversary

Minnesota State University, Mankato celebrated the 150th anniversary of its establishment and held an event to honor its alumni over 34 years. Assistant Director of the University International Office Hamdan

Al-Nazahi said, "I came with an elite group of doctors to honor university graduates since 34 years." He said the university wanted to stay in touch with its graduates from all over the world, yet Kuwaitis were the majority at the university, so it preferred to come to Kuwait and recognize its Kuwaiti graduates to strengthen relations with its alumni. He said this is not the first visit to Kuwait as the first visit was in 2016 which was the start of an increase in the number of Kuwaiti students at the university. He added that the number of Kuwaiti students increased from 5 to 86 students and they are among the most outstanding at the university.



CROSSWORD 1905



ACROSS

- 1. A state-chartered savings bank owned by its depositors and managed by a board of trustees.
4. Durable fragrant wood.
12. Of southern Europe.
15. A reptile genus of Iguanidae.
16. The animal order including amoebas.
17. Aircraft landing in bad weather in which the pilot is talked down by ground control using precision approach radar.
18. A workplace for the conduct of scientific research.
19. A city is east central Sweden north northwest of Stockholm.
20. English theoretical physicist who applied relativity theory to quantum mechanics and predicted the existence of antimatter and the positron (1902-1984).
22. English architect (1746-1813).
24. At a previous time.
25. A metabolic acid found in yeast and liver cells.
26. Jewish republic in southwestern Asia at eastern end of Mediterranean.
27. A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
29. A son who has the same first name as his father.
32. Open-heart surgery in which the rib cage is opened and a section of a blood vessel is grafted from the aorta to the coronary artery to bypass the blocked section of the coronary artery and improve the blood supply to the heart.
36. At full speed.
39. Pertaining to animals or animal life or action.
41. The capital and largest city of Yemen.
42. Small striped semiterrestrial eastern American squirrel with cheek pouches.
43. Lacking or deprive of the sense of hearing wholly or in part.
45. In operation or operational.
46. A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
49. A rudaceous rock consisting of sharp fragments embedded in clay or sand.
53. Type genus of the Xiphidae.
56. Port city of Denmark in eastern Jutland.
59. Syncopated music in duple time for dancing the rumba.
60. An ancient Greek city famous for military prowess.
63. A run that is the result of the batter's performance.
64. A silvery ductile metallic element found primarily in bauxite.
65. Used of persons.
71. Any plant of the genus Episcia.
74. The network in the reticular formation that serves an alerting or arousal function.
75. (Japan) Ritual suicide by self-disembowelment on a sword.
77. The bureau of the Treasury Department responsible for tax collections.
78. A chronic skin disease occurring primarily in women between the ages of 20 and 40.
79. Not necessary.
80. (meaning literally 'born') Used to indicate the maiden or family name of a married woman.

DOWN

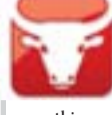
- 1. A Chad language spoken south of Lake Chad.
2. A woman's close-fitting foundation garment.
3. An imaginary elephant that appears in a series of French books for children.
4. Semisweet golden-colored table or dessert wine from around Bordeaux in France.
5. The basic unit of electric current adopted under the System International d'Unites.
6. The organ of smell and entrance to the respiratory tract.
7. Dearly loved.
8. A bachelor's degree in library science.
9. A long noosed rope used to catch animals.
10. A public promotion of some product or service.
11. Someone who is morally reprehensible.
12. A city in northern India.
13. Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
14. Large burrowing rodent of South and Central America.
21. A medicinal drug used to evoke vomiting (especially in cases of drug overdose or poisoning).
23. A landlocked mountainous republic in southeast central Asia north of Afghanistan.
28. The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
30. The closing section of a musical composition.
31. A piece of land held under the feudal system.
33. An associate degree in nursing.
34. African tree having an exceedingly thick trunk and fruit that resembles a gourd and has an edible pulp called monkey bread.
35. God of wisdom or prophecy.
37. A flat-bottomed volcanic crater that was formed by an explosion.
38. A unit of area (4840 square yards) used in English-speaking countries.
40. A white crystalline oxide used in the production of calcium hydroxide.
44. Free from favoritism or self-interest or bias or deception.
47. The longer of the two telegraphic signals used in Morse code.
48. Game in which matchsticks are arranged in rows and players alternately remove one or more of them.
50. A game played with playing cards.
51. Extract of the heartwood of Acacia catechu used for dyeing and tanning and preserving fishnets and sails.
52. Of or relating to Iran or its people or language or culture.
54. Large cylindrical or flattened mostly tropical insects with long strong legs that feed on plants.
55. An expression of greeting.
57. Goddess of fate.
58. A metallic element having four allotropic forms.
61. Proceeding from or ordered by or subject to a pope or the papacy regarded as the successor of the Apostles.
62. Come into existence.
66. Earn on some commercial or business transaction.
67. A river in northern England that flows southeast through West Yorkshire.
68. (Norse mythology) Ruler of the Aesir.
69. Decrease gradually or bit by bit.
70. Other than what is under consideration or implied.
72. (Hawaiian) A small guitar having four strings.
73. A coenzyme derived from the B vitamin nicotinic acid.
76. That is to say.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Taking a good, long look at the circumstances of your life is a priority. You could feel left out or overlooked because you weren't included in an outing; remember that just because others go out without you doesn't mean you aren't wanted!



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You are determined to repair and emotional upheaval with someone dear to you; this person could be on that holds grudges and never forgives or forgets. Your practical side does battle with your whimsical side; you decide which side wins.



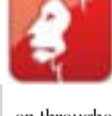
Gemini (May 21-June 20)

You find yourself involved with someone younger who looks to you for answers about life and death; no fear, you'll know exactly what to say as you speak from your heart.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Someone turns to you for strength and wisdom. A past mistake pays off as you realize what's at the root of your making that decision.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

A sweet note sent by someone you helped warms your heart; you love helping deserving people. You could feel disconnected and fuzzy off and on throughout the day; the only blockages and obstacles are in your mind.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

You come to appreciate something others take for granted; you re-experiencing the important role in life played by having your basic needs taken care of.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Something happens at work that reveals someone's true feelings about a project even though they try to hide them; you assure this person you completely understand and they have done nothing wrong.



Scorpio (October 23-November 19)

You wake up ready to face the day. Something you focus on actually moves ahead of schedule; working with others almost seems to be magic.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 19)

You enter into a detailed conversation with someone who seeks your help. You find yourself attending one social gathering after the next; some are work, some pleasure, but buying new clothes is justified.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Not a day to go deeply into anything serious or otherwise; a sort of frivolous day is very strongly indicated. Instead of becoming frustrated when unable to make sense of anything, you decide to take the day off and pursue only lighthearted, almost meaningless tasks.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

You seem to know exactly what's needed in an emergency situation; this isn't serious, just something that needs taken care of.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Nothing can take your mind off of getting your business in order. This could indicate financial, domestic, health and job-related matters.

Wordsearch Puzzle

More 80's Songs

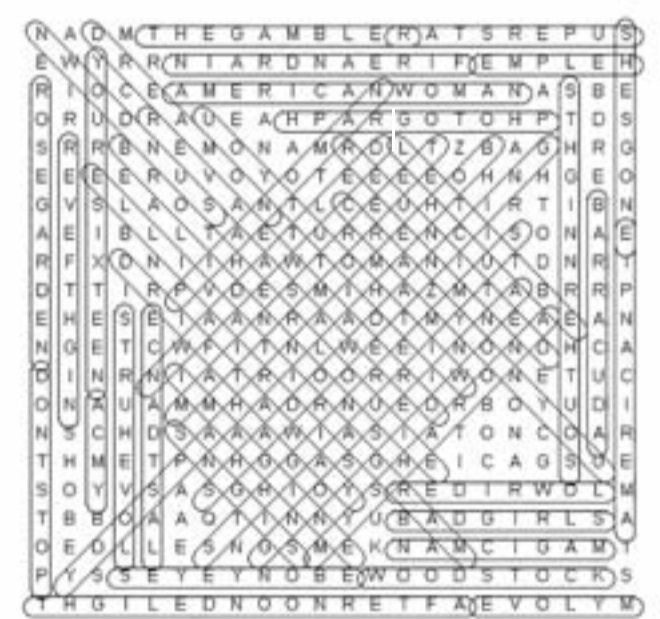
Find and circle all of the 1980's song titles that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell the title of an Elton John song.



- AFRICA, ALWAYS, AMERICA, BEAT IT, BROKEN WINGS, CALL ME, CONTROL, CRUISIN', DOWN UNDER, ENDLESS LOVE, FAITHFULLY, FAME, FAST CAR, FREEDOM, GLORIA, GUILTY, HEARTBREAKER, HEAVEN, HOLD ME, HUMAN, HUNGRY HEART, INFATUATION, KIKOKO, LA BAMBA, LET'S DANCE, MAGIC, MANIC MONDAY, MONY MONY, NEVER, NOTORIOUS, OUR HOUSE, PASSION, PATIENCE, PINK HOUSES, PURPLE RAIN, ROCK ON, SAILING, SARA, SATISFIED, SHOUT, SONGBIRD, SUKIYAKI, SUSSUUDO, THE FLAME, THE LOOK, THE ROSE, TIME, TOO SHY, TRUE, TRULY, TWO HEARTS, VACATION, VOICES CARRY, WE BELONG, WHIP IT, YOUR LOVE.

Yesterday's Solution

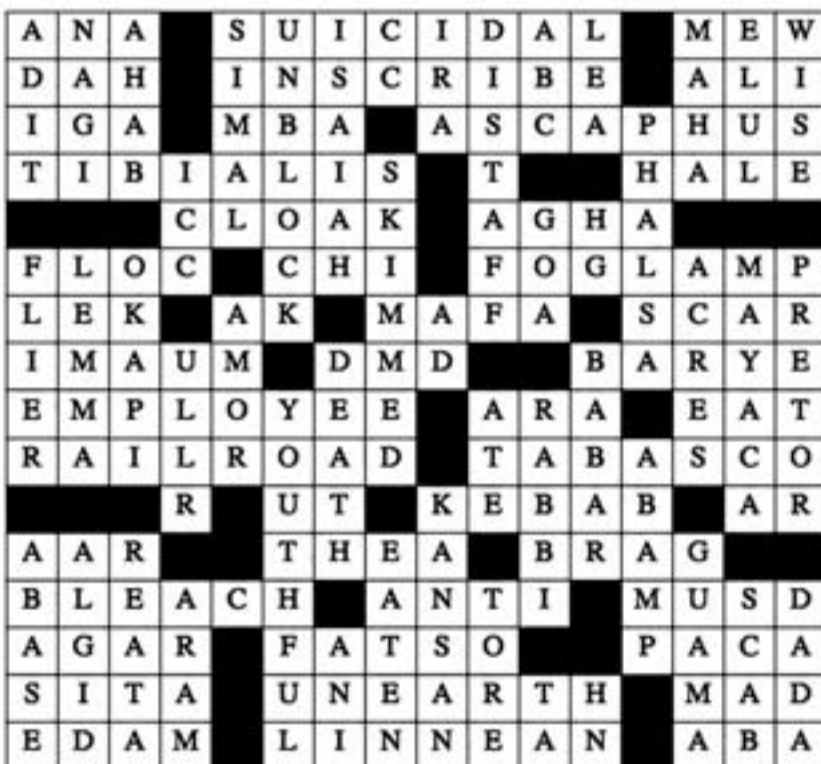
More 70's Songs



- AFTERNOON DELIGHT, AMERICAN PIE, AMERICAN WOMAN, ANNIE'S SONG, BAD GIRLS, BARRACUDA, BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY, BROTHER LOUIE, CRAZY ON YOU, DELTA DAWY, DON'T STOP, DREAM ON, DRIFT AWAY, EBONY EYES, FIRE AND RAIN, HELP ME, IMAGINE, LAST DANCE, LET IT BE, LOW RIDER, MAGIC MAN, MAIN STREET, MARGARITAVILLE, MY LOUIE, MY SHARDIA, NIGHT FEVER, PHOTOGRAPH, PLAND MAN, REUNITED, ROSE GARDEN, SHADOW DANCING, SHE'S GONE, SIGNS, SOUTHERN NIGHTS, SUMMER NIGHTS, SUNDOWN, SUPERSTAR, THE GAMBLER, WITHOUT YOU, WOODSTOCK, Y.M.C.A., YOU'RE SIXTEEN.

Hidden words: AMERICA BREAD NAZARETH HEART BLONDIE BOSTON CHICAGO ABBA QUEEN KISS

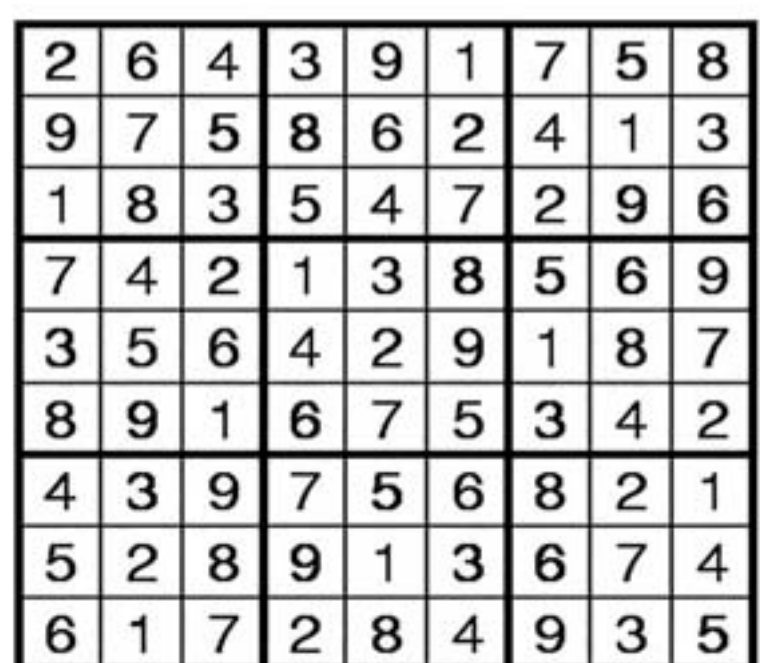
Yesterday's Solution



Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution





ELLA EYRE NAMED MTV STAYING ALIVE FOUNDATION AMBASSADOR

Ella Eyre has been announced as an ambassador of the MTV Staying Alive Foundation. The 'Ego' hitmaker will work with MTV's HIV prevention charity to help educate young people on the risks of the potentially life-threatening virus and to learn about their sexual and reproductive health. The role will see the MOBO-Award-winning star headline MTV Staying Alive's 20th Anniversary Fundraising Dinner later this year, and design a limited edition label for one of Kiehl's Ultra Facial Cream, with £10 for each 125ml product sold going to the foundation when it goes on sale in July. Georgia Arnold, Executive Director, MTV Staying Alive Foundation, commented: "We are so happy to welcome Ella Eyre to the MTV Staying Alive Foundation as we mark 20 years of campaigning to end HIV. "Ella's incredible voice and shining personality resonate with young people and make her the ideal Ambassador to amplify our message and represent the foundation during this landmark year. "HIV continues to be the leading cause of death of adolescents in Africa and the second of adolescents worldwide. In sub-Saharan Africa, three in four new HIV infections among 15-19-year-olds are among girls and outside sub-Saharan Africa, women and girls and other key populations account for 80 per cent of new HIV infections. "Using the MTV brand, we're able to reach these vulnerable communities. It's a big year for MTV Staying Alive and we're so excited to be working with Ella to inject her incredible energy into our HIV prevention work around the world." Ella has also been announced for Isle of MTV Malta on June 27 as special guest of 'Come Here For Love' collaborator, Sigala. Jason Deluro, Halice Steinfeld have also been added to the line-up, along with EDM headliners Dimitri Vegas & Like Mike.

John warns Sheeran his 'heyday' won't last

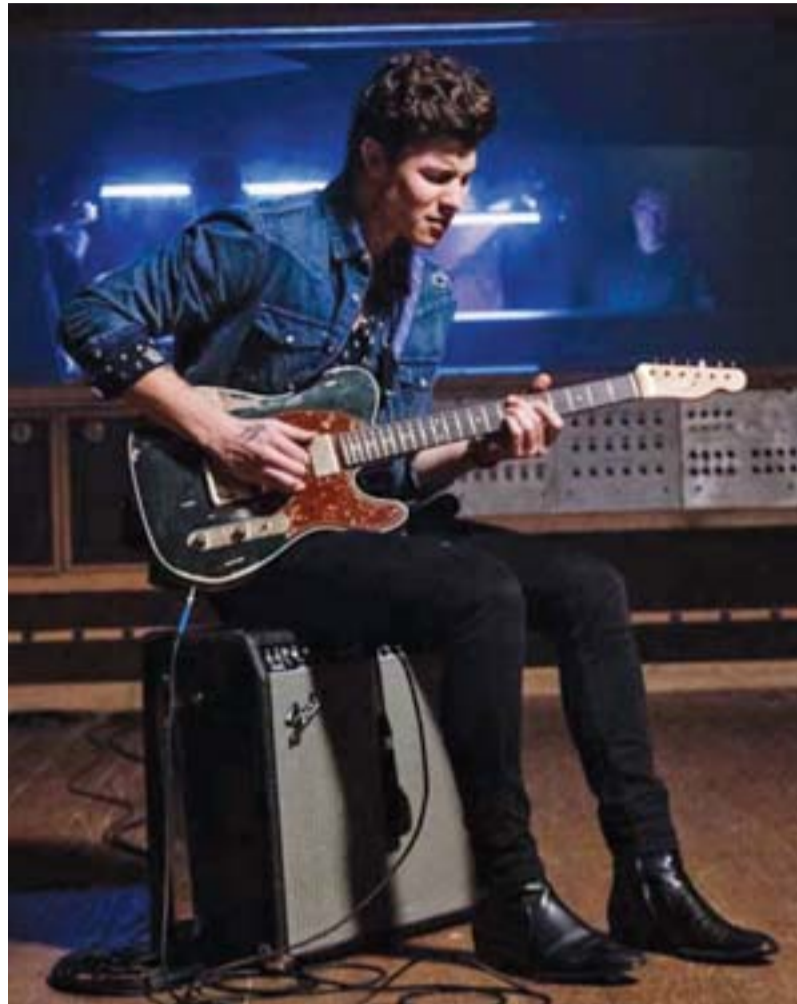
Sir Elton John has warned Ed Sheeran his "heyday" won't last forever. The 'Rocket Man' hitmaker's protege - who has sold more than 26 million albums and 100 million singles worldwide, making him one of the world's best-selling music artists - has told to the 27-year-old singer/songwriter to prepare for the time when he won't be reigning the charts and winning awards left-right-and-centre and advised him that he'll just have to "accept" it. Appearing on George Ezra's 'George Ezra & Friends' podcast, Elton said: "You have a heyday and you have a rest, and the heyday can never be replaced. "After that I had the common sense to know I'm not going to have a No1 every time straight away. I knew someone else would take over. It's cyclical. "Ed will go through that and I've talked to him about it. I've said, 'There'll come a time where this won't happen every time and you have to accept that.'" The 71-year-old music legend - who is to bow out of performing live with his final



three-year world tour after 50 years on the road - also confessed that he's tired of hearing the 'Shape of You' hitmaker's music on the radio constantly in the US. He said: "On the [American radio] chart, which is the middle-of-the-road chart, Ed is still No1 and Shape Of You is still in the chart. "It's like, 'Why?' "How many times do you want to listen to these things?" The 'Tiny Dancer' singer also admitted has no idea how to download music, and that he religiously makes sure he has the latest releases delivered to him in physical form. Elton said: "Getting a record was a treasure and I still feel that way about getting a CD. "You have to get the office to burn them. "I don't download anything. I've never downloaded anything and I wouldn't know how to. "I plan every week. At 9.45am I'll get a fax coming through from the office with the new releases. "I'll highlight them, I'll phone the office straight away and they'll get delivered the same day."

Mendes announces global tour and O2 partnership

Shawn Mendes has announced a world tour. The Canadian pop star will head out on a 56-date global run across North America, the UK and Europe, including two consecutive nights at London's The O2 arena. For the UK leg of the tour, Shawn has teamed up with O2, exclusively offering O2 customers Priority Tickets for the six UK tour dates, 48 hours ahead of general release. The 'In My Blood' hitmaker will also follow in the footsteps of Beyonce, Ed Sheeran and Lady Gaga by appearing in one of O2's iconic 'Walk' TV adverts, as part of a major campaign to promote the concerts on UK soil. Shawn said: "I can't wait to come to the UK and tour for my British fans. There's nothing like playing in front of such a massive crowd of my most diehard fans at The O2 and I'm so excited to play a bunch of my new music from my upcoming album, as well as from my past albums." The 60-second commercial will air today on ITV and O2's official YouTube channel. 'Shawn Mendes: The Tour' is the star's third global run in support of his forthcoming third self-titled LP, which is released on May 25. It follows the 'Stitches' hitmaker's worldwide tour last year, which sold out swiftly. O2 customers can get Priority Tickets 48 hours before general release on May 16, through the Priority app. Tickets go on sale to the general public from 10am on May 18.



Dave Grohl nearly breaks leg - again



Dave Grohl almost broke his leg again at a recent concert. The Foo Fighters frontman was performing with his bandmates at Welcome to Rockville in Florida last week, when he suffered a fall, but the 'Learn To Fly' hitmaker laughed off his trip insisting that he knows he's played a "great show" when he comes close to injuring himself. He told the crowd: "I almost broke my leg over there. "Here's the way I look at it, when you get that close to breaking your leg, that means it's a great show." However, it hasn't always been a light-hearted matter, as the 49-year-old rocker previously admitted he "fell into depression" the last time he broke his leg at a concert in Sweden in

2015. Dave fell 12 feet off the stage, snapping the bone, dislocating his leg and tearing "all" of the ligaments in the limb. The rocker decided to carry on with the "60 more shows" they had lined up - performing sat down on a 'Game of Thrones' inspired throne - but once the group had finished their string of concerts they decided to take a break, during which he struggled to cope with his recovery and life without the band and music. Speaking last year, he spilled: "I didn't just snap the bone. I dislocated it and tore all the ligaments. But we had 60 more shows and after I came out of surgery we sat in my hotel room and had a meeting to decide what to do. Everyone wanted to make sure. I was OK and that

weren't pushing it too hard. So I said what would it be like if I had to sit in a ridiculous throne every night and play to thousands of people? "I imagined there would be a solid year of no music but I didn't realize how bad I'd damaged my leg until I was with a physiotherapist three months after I had surgery. "I've got a beautiful life outside of the band, but music really is what keeps my blood pumping. "After about six months, with no band or no music, I really fell into a depression where I felt empty." The break prevented the US band from headlining Glastonbury Festival that year, with Florence + The Machine stepping in, but they finally got to play the famous Pyramid Stage in 2017.

Robert Downey Jr paid \$1 million per minute for Spider-Man: Homecoming



Robert Downey Jr was paid more than \$1 million a minute for his role in 'Spider-Man: Homecoming'. The 53-year-old Hollywood actor - who has played Iron Man since 2008 - appeared in the Marvel movie for eight minutes, but raked up a profit of \$10 million, according to figures released by Variety. On filming the movie, Downey Jr previously said: "I genuinely had a blast. I just love Spider-Man so to me being able to participate in reintroducing Spider-Man to a new generation or giving kind of a really back to, that's why it's called 'Homecoming.'" The 'Iron Man' star - who was the first of the Marvel characters to hit the big screen - is one of the movie industry's most in-demand performers, and it was previously reported he made \$40 million for his supporting role in 'Captain America: Civil War', which also starred Chris Evans. The 36-year-old actor - who's best known for his role as Steve Rogers in the 'Captain America' franchise - feels his Marvel co-star is irreplaceable as Iron Man. Evans said: "No matter what it feels like for me, I try to imagine what it feels like for him, because he really did start this. He really is so irreplaceable. Nobody can ever be Iron Man. It's not a role like Superman or Batman that can kind of find different incarnations, no one can touch it." As well as being a fan of Downey Jr's acting talents, Evans also hailed him as a "wonderful guy". He added: "It's low-hanging fruit to say Downey. He's such a wonderful guy and is so talented, so experienced, and so supportive ... He's always been in my corner and I've always felt supported by him." — Bang Showbiz

Faulkner announces intimate UK tour

Newton Faulkner has announced a series of intimate shows for next month. The 'Dream Catch Me' hitmaker will play Newquay, Glasgow, Manchester and London, kicking off at Whiskers in Cornwall, on June 1. The small venues are ideal as the singer's latest record, 2017's 'Hit the Ground Running', sees the focus turn to his voice rather than the guitar. The flame-haired star wrote all of the songs himself on his sixth record instead of recruiting co-writers, after his brother forced him to do it. He explained previously: "In the past I have mainly focused on pushing my



guitar playing, on this album and particularly the first single. I decided to focus on my voice. On the last few albums, there were quite a few co-writes but on this one my brother forced me to write mostly on my own and this song is one of the ones that came out of that. It's about messing things up but keeping moving forwards. I happen to have a reasonable amount of experience in both." The last time Newton played intimate venues was in 2007, over a decade ago, when he released debut LP 'Hand Built by Robots', which reached number three in the Official UK Chart. The mini run follows the 'If This Is It' hitmaker's extensive UK headline tour at the end of last year.



Disney boss hints at new Avengers movies

Marvel Studios could launch a new Avengers franchise. 'Avengers 4' - which is scheduled to be released next year - looks set to be the final chapter for the ensemble cast of superhero favorites, but Disney CEO Bob Iger has teased that it might not be the end of an era. Speaking to The Hollywood Reporter, he said: "We meet on a regular basis with our Marvel team, and we've plotted out Marvel movies that will take us well into the next decade. "I'm guessing we will try our hand at what I'll call a new franchise beyond Avengers, but that doesn't necessarily mean you won't see more Avengers down the road. We just haven't made any announcements about that." The 67-year-old Disney boss explained that there would be a "significant conclusion" to the storyline - which started in 2008 with 'Iron Man' starring Robert Downey Jr - but he assured fans that it won't be the last they'll see of their much-loved superheroes. He revealed: "Given the popularity of the characters and given the popularity of the franchise, I don't think people should conclude there will never be another Avengers movie." Disney is currently enjoying success at the box-office with 'Avengers: Infinity War' - the prequel to 'Avengers 4' - with the film on its way to being Marvel's biggest ever UK hit. However, Christine McCarthy, Disney CFO, admitted that the size of the cast - which included the likes of Robert Downey Jr, Chris Hemsworth and Chris Evans - created a big challenge for everyone involved with the project. She said: "There is one difference in this movie ... that's the size of the cast. ... Because of the size of the cast involved and the cost of the movie, the scale, the magnitude, while this film is going to be very profitable, it may not be on the same return level as some of the other films, because of the sheer scale of it."

Lifestyle | Music & Movies

'Revenge': Feminist horror for the post-Weinstein era

An oft-criticized staple of genre filmmaking, the rape-revenge thriller has occupied a squalid, often controversial corner of horror cinema since the 1970s. The industry might have been expected to let such a problematic subgenre wither on the vine with the rise of the Time's Up and #MeToo movements against sexual violence, harassment and inequity. But a stomach-churning new French release by Parisian filmmaker Coralie Fargeat is being touted unapologetically as a feminist rape-revenge movie for the new, post-Weinstein reality.

"Pushed to her limits, the first horror heroine of the Time's Up era is born in the gutsy 'Revenge,'" enthused a review in the Los Angeles Times. Starring Italian actress and model Matilda Lutz, this brutal examination of male entitlement, presumptions of privilege and victim-blaming hits US theaters and streaming services on Friday. It premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in September, a

month before Hollywood's sexual abuse and harassment scandal that triggered the #MeToo movement.

But Fargeat, directing her debut feature from her own script, points out that the behavior of Hollywood powerbroker Harvey Weinstein and other public figures was just "the tip of the iceberg." "A major change of society is needed and that's not going to happen in three or four or five months, because it's the whole root of society that needs to be changed," she told the Los Angeles Times. Lutz ("Rings") stars as Jen, a pretty young woman who goes on vacation at a remote villa in a desert canyon with her married boyfriend Richard, played by Belgian actor Kevin Janssens. Their romantic weekend goes badly awry when Richard's hunting partners Stan (Vincent Colombe) and Dimitri (Guillaume Bouchede) show up uninvited. Jen, a Lolita-type figure in skimpy swimwear, quickly arouses their predatory instincts. And her rape, no less shocking for playing out largely off-screen, triggers a

wave of sickening violence.

Lutz, who studied Marilyn Monroe for inspiration, plays her protagonist at first as an eager-to-please, guileless ingenue, but transforms over 108 minutes into a cold-blooded killer. "The film plays at the beginning with this representation, which it pushes to its fullest in order to switch it brutally the other way round," Fargeat said in a statement. Rape-revenge movies—from Wes Craven's "Last House on the Left," Meir Zarchi's "I Spit on Your Grave" and Sam Peckinpah's "Straw Dogs" in the 1970s to Niels Arden Oplev's "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo" (2009) — are made almost exclusively by men. Fargeat says she didn't set out merely to upset the apple cart or make a point about gender politics, describing the genre as "my kind of film." The violence is stomach-churning and yet feels anything but gratuitous. Every punch, shot or stab feels like it comes at a cost, spilling what looks like real blood rather than red corn syrup. In Toronto, paramedics had to



A still from 'Revenge'.

treat an audience member who suffered a seizure, according to local media, during a scene in which one character digs a jagged shard of glass out of his foot.

Lutz, a 26-year-old multilingual Italian who lives in California, told the L.A. Times "Revenge" had changed her outlook and given her confidence. "I've always been strong but I've always

felt very concerned about what other people thought of me, what my body looked like, what people were saying about my body," she said. "On the beach... on the street, if a man was looking at me I would either put my head down or change sides because I was scared of what might happen to me. And now, I don't do that anymore." — AFP



Kenyan director Wanuri Kahiu poses during a photocall ahead of the opening of the 71st edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. —AFP

BANNED DIRECTOR WANTS TO TURN AFRICA'S IMAGE ON ITS HEAD



(From left) South African producer Steven Markovitz, Kenyan actress Sheila Munyiva, Kenyan actress Samantha Mugatsia and Kenyan director Wanuri Kahiu pose yesterday during a photocall for the film 'Rafiki' at the 71st edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP

Wanuri Kahiu is remarkably chipper for someone who went from national hero to being accused of corrupting Kenyan youth in little over a week. Her film "Rafiki", a touching love story between two middle-class Nairobi girls, is the first Kenyan film ever to be selected for the Cannes film festival. At first, the head of the Kenyan Film Classification Board, Ezekiel Mutua, "went on air to say great things about it", Kahiu told AFP just before its Cannes premiere Wednesday. But a few days later the self-styled "fervent moral crusader" changed his mind, banning the bubblegum teenage romance for its "happy ending" and for showing "the resilience of youngsters involved in lesbianism".

Daring to show the film in the conservative East African country, where LGBT people can face long prison sentences, could land the director in jail. Lesser mortals might be intimidated, but not Kahiu who is on a mission to turn Africa's image on its head.

"Rafiki", with its skateboarding- and music-obsessed heroines, could be set almost anywhere in the world. "Africa is always depicted as a place with lots of pain, suffering, war and disease," said the 37-year-old, a TED Talk regular who made a big splash at the Sundance festival in 2010 with her sci-fi short "Pumzi", about a world without water.

'Tame' same sex love

"Our ambition is to make sure the image of Africa is also fun, joyous and full of hope. 'Afro bubblegum' is a genre we just invented—it's fun, fierce and frivolous work coming from Africa," she declared, with a smile that could stop traffic. "Unfortunately not enough people know about the way people live in modern Africa. Usually when you see Africans you see them in villages carrying water on their head. I have never carried water on my head in my life," she laughed. "We want to celebrate African urban pop culture," she said. Kahiu's armored optimism extends to her own film, convinced that one day the ban in her homeland will be lifted.

"We have experienced films and books being banned in the past and now they are absolutely available in Kenya. Sometimes art comes out from exile." Despite homosexuality being a massive taboo subject in most of Africa, Kahiu insisted she never meant to

cause a scandal. "We know we live in a conservative society," she said, "and we had hoped for an 18 rating even if the film is quite tame." "The love scenes are actually cute, they are fumbling and naive, they don't even take off their clothes. "The girls would not know what to do. It was about their innocence," she said.

'Fight for joy'

Kahiu said she did not set out to make a lesbian movie. "We just wanted to make a love story and the one that stood out the most" was the "Jumbula Tree", a short story about the Ugandan Monica Arac de Nyekoro "just because it is such a beautiful coming-of-age story." "The other stories I was reading at the time were not as soft and kind," she added. The director even sees the positive side of the controversy kicked up by the film selected for Cannes' Un Certain Regard section. "We're having a conversation not only about the LGBT community but also about freedom of expression and the right for artists to express themselves." Africa may have its problems, she argued, but "its history is also full of joy and fun, but we don't hear about it. Think about the music and the way we dance. That cannot only be the result of suffering," she said.

Kahiu believes that her job as a young African film director is "the promotion of joy. But even that got us into trouble making this film because they asked us to change the ending because they thought it was too hopeful. They said it wasn't remorseful enough. But it's important to fight for joy." While the Cannes film festival has been dominated by the debate over the lack of female directors, Kahiu said Kenya was ahead of the game. "We have as many female directors as male directors because women have always been the primary storytellers, keeping children busy as they cook and making sure that they go to sleep.

"Women have been the holders of stories." But the #MeToo movement was also shaking Africa, she said. "It impacts Kenyan women in the same way that it does all over the world," she said. They were particularly roused by "Black Panther" star Lupita Nyong'o speaking out about being harassed by Harvey Weinstein. "The moment you see any woman stand up and speak out you know she has power," Kahiu said. — AFP

Penelope Cruz puts 'torture' of early work behind her

Spanish Oscar winner Penelope Cruz said yesterday that putting a firewall between acting and her private life—even when working with husband Javier Bardem—had put a stop to the "torture" of her early years in the industry. Presenting her new film "Everybody Knows" by Iran's Asghar Farhadi at Cannes, Cruz told reporters that she and Bardem made a point of not taking their personal life to the set, or their work home with them. "When I was in my 20s, I thought the more I would torture myself and the more I would stay in character for months, the better the result would be," Cruz said. "We (she and Bardem) have very similar ways to work and maybe I did that experiment when I was younger because we both started very young."

Cruz and Bardem, who many celebrity watchers say have claimed the place vacated by Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt in the star couple firmament, met on the set of the sexy 1992 Spanish dramedy "Jamon Jamon" when she was still a teenager. But it took working together on Woody Allen's "Vicky Cristina Barcelona", which premiered at Cannes in 2008, to light the romantic spark. Cruz took home an Academy Award for her supporting role as a hot-tempered artist in the film. She and Bardem, who won the previous year for "No Country for Old Men", are respectively the first Spanish man and woman to win an acting Oscar.

Equal pay

Bardem, now 49, publicly declared his love for Cruz, 44, at Cannes in 2010 and they married the same year on an island in the Bahamas owned by their friend, US actor Johnny Depp. They have two children together and jealously guard their privacy. "I have a life and then I have my job and that allows me to jump many times in one day from reality to fiction—I love that beautiful dance back and forth from both dimensions," Cruz said. "It would not make your life better, I think, if you used certain things from your private life (on a film set) so the fact that we know each other and trust each other so much only helps."

Cruz and Bardem have starred in nine films together, including last year's "Loving Pablo" by Spanish director Fernando Leon de Aranoa, in which Bardem plays infamous Colombian drug lord Pablo Escobar and Cruz a journalist who falls in love with him. Cruz said that while she enjoyed working on "Everybody Knows" with Bardem, in which they play ex-lovers thrown together decades later, "it's not something that we plan on doing every two years". "No, that



Spanish actress Penelope Cruz (left) and Spanish actor Javier Bardem pose as they arrive for the screening of the film 'Todos Lo Saben (Everybody Knows)' and the opening ceremony of the 71st edition of the Cannes Film Festival. — AFP photos

will be once in a while if we feel it's right, like in this case," she said.

Farhadi, who has frequently worked with his own wife, fellow Iranian director Parisa Bakhtavar, said the couple seemed to maintain a "healthy" distance from the industry. "I really admired how Penelope and Javier kept fiction and reality, life and work, separate," he said.

"They are the very symbol of a happy couple and it was a pleasure to see what deep respect they have for each other." With the sexism and abuse debate roiling the international film industry and drawing the spotlight at Cannes this year, Cruz and Bardem were asked if they were paid equally for the film. "Yes, actually," she said. — AFP



(From left) Spanish actress Penelope Cruz, Iranian director Asghar Farhadi and Spanish actor Javier Bardem during a photocall for the film 'Todos Lo Saben (Everybody Knows)'.

Beyonce, Kanye streaming stats 'manipulated' on Tidal



Streaming numbers of Beyonce and Kanye West's respective albums on rap mogul Jay Z's music platform Tidal have been manipulated, allowing the stars excessive royalty payouts, a Norwegian newspaper said yesterday. In its investigative report, the financial daily Dagens Naeringsliv (DN) claimed the streaming numbers for Kanye West's "The Life of Pablo" and Beyonce's "Lemonade" were inflated through manipulated user play counts on Tidal. Jay Z bought the online service, which has its roots and significant activities in Oslo, through his holding Project Panther for \$56 million in March 2015.

His wife Beyonce and his former protégé West both launched their albums exclusively on the streaming platform in 2016. DN's revelations suggest that West and Beyonce, along with their record companies, received a disproportionate share of royalty payouts at the expense of other artists on Tidal. This could put the service in a tricky situation, as it has promised to pay rights holders

more money than its other streaming rivals including Spotify, Apple Music, and Deezer. Based on an analysis provided by the Norwegian Center for Cyber and Information Security (CCIS), DN reported more than 320 million false plays of songs from the two albums over short periods, a manipulation which affected more than 1.7 million users.

User accounts and play counts obtained by the newspaper revealed suspicious listening patterns, such as simultaneous playbacks of multiple songs by the same user or repeated playbacks of the same song at regular intervals. For example, the tracks were restarted every six minutes at the same second and millisecond. Two of the Tidal users contacted by DN appeared to have listened to tracks in "Lemonade" 180 and 251 times, respectively, during 24 hours. They both denied doing so to the paper. Tidal's lawyer Jordan Siev told DN that it denies any manipulation and claims its data has been stolen and that the media report is false. Contacted by AFP, the platform was not immediately available for comment. — AFP



Rambo returns for one last mission

Rambo is back on the warpath. US film star Sylvester Stallone has revealed that his muscle-packed combat hero Rambo is getting ready to draw blood again in a fifth sequel next year. Stallone—now 71 — posted a teaser poster on his Instagram account late Tuesday, showing a graffiti-style image of Hollywood's most famous Vietnam veteran kneeling with his signature knife and the words: "Rambo V. Fall 2019." "Something wicked is coming this way," the actor commented in a caption, a decade after his character last strapped on his famous headband and fired a hail of bullets at ruthless rogue soldiers in conflict-torn Myanmar. The film's producers, Millennium Media, are selling the international rights for "Rambo V" at the Cannes film festival, which opened Tuesday.

The latest installment in the franchise—launched with "Bad Blood" in 1982—is slated to start filming in September in several locations including London, Bulgaria and the Canary Islands, according to the Hollywood Reporter. In the new movie, John Rambo has swapped blood-drenched jungles for quiet ranch living in Arizona as he struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder. But when a friend's grand-daughter is kidnapped by a Mexican sex-trafficking cartel, Rambo cannot but jump back into action and join the hunt for the missing girl. What ensues promises "a violent descent into hell", said Hollywood Reporter. — AFP

Helicopter taxi apps offer escape from traffic-choked megacities

Within minutes of using an app to book a ride, Agostino Fernandes was looking down on lush greenery from a helicopter taxi high above Bangalore—one of several Uber-style chopper services taking off to help commuters tackle increasingly congested megacities. In under 30 minutes—a quarter of the time it would have taken from downtown Bangalore by road—Fernandes was strolling through Kempegowda International Airport to his gate.



This picture taken in Jakarta shows Whitesky Aviation chief executive Denon Prawiraatmadja posing next to a Helicity helicopter. — AFP photos

"It's much better than the usual car or taxi because it saves time," he said. "And for a city like Bangalore, which they call India's green capital because of the parks and gardens, you get a very nice view." From New York to Jakarta, chopper-hailing services have been taking off to help commuters beat the traffic chaos.

Private helicopter charters have been available for decades—at a price—but the latest services are far cheaper and more accessible to the public, allowing anyone with a

smartphone and a credit card to order a ride with relative ease. Sameer Rehman, Asia-Pacific managing director of Bell Helicopter, said chopper manufacturers were predicting more such services in traffic-clogged parts of Southeast Asia in particular, describing it as an "important testbed" for the wider region.

"That can be replicated throughout other cities and countries in the Asia-Pacific," he told AFP at a conference in Singapore. Another similar service was recently launched in the Indonesian capital Jakarta, a chaotic metropolis of over 10 million people, which suffers some of the world's worst jams. Operated by Whitesky Aviation, Helicity now has about 60 customers each month, mostly from the business world.

Its services include a 20-minute ride from Jakarta airport into the heart of the city for six million rupiah for up to four people, as well as a 45-minute flight from Jakarta to Bandung, 150 kilometers away, from 14 million rupiah.



Crews of a Helicity helicopter preparing for take-off in Jakarta.



A helipad on a skyscraper as Helicity flies over Jakarta.

While it offers an alternative to sitting in traffic for hours and is cheaper than private charters in the past, the prices are nevertheless out of reach for most people in Jakarta, where the monthly minimum wage is about \$250.

And it has not all been easy going for Whitesky in recent times—one of their helicopters crashed last month on Indonesia's central Sulawesi island as it flew over a mining area, killing one person on the ground and injuring four passengers.

Onerous regulations, poor infrastructure

In Bangalore, one of India's most congested megacities, HeliTaxi launched in March, offering a seat in a helicopter from the airport to IT industrial park Electronic City for about \$65 per person—the same journey that Fernandes took on launch day. In Brazil's Sao Paulo, the app Voom offers a 30-kilometre helicopter ride to the airport for about \$150 — 10 times cheaper than private charters in the past—while in New York, a chopper-hailing service ferries people between downtown and surrounding airports.

Despite the growth of such apps, industry players warn there are still major hurdles. One is finding suitable take-off and landing sites, particularly in Asian cities. Helipads have been springing up rapidly in recent years but a large number are private and observers warn many have not been certified as safe by aviation authorities. Another is restrictions on flying times. Whitesky Aviation

chief executive Denon Prawiraatmadja said that since the Jakarta service's five-strong fleet of choppers was for civilian purposes, they were currently only allowed to fly between 6:00 am and 6:00 pm.

"We are in the process of getting more operating hours, so it can become a 24/7 operation," he said. "We hope this type of new regulation will allow us to grow the business." The company has big expansion plans: in 2016, they signed a 30-helicopter deal with Bell and will receive two Bell 505s every year until the deal is completed. It also has several fixed-wing aircraft in its fleet.

Similarly in Bangalore, Helitaxi is only allowed to fly from 6:30am to 10:00am, and in a later slot between 3:00pm to 6:00pm. While the popularity of such services is growing, analysts say there are unlikely to be large numbers of helicopter taxis taking to the skies soon as prices—although lower than they once were—will remain a barrier.

Saj Ahmad, chief analyst at consultancy StrategicAero Research, also cautioned there was much uncertainty surrounding the nascent industry and how it would operate. "Will there be further security screenings?" he said. "What sort of passengers will be allowed on these flights?" — AFP

For top pianist Andsnes, a quest for a perfect mood

When he sat down to his longtime goal of recording Chopin's famously demanding Ballades, the pianist Leif Ove Andsnes knew he had to choose the right space. The Norwegian virtuoso, who has spent the past season as the artist-in-residence at the New York Philharmonic, has developed an intuition on the relationship between settings and the great composers whose works he brings to life. "With Beethoven, for instance, I feel that he speaks to the crowd—he's sort of delivering a speech in an extremely profound way. But with Chopin—and the same with Schumann—you feel it's very much between two persons," Andsnes told AFP over lunch near the Philharmonic's home at Lincoln Center. Andsnes had recorded well-regarded CDs of Sibelius and Stravinsky in Berlin's Teldex studio but he found its reflection from the walls and floor ill-suited to Chopin and the intimacy he requires. Instead Andsnes headed to the Sendesaal studio in Bremen, whose building-within-a-building design makes it thoroughly sound-proof. But the CD also features live recordings from the studio, which Andsnes described as "liberating" after days of solitary sessions.

"The problem with recording is that you're always thinking about how you did things and you become self-conscious about how it's going, because obviously you're recording all the time for things to be perfect on tape and for things to be good and intense," he said. "But in concerts, you're naturally thinking much more forward—you're thinking about what is coming and what you have to tell."

Life quest on Chopin

Andsnes, 48, had been playing the first three of Chopin's Ballades since he was a teenager. He only six years ago attempted the especially challenging fourth Ballade but has since played it frequently. "How it is possible to tell so much and with so much diver-

sity within 10 minutes, it's quite a miracle to me," he said. Considering the Ballades to be too passion-rich to play in a single cycle, Andsnes is interspersing them with Chopin Nocturnes for the CD, which will be released in September on Sony Classics.

Throughout his residency at the New York Philharmonic, Andsnes highlighted works by major composers that often go overlooked. Andsnes, who plays with forcefulness yet grace, selected Rachmaninoff's modernist fourth concerto, Britten's often overlooked piano concerto and Debussy's "Fantaisie for Piano and Orchestra." The "Fantaisie," the French master's sole work for piano and orchestra, was never played in Debussy's lifetime. The 1890 premiere was scrapped when the conductor said there was no time to prepare and Debussy later balked at attempts to perform it.

The "Fantaisie" presents a fine balancing act for the pianist, who has little scope for outward showmanship. Andsnes instead forged a rich blend with the New York Philharmonic, conducted with subtlety in the orchestra debut of Bergen-based British conductor Edward Gardner. Andsnes—who described the "Fantaisie" as "wonderful" yet indicative of a still-young Debussy—will perform the work again next month in Paris with the Orchestre Philharmonique De Radio France.

Looking back at World War I

Andsnes attaches particular importance to remaining active in Norway. A father of three, Andsnes briefly stepped back from curatorial roles but since 2016 has put together a summer festival in the western coastal village of Rosendal. The latest festival in August will examine music written during World War I on the conflict's centennial. —AFP



A general view of Figueira Square in downtown Lisbon.



A general view of Sao Joao Castle and downtown Lisbon. — AFP photos

Lisbon in Eurovision tourism boost as locals sing the blues

With Lisbon steeped in kitsch and glam as it prepares to host this year's grand finale of Eurovision, officials are hoping the pop fest will draw even more tourists to the Portuguese capital. Locals here know their country's economy depends heavily on tourism, but they also fear Lisbon may not be able to handle the huge influx of visitors already pouring in. Officials expect Saturday's final of the annual musical spectacle to draw some 30,000 foreign visitors to the city. In the lead-up to the event, Lisbon city hall has been staging free nightly concerts at the so-called Eurovision Village set up in the riverside Praca do Comercio in the heart of the city, complete with reclining seats, cocktail bars and food trucks.

Local authorities are meanwhile working to use Lisbon's moment in the Eurovision spotlight to showcase the city's charms and lure more visitors for the years to come. "This will be a great additional calling card for the city," Lisbon mayor Fernando Medina told reporters last week as he explained the decision to spend 5.0 million euros (\$6.0 million) to stage Eurovision. "We can never have too many people getting to know us," he added when asked whether the city, which has seen a surge in visitor numbers in recent years, really needed any more tourism.

'Discover Lisbon'

Portuguese state broadcaster RTP, which is organizing the show, asked each of the finalists to record a 40-second video of themselves enjoying Portugal's sights. The videos, dubbed "postcards" from Lisbon, will be broadcast during the final, which is watched by many millions of people around the world. Montenegro's contestant Vanja Radovanovic taped his "postcard" at Lisbon's Feira da Ladra flea market,

while Belarusian singer Alekseev recorded his on top of the 19th century Rua Augusta Arch which offers sweeping views of the Tagus river.

"Five hundred years ago we discovered the world from Lisbon and it is time for the world to discover Lisbon," said Eurovision executive producer Joao Nuno Nogueira. He was referring to the 15th century sea voyages to the Americas, when Portugal was a leading maritime nation. It appears Eurovision has already reaped some benefits for Lisbon's tourism industry. British online agency Travel Republic says bookings to the city jumped 27 percent in

the month after Portugal won last year's Eurovision song contest in Kiev in May 2017.

'Enormous pressure'

Long overlooked by visitors who favored Portugal's southern Algarve region, Lisbon is attracting more tourists thanks to its ambitious marketing campaigns, relatively low prices and a growing cruise-ship port. The number of overnight foreign guests in Lisbon jumped to around 11 million last year from around six million in 2010, official data shows. While local residents welcome the economic boost that visitors bring, many complain the city is not doing enough to deal with the ensuing strain on public services such as garbage collection and public transport.

"When the city invites more people, it has to face up to this enormous pressure," said Isabel Sa da Bandeira. She heads a neighborhood association in Cais do Sodre in central Lisbon called Aqui Mora Gente, meaning "People Live Here", which lobbies against the noise and garbage generated by fun-lovers drawn to the area's lively bars and nightclubs. Lisbon city hall expects its investment in Eurovision to generate around 25 million euros in direct revenues for hotels, restaurants and other local businesses. But Carlos Moura, a Communist Lisbon city councillor, told the Lusa news agency it was "completely absurd" that the city used money from a tourism fund for Eurovision. That fund, he said, had been "set up precisely to tackle the issues raised by the use of city services by tourists". — AFP

Portuguese singers Claudia Pascoale (right) and Isaura pose for pictures during the Red Carpet ceremony of the 63rd edition of the Eurovision Song Contest 2018 at the Altice Arena in Lisbon.



Norwegian pianist Leif Ove Andsnes plays the piano in the David Geffen Hall, in Lincoln Center, in New York City. — AFP



Lifestyle | Features



Kuwaiti opera singer Amani Hajji (left), sings with one of her students at the Higher Institute for Musical Arts in Kuwait City.



Kuwaiti opera singer Amani Hajji, poses for a picture at the Higher Institute for Musical Arts.



Kuwaiti opera singer Amani Hajji, practices at the Higher Institute for Musical Arts.



Kuwaiti opera singer Amani Hajji, gives instructions to one of her students.



Kuwaiti opera singer Amani Hajji, practices at the Higher Institute for Musical Arts in Kuwait City. — AFP photos

Kuwait's first soprano brings Puccini to the Gulf

Amani Hajji is nothing if not stubborn: for 20 years, she has refused to give up on her dream of making opera mainstream in her native Kuwait. A soprano by training, and with her trademark bob haircut, Hajji is Kuwait's first opera singer with a small but dedicated local following. The 51-year-old's journey has not been easy. When she first enrolled in Kuwait's National Conservatory in 1985, her parents banned her from singing anywhere outside the walls of the school. Fifteen years later, Hajji appeared onstage at the Cairo opera house. The audience settled in for an interlude of oriental folklore. Instead, they were treated to Giacomo Puccini's repertoire.

Hajji has since been invited back five times to perform works by the Italian composer, still her favorite, to Arab audiences in Italian or German. Puccini, she believes, is also the most relatable to Kuwaiti music lovers' ear, with his emotive, late Romantic style.

'Sentimental style'

Kuwait opened its first opera house in 2016 — but

Hajji was not invited to appear onstage. That's when she found out about her own dedicated fan base who-to her surprise-had been following her career for years. "The Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli opened the venue, and a lot of Kuwaitis were outraged by my absence," Hajji told AFP. "That's how I discovered that I had an audience who knew who I was and who loved me." Hajji was first introduced to opera as a teenager, when she saw a television special that caught her eye.

"I loved music in general, and in my first year in high school I saw an interview with Ahmed Al-Baqer, who founded Kuwait's conservatory," she said. "I decided to register for lessons. I started to train and then discovered opera, thanks to an Egyptian teacher here in Kuwait." She has since represented her country in music festivals in Bahrain, Italy, Ukraine, Turkey, Morocco and elsewhere. Shortly after her initial snub by Kuwait's opera house, she made it on stage in her native country performing with the Bucharest Philharmonic Orchestra.

'Raw talent'

Hajji credits her oriental roots with helping Kuwaiti audiences relate to the classical works of Puccini and others. "Even if they don't understand the language, the audience appreciates the music, the way it is sung," she said. "I have my own style. It's sentimental. It's a contrast to the Western way of interpretation." Now an instructor herself at Kuwait's national conservatory, she is starting to sense a budding interest in opera at home.

Most of them, however, are men-and Hajji still has her eye on finding a female star pupil. "There is so much raw talent that we're working to train musically," Hajji told AFP. "But I've always dreamt of singing a duet with another female Kuwaiti opera singer." Kuwait's conservatory is highly popular in the Gulf and for years has drawn students from neighboring countries-some of whom have had to stand up to their families to follow their passion.

Opera houses have also begun to pop up across the region, with Dubai and Oman each home to a venue. But there is still cultural pushback against the genre, some say.

Ahmed Kandari, an opera teacher at Kuwait's conservatory, had to face his family's disapproval over his choice to study opera. Today, he is fighting to introduce music into Kuwait's educational system. "High school education is marked by the total lack of a music curriculum," he told AFP. "We have to start introducing it earlier, and growing our education, to help teach the public appreciation of different musical styles and genres."

The work of Hajji, and Kandari, has inspired youth beyond Kuwait. Ahmed Saleh Al-Jazali, from Oman, is enrolled in the opera program at Kuwait's conservatory. With the support of his family, he says his goal is to become his country's first opera singer. "I'm working on it-I'm going to sing in German and Italian," he said. —AFP

Swaddle, rock, whoosh: Putting babies to sleep in the Snoo

"I don't even call it a bed. I kind of think of it as your grandmother." So declares Dr Harvey Karp, a Los Angeles pediatrician whose smart-tech baby sleeper, the Snoo, is a game-changer for some sleep-deprived parents. The Snoo has earned rave reviews from baby gear experts and parents alike, including Ashton Kutcher and Mila Kunis. Last year, the consumer products show CES bestowed its coveted baby safety award on the invention. The Snoo is all about swaddling. Just don't call it a bed.

In a video on his website, Papa Karp says the Snoo provides a service "more than being a thing." It gently rocks and jiggles babies from birth to 6 months old, a period he calls the "fourth trimester," when - he believes - simulating the womb environment is key to calming babies. Babies are zipped into a mesh sleep sack after a broad cotton swaddle tightly pins the infant's arms to the side from shoulder to wrist. The sack is then secured to the Snoo's frame before the rocking and a white-noise lullaby commence.



Photo released by Paul Zalewski shows his infant daughter Ruby in a smart-tech sleeper called the Snoo, which gently rocks and jiggles babies to sleep from birth to 6 months old. — AP

Karp, who's also written a book, "The Happiest Baby on the Block," says infants should be soothed in 40 to 60 seconds. The Snoo increases its motion and noise based on persistent sound from the baby, until it reaches its fourth and final level. If that doesn't work, it turns off. Parents can adjust settings manually or with an app. The Snoo also comes with an organic cotton sheet and sleep sacks in three sizes.

Parental fatigue

But at \$1,160, the Snoo more expensive than many rocking devices - though designer baby beds can run higher. New York mom Kathleen Udo heard about the Snoo and "thought, 'Wow, that sounds great, sign me up,' until I looked at the price. I was, like, 'Get out of town.'" Then her son Jack, now 3 months old, was born. Parental fatigue set in and she found a mommy friend with a Snoo to lend. "My little terrorist over here wouldn't sleep. Even with the Snoo, we've only gotten to about four hours at a stretch at night," said Udo, who is an attorney. "I'm going back to work in mid-June and I need to be back on my A-game. The Snoo was a desperation move."

Karp says babies who aren't put in the Snoo from birth have a learning curve, and that was the case with Jack. But, says Udo, "It definitely calms him," so that she doesn't need to rock him to sleep anymore. Jamee Zalewski of Denver tried the Snoo with her second child Ruby. "The mental break was really important for me," she said. "I was

able to take it because I knew the Snoo's soothing would shut off if Ruby needed me. I could watch it on my phone and get an alert."

Her husband Paul, who blogs about baby gear at Fathercraft.com, said they sometimes wondered, "Are we letting a robot do our job?" There were these moments when we would walk away after Ruby fell asleep and we'd be like, 'We should be doing something.'" While the Zalewskis did become Snoo fans, they opted to return the device before the 30-day trial period was up. The reason: Ruby was colicky and congested and needed to sleep on an incline. The company has since added leg lifts so it can be adjusted. Karp, who worked with designer Yves Behar on the Snoo, says the device also promotes safety, by keeping babies in the supine position recommended for sleep by the American Academy of Pediatrics, and by making it unnecessary for sleep-deprived parents to bring babies into their own beds.

Postpartum depression and marital stress

About 3,500 infants in the United States die suddenly and unexpectedly each year, according to the US Centers for Disease and Control, and the causes include accidental suffocation in a parent's bed. Getting babies to sleep soundly can also reduce postpartum depression and marital stress. "The No. 1 stress that new parents talk about is exhaustion," Karp said. Karp's team works with companies offering rented Snoos to parents returning to work, foster parents and doctors treating babies born to drug-addicted mothers. He is also working on a plan to offer Snoos for rent at reasonable cost.

At the University of Kentucky Children's Hospital in

“The No. 1 stress that new parents talk about is exhaustion”

Lexington, 10 Snoos are available for babies with the addiction and withdrawal condition called neonatal abstinence syndrome, in a state where 15 of every 1,000 babies is born dependent on opioids. Such babies routinely experience disrupted sleep, said Dr. Lori A. Shook, a neonatologist there. Before she stumbled on the Snoo at a pediatric conference, she'd notice the babies in the eight-bed unit fussing terribly in their bassinets.

The Snoos are used in addition to aromatherapy and massage for calming, in a unit that focuses on families caring for their babies. "Now on rounds I see every baby asleep in their Snoo bed," Shook said. "At first I think the nurses were leery because of the motion, but now we realize it also allows families to sleep better, and hopefully get the babies out of the hospital sooner and with less medication." — AP



In this file photo Meghan Markle (center) and her mother Doria Ragland (left) watch the closing ceremonies for the Invictus Games in Toronto, Ontario. — AFP

Meghan Markle's parents to visit queen, have wedding roles

Meghan Markle's parents will meet with Queen Elizabeth II and other royals before her May 19 wedding to Prince Harry and will have special roles in their daughter's wedding, a palace spokesman said Friday. At the wedding, the royal couple also plan to honor the memory of the late Princess Diana, Harry's mother, who died in a Paris car crash in 1997. Officials didn't predict the weather - springtime in England can be glorious or horrid, sometimes on the same day - but they outlined plans for a celebration designed to spread from the privileged environs of Windsor Castle throughout Britain and the world, via television and the internet. Here are some of the plans disclosed by Harry's press secretary, Jason Knauf, during a briefing at Buckingham Palace:

Meghan's parents to meet the queen, take part in wedding:

Markle's divorced parents, Thomas Markle and Doria Ragland, will arrive during the week before the May 19 wedding so they have time to meet Harry's family. Knauf says they will visit with the queen, her husband Prince Philip, Harry's father Prince Charles and his wife Camilla, and with Harry's brother Prince William and his sister-in-law Kate.

Ragland will travel with her daughter by car to Windsor Castle on May 19 and Thomas Markle will walk his daughter down the aisle of St George's Chapel for the ceremony. Knauf says Markle is "delighted" that her parents will be by her side. He did not say whether Markle's half-brother and half-sister will attend the wedding.

Princess Diana's family will have a role as well:

The press secretary says Harry is "keen to involve his mother's family in the wedding" and that all three of Diana's siblings will be present. One of Diana's two older sisters, Jane Fellowes, will give a reading during the ceremony to represent Diana's family.

No maid of honor

Markle, an American actress who came to prominence in the TV series "Suits," will not have a maid of honor during the ceremony. Harry has chosen William as his best man.

Young bridesmaids and page boys

Knauf says all the bridesmaids and page boys will be

children. That may mean a role for Prince George, 4, and Princess Charlotte, 3, the children of Prince William and the Duchess of Cambridge. But don't bother looking for Prince Louis - born in late April - as the youngest prince will not attend the wedding.

Don't ask about the dress

Palace officials are determined that the style and designer of Markle's wedding gown will be kept secret until the moment she gets out of the car to walk into the chapel. They say this tradition is very important - but that won't keep speculators from trying to guess who has received the most important dressmaking assignment of the year.

Separated the night before

The press secretary says Harry and Markle will spend the night before the wedding apart. They have been living together in recent months since announcing their engagement. They will spend their first night as a married couple in Windsor Castle.

Good wishes for prince Philip's health

Palace officials say they're hopeful that 96-year-old Prince Philip, Harry's grandfather, will be well enough to attend the wedding festivities. The queen's husband has been recovering from hip replacement surgery and has not participated in any public events since being discharged from the hospital in mid-April.

Follow the wedding at home

The palace plans to publish the Order of Service on its website the morning of the wedding so people watching it on television will be better able to follow what's taking place inside the church.

Delayed honeymoon

Knauf would not reveal where the newest royal couple will spend their honeymoon, but he said they won't be leaving right after the wedding. Instead they plan to make their first public appearance as a married couple during the week following the ceremony. In the past, they have traveled in Africa together. — AP

Lifestyle

THURSDAY, MAY 10, 2018



Wax figures of Britain's Prince Harry and his US fiancée Meghan Markle are pictured during a photocall at Madame Tussauds in central London yesterday. Britain's Prince Harry and US actress Meghan Markle will marry on May 19 at St George's Chapel in Windsor Castle. — AFP

NEW YORK AUCTION SETS NEW MONET, MATISSE RECORDS

The sale of the art collection amassed by the late banker David Rockefeller kicked off Tuesday, setting new auction records for French artists Claude Monet and Henri Matisse, Christie's said. Monet's "Nymphs en fleur," part of the impressionist's famed water-lily series inspired by his Giverny home, fetched \$84.69 million at the evening sale in New York, the auction house said. The previous record for the Frenchman had been \$81.4 million, set by Christie's in 2016 for "Meule" from Monet's famous grainstack series. Tuesday's sale also set a new auction record for Henri Matisse, with his 1923 "Odalisque couchée aux magnolias" selling for \$80.75 million, Christie's said. The previous Matisse record was \$49 million.

But the top lot of the night was Picasso's 1905 masterpiece "Fille à la corbeille fleurie" ("Young Girl With a Flower Basket") which sold for \$115 million, over its pre-sale value of \$100 million. Its original purchase by Gertrude and Leon Stein, together with two other Rose Period paintings, helped jumpstart Pablo Picasso's career. The Rockefellers purchased the canvas in December 1968. Christie's is selling off 1,600 items from the glittering collection of Rockefeller, the billionaire who died last year aged 101, and his wife Peggy. The three-day sale is expected to rake in \$600 million and smash the previous record for a collection set by that of Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Berge, which fetched \$484 million in 2009. It sees Christie's for the first time spread its flagship

spring sales over two weeks, twice the traditional length. The May 2018 season is expected to break new records, six months after Christie's sold a Leonardo da Vinci for \$450.3 million, more than doubling the world record for any work of art bought at auction. Picasso's "The Women of Algiers (Version O)" previously sold for \$179.4 million at Christie's in New York in May 2015. — AFP



"Nymphs en fleur" by Claude Monet is seen during a Christie's preview presenting the collection of Peggy and David Rockefeller, in New York. — AFP



Visitors attend an exhibition displaying the works of late Palestinian caricaturist Naji Al-Ali — who was assassinated in London in 1987 — at a gallery in Kuwait City on May 8, 2018. — AFP photos

Naji Al-Ali Exhibition

